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Guilty! Until Proven Innocent - A New COINTELPRO?

30 June 2018, by **Malik Miah**

COINTELPRO came to light only when a group of heroic resisters broke into FBI offices and found the incriminating documents. Is a similar program underway today? "Democracy Now," a progressive radio and television news broadcast, has been pursuing the story. An article by Amy Goodman and Dennis Moynihan discussed the evidence. [1]

On the May 23 program, Goodman and co-host Juan Gonzalez interviewed a Black activist, Rakem Balogun, about his arrest at his apartment by the FBI and subsequent months of detention. [2]

As Amy Goodman explained, Balogun is a founding member of the groups Guerrilla Mainframe and the Huey P. Newton Gun Club. The groups coordinate meals for homeless people, organize youth picnics, run self-defense classes, protest police

brutality and advocate for the rights of Black gun owners.

Investigators began tracking him after he was part of a 2015 police brutality protest, which the FBI learned about from a video on InfoWars, the far-right website run by Alex Jones. He was arrested following a leaked August 2017 report from the FBI's Domestic Terrorism Analysis Unit, claiming that "it is very likely Black Identity Extremist perceptions of police brutality against African Americans spurred an increase in premeditated, retaliatory lethal violence against law enforcement and will very likely serve as justification for such violence."

Goodman pointed out that "Many have also noted the FBI memo was dated August 3rd" only a few days before the deadly white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, where white supremacists, Ku Klux Klan members

and neo-Nazis killed an anti-racist protester, Heather Heyer, and injured dozens more. The FBI does not seem to be surveilling and targeting white people who post violent things to social media, including multiple white men who have recently carried out mass school shootings."

Goodman and Gonzalez spoke with Rakem Balogun, following his release from nearly six months detention, and with Malkia Cyril, co-founder and executive director of the Center for Media Justice and a Black Lives Matter Bay Area activist.

Balogun told "Democracy Now," "on December 12th, around 6 a.m. in the morning, me and my son was at home resting, when FBI agents rammed our door and immediately rushed us outside in our underwear, you know, under gunpoint, to be arrested and for me and my son to be separated and,

overall, me be hauled off to jail.

"I was charged with [Federal law] 922(g), which is prohibited possession of a firearm."

Under Texas law no permit for the gun is required. "[T]he reason why I was held is because the FBI was pretty much surveilling me for over two-and-a-half years as a domestic terrorist. And from surveilling me for being a domestic terrorist, you know, they overreached and tried to use a previous charge from 2005 to say that this charge made me prohibited of having a firearm, which the elements of that charge didn't.

"But the reason I was able to be detained for so long is because, when I initially got locked up, I went to a magistrate hearing with a magistrate judge for a bond, and the judge denied me bond based off me using my First Amendment right to criticize police officers on Facebook."

Asked how the case was ultimately resolved, Balogun explained: "It was dismissed. You know, we filed pretrial motions stating that I am not a prohibited person and forcing the United States government to prove that I'm a prohibited person not to have firearms. And the government failed to prove that. And so, therefore, they had to release me, after holding me over five months."

It may have been a miracle that Balogun wasn't shot multiple times, like the Detroit Black imam Lugman Ameen Abdullah who was entrapped and gunned down in a 2009 raid. [3]

Response to Open Racism

African Americans have always lived under the reality of "guilty until proven innocent" by white America and its legal system. While progress has occurred in 400 years from slavery to today, assumptions about "Blackness" as a negative haven't changed.

The Trump Era, "Make America White Again," is a rerun of what Black people have faced, with inherent bias openly acted upon. Calling Blacks

"apes" is not new. The dehumanization of Africans has been and remains a way to make Blacks less than human beings.

It was not a surprise when comedian Roseanne Barr called former President Obama's chief domestic adviser Valerie Jarrett a combination of the "Muslim Brotherhood" and "Planet of the Apes." Ironically, only Muslims denounced Barr's attack on them, which was largely ignored by the media.

Even some on the right condemned Barr's tweet "but not President Donald Trump. He demanded instead an apology from ABC/Disney for others who attacked him for his bigotry. His White House demanded that comedian Samantha Bee be fired for using the "C-word" for Ivanka Trump's failure to defend undocumented children snatched by ICE and separated from their parents seeking asylum at the U.S. border.

Trump's greenlighting of below-the-surface racism enabled for many whites the "freedom" to call cops on Blacks sitting in a Starbucks in Philadelphia, or a Black female graduate student taking a nap in a common dorm area at Yale University.

The New York Times) African-American columnist Charles Blow wrote what many of us agree with:

"You see, racism is a moral corruption built on an intellectual fallacy and exists as a construction invented for the very purpose of violence. So, when people demonstrate that they subscribe to theories of racism, they have shown their hand, and I am immediately roused by the euphoric understanding that they are compromised, diminished and assailable.

"Instead of reducing me, their racism reduces them. That is the ironic, poetic justice of it....

"Although it doesn't hurt my feelings, it does enrage me when racists are granted power in society to allow their idiocy to have a negative impact on other people, whether that be culturally, psychologically and spiritually, or materially and

physically.

"It enrages me when ignorance is elevated and empowered, when historical truth is eschewed, when current realities are denied.

"But this moral rage is separate and apart from emotional distress, the former being active and energetic while the latter is passive and plaintive.

"In this context, Roseanne Barr's recent racist tweets, including one suggesting that the Obama-era White House official Valerie Jarrett was the offspring of apes, were not emotionally injurious, but were rage-inducing." ("On Race: The Moral High Ground," May 28, 2018)

Obama Too Early?

Barack Obama supposedly told former aide Ben Rhodes that his presidency was maybe "10 to 20 years" too early. Rhodes' memoir *The World as It Is* (released June 5, 2018), Rhodes quotes Obama as saying, "Maybe we pushed too far. ... Maybe people just want to fall back into their tribe."

"I couldn't shake the feeling that I should have seen it coming," Rhodes wrote. "Because when you distilled it, stripped out the racism and misogyny, we'd run against Hillary eight years ago with the same message Trump had used: She's part of a corrupt establishment that can't be trusted to bring change."

Obama's observation reflects a long truism of anti-Black racism in the country. While all peoples have histories of oppression and super-exploitation, former slaves have had a unique place in the formation of the United States.

Thus, the genocide of Native American peoples was worse than slavery, and the white settlers never saw natives as deserving recognition even after the Civil War and the passage of the 14th Amendment conferring citizenship on the former slaves.

Native peoples had their lands stolen; their children kidnapped, and were placed in reservations. (The Bureau of Indian Affairs still exists.) They could

not vote in elections since they were not citizens. Only the passage of the Indian Citizenship Act in 1924 granted citizenship to all Natives born in America. That's when Native Americans were finally granted free travel in the United States.

Slaves and later freed Blacks were the backbone of the economy. Yet they were dehumanized and treated as animals. This only changed briefly at the end of the Civil War.

By the 1880s, when the former Confederates reclaimed what they considered their lands, African American were violently put back in third-class status, losing the right to vote among other Constitutional privileges.

It took another 80 years to adopt the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts in the 1960s to begin to reverse that structural racism. Obama's presidency was a result of these radical social changes, but the white supremacist backlash was so determined it brought the white "silent majority" herd behind Trump, who continues to have broad support among both working class and wealthy whites.

The truth is that some 30 to 40 years - "of the 400 years of African

Americans living in North America" of significant progress toward achieving full equality can be quickly and/or steadily reversed by legal and extra-legal means.

What to Do: Fight Back

The key lesson is what a clear majority of Black Americans know: white supremacy cannot be defeated by elections or education alone. *It will require mass fightback.*

From slavery to civil rights, the decisive winning resistance was extra-legal. For an oppressed minority, first came self-organization, then a reach out to others for a united front.

Until slaves were freed and became legal citizens, the First, Second and other Amendments meant nothing to Black people. July 4 was not celebrated. It was a white settlers' holiday.

Black people, not surprisingly, tend to be indifferent on demands about the Second Amendment. Ronald Reagan, when governor of California, was for the Second Amendment until the Black Panthers armed themselves and stood

up at the state capital. The National Rifle Association (NRA) supported Reagan's gun control law.

Texas has the least restrictive gun laws in the country. You don't need a permit for a handgun. Yet the FBI raided and charged Rakem Balogun under a gun law for alleged "domestic terrorism," while white mass shooters are labeled "mentally ill."

During the resistance in the South after the Civil War, and during the Civil Rights movement, African Americans had guns at home to protect themselves from racists. Today it is just as important. (The debate over military assault weapons is different if it doesn't restrict the right to bear basic defensive arms.)

Justice in America has primarily been about skin color. Blacks must always be aware of white reaction wherever you live, work, walk, drive or even go to a coffee shop and waffle house. Whites don't live with that daily anxiety "an unearned "privilege" all African Americans would like to have.

No wonder the reality of the criminal justice system remains what it has been: Guilty! Until proven innocent.

July/August 2018, ATC 195

The mixed fortunes of Argentina's 2005 and 2010 debt restructurings

29 June 2018, by Éric Toussaint

And Argentina? After the biggest suspension of payments in history, in 2001 the Argentine government renegotiated its sovereign debt. What were the conditions?

Yes! In 2005 and in 2010 Argentina's debt was restructured through an exchange of bonds: old bonds were exchanged against new ones. This was the situation: in December 2001, the Argentine authorities, under the interim President Adolfo Rodríguez

Saá, unilaterally suspended debt repayments amounting to \$80 billion to private creditors and the Paris Club (\$6.5 billion). Notice that they did not suspend payments to multilateral organisms such as the World Bank, the IMF and others.

This action came about in a situation of economic crisis and popular revolt against the policies that had been followed for years by successive neoliberal governments, of which

Fernando de la Rúa was the most recent. It was thus under pressure from the street at a time when the treasury was empty that the Argentine authorities suspended debt repayments.

Argentina's suspension of payments of sovereign debt bonds lasted from December 2001 to March 2005. This was beneficial for the Argentine economy and population. Between 2003 and 2009, Argentina's economic

growth was between 7% and 9%. Some economists claim that this growth was due to the rise in the prices of Argentina's raw materials exports, but it is clear that if Argentina had continued paying off its debt, the increased exports income (in other words, the taxes levied on the exporting companies) would have been used for the debt repayments.

Between 2002 and 2005 the Argentine authorities negotiated with their creditors to convince a majority of them to agree to exchange the bonds they held for new ones, written down by 60%, but with a stronger guarantee and a favourable interest-rate indexed on Argentine GDP growth. This was debt restructuring by exchange of bonds: by March 2005, 76% of outstanding bonds had been exchanged, a majority that was considered sufficient protection against the 24% who refused the exchange. The authorities announced, at the time, that those who refused the exchange would have no further occasion to negotiate.

So why did Argentina restructure its debt again, in 2010?

Indeed, in contradiction with previous declarations and despite the protests of Roberto Lavagna, the minister of economic affairs who had taken part in the 2005 negotiations, the

government of Argentina did open a new round of negotiations with the remaining 24% of the creditors. A new agreement was reached with 67% of that 24% in 2010. In all, 8% of all the bonds whose payment had been suspended since 2001 "held out" against both agreements. Both agreements contained clauses stipulating that in case of litigation involving the new issues, US courts would be the competent jurisdiction.

In the end, can this restructuring be considered a success? Can other governments follow the Argentine strategy?

The Argentine authorities claim success because of the 50% to 60% reduction of debt stock. But, in return, big concessions were made: high interest rates; indexation to Argentina's GDP growth, which means that the country actually agreed to hand over a share of its growth profits to the creditors; renouncing sovereignty in case of litigation.

In fact, Argentina's example is not the one to follow, but it is a source of inspiration. It shows the interest of suspending payments and the limits of a negotiated deal that makes big concessions to the creditors. The current situation is evidence enough:

1. Firstly, the amounts in

fact reimbursed to creditors are considerable; Argentina itself acknowledges that it has reimbursed \$190 billion since 2003.

2. Secondly, although Argentina's debt was certainly lower between 2005 and 2010, today the amount of Argentine debt is higher than it was in 2001.
3. Thirdly, Argentina is under heavy and unwarranted pressure to reimburse the Vulture funds that refused to accept the exchange offers, after not only a New York judge but the US Supreme Court ruled in favour of the Vulture funds.

Eventually, Mauricio Macri, who became president of the republic in December 2015, decided in 2016 to fully compensate the vulture funds, thus humiliating Argentina and provoking a strong increase in the country's public debt [4].

[5].

The Mexican elections in the crucible of crisis

29 June 2018, by PRT, Mexico

Should the left vote for Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) of the center-left Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional (MORENA)? The following statement by the Revolutionary Workers' Party (PRT) argues that the question of whether or not to vote is secondary to the need to organize the anti-capitalist left. Though AMLO is the leading contender, Mexico's

history of naked electoral fraud could mean that "victory" goes to another candidate.

But whatever the official outcome, the anti-capitalist left should seek to advance in the period that will begin after the vote. This may mean an effort to seize the opening that a victory by AMLO could provide to

build a united workers' movement to the left of his party, or it might necessitate a struggle in the streets to resist another fraudulent election unjustly handed to the candidates of the PRI-PAN alliance.

The PRT is the Mexican Section of the Fourth International, and this statement first appeared at

Correspondencia de Prensa, and was translated by Brian M. Napoletano, Héctor Agredano Rivera and Fernando Estañol Tecuatl.

The current electoral process presents itself to us as a moment of political restructuring in the context of a profound crisis and recomposition of Mexico's political regime.

Not that the electoral process and its campaigns have caused the crisis; rather the electoral process is taking place during a high point in the accumulation of grievances and in the crisis of the political regime and its political institutions, including the establishment parties. Divisions within the ruling class caused by the 2008 crisis and the global economic changes are finally exploding in a rupture in the oligarchy.

In opposition to this, the constant mobilizations, protests and popular resistance, although unsuccessful in repealing neoliberal reforms, have further discredited the current regime. This conjuncture has resulted in the crisis of the political regime that established the foundation of the regime that emerged from the historical turn signified by the PRI-PAN pact and the Salinas de Gortari-Fernández de Cevallos alliance of 1988. [In 1988, Diego Fernández de Cevallos, one of the leaders of PAN, which at the time was an opposition party, recognized Salinas as president despite electoral fraud.]

The form of domination by a neoliberal oligarchy that displaced other sectors of the ruling class and that was represented in the PRI-PAN alliance is breaking down and pointing to a new restructuring, a new arrangement. This moment is not only evinced in opposing electoral campaigns, but in the very broad division of the ruling class that points to a new expression of class domination more in keeping with the turn to the extreme right in other parts of the world.

The dominant bloc, represented in the political sphere by the PRIAN (PRI-PAN alliance), managed to complete the most serious cycle of neoliberal reforms, of "structural reforms," particularly in the energy sector.

Now, with the crisis of legitimacy (amid permanent and widespread protest), with the shifts brought by Trump's arrival, and the uncertain future and lack of credibility of all the institutional parties, especially the "Pacto por México" (Pact for Mexico), a violent division within the bourgeoisie has arisen, which is being reflected in the electoral process.

However, a political restructuring like the one taking place does not mean that the neoliberal economic model is being questioned, let alone contested, in the next elections. None of the candidates are really questioning the central elements of neoliberal policy that in the course of three decades has created a scandalously unequal and violent country in permanent crisis.

This does not negate the fact that business leaders have tried to establish themselves as the great electors, in which they do nothing but show a deep contempt for working people and social movement leaders who "dare" to involve themselves in politics. This is shown in the nefarious defamation of Nestora Salgado [leader of the community police in the state of Guerrero], for example, or the illegal quest to coerce and condition the votes of the workers in the country's mega-corporations. The PRT repudiates and condemns these demonstrations of class hatred, manipulation and blackmail by the bourgeoisie.

The neoliberal economic model is not being questioned by the candidates, which is merely a symptom of how the electoral program of each party generally skews to the right. The major national problems are not on the agendas of the candidates or their parties.

There is silence, evasive answers or, worse, an opportunistic use of, for example, the victims of more than a decade of militarization and a false "war on drugs." The scandalous working conditions in the country, poverty wages, the lack of basic workers' rights, employment

instability and precarity are also not included in the electoral agendas.

Neither are the rights of women and the violence they suffer under these agendas, nor the most crude expression of this oppression — the ever-growing thousands of instances of femicide. The agenda and demands of women are evaded by calls to "put them up to a vote," which is especially scandalous coming from parties that call themselves "progressive." Either due to open opposition to the recognition of women's rights to control their own bodies or for fear of losing campaign contributions, the demands of women are excluded from the electoral debate.

The rights of the entire LGBT community are being similarly discarded and even openly attacked by various electoral forces across the spectrum while they deceptively seek to maintain the appearance of tolerance and inclusion. The most worrisome in this regard is that, whatever the final outcome of the election, we face a much more belligerent Congress on these issues, with a new extreme religious right irresponsibly catapulted from the margins to a position of legislative power by MORENA.

The way the candidates frame the debate around the new airport in Mexico City also shows that the terrible ecocide the country is experiencing — the mega-projects, the rapacious mining, the water crises in several regions, among other serious environmental problems — are not part of the electoral agenda.

On the contrary, all the candidates are committed to pursuing a destructive development model dependent on extractive industries, the abuse of natural resources and especially the dispossession of lands and territories of indigenous peoples and popular classes in general.

Despite the above, however, huge sectors of the working population are looking for ways to express their anger and discontent. Thus, despite

the concessions and scandalous alliances, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) is emerging as the main leader in various polls and is projected to obtain the majority of votes on July 1. For the peremptory date that the election signifies, there is no alternative that clearly represents the demands and interests of the popular classes in the country.

In the absence of a political alternative belonging to the working classes themselves, millions of indignant people whose numbers are steadily increasing “in spite of the repression and violence that exists throughout the entire country” will express the popular rejection of the PRIAN by voting for AMLO.

Despite the daily concessions that AMLO announces to obtain respect among the dominating classes for his triumph, and despite more than anything his rightist turn (as various commentators call it), he has raised hopes in the popular imagination that his election would herald a radical change in the regime. This popular illusion is enhanced, paradoxically, by the violent and dirty war waged by the right against AMLO by means of slander and condescension, which does nothing but paint the entire governing body as an arrogant oligarchy that despises working people.

For those of us who are anti-capitalists and socialists, the current debate should not be about how to construct a voting formula for the next election, but about how the post-election landscape, whatever it is, can pave the way for the construction of new alternatives based on an appreciation of the massive expected vote for AMLO.

It is not for those of us who seek the construction of alternatives for working people to build formulas of “critical support” for a project in which the left does not feel represented and which, if it arrives at the presidency, would be more of an administrator of the crisis and lead to more than a few disappointments for its many voters.

But a parallel error would be to confront in a belligerent and sectarian

way, with supposed moral or intellectual superiority, those who will vote their hopes on the July 1 ballot.

Our challenge, much more difficult than simple short-term departures, is to understand the new period that will open following the election and, in this context, to find ways to reorganize anti-capitalist alternatives. For this reason, instead of a voting formula, we have reiterated the slogan “whether you vote or not, organize” to guide the anti-capitalist struggle, which will face serious challenges in any post-electoral scenario.

Moreover, based on previous experience with electoral victories of so-called “progressive” governments in Latin America (as AMLO may be), the anti-capitalist left must not hesitate to construct point of reference to the left of such governments if it is to avoid political suicide. This same lesson can be drawn from the tragicomic cycle of degradation of the PRD, which once sought to win hegemony over the entire left end of the political spectrum but today is staring its own demise in the face.

In the search to construct an anti-capitalist option on this terrain, we participated in and backed the campaign of MarÃa de JesÃs Patricio MartÃnez “also known as Marichuy” spokesperson of the Indigenous Council of Government (Concejo IndÃgena de Gobierno) to qualify for the ballot as an independent candidate.

The campaign was a step forward in the necessary search for an anti-capitalist alternative to the present crisis of the political regime “as a means to give left-wing expression to the general popular discontent and to challenge the anti-capitalist left to act on a much larger scale.

And although the campaign of Marichuy has the prestige and moral authority that the other candidates lack “especially the “independents” for having obtained signatures honestly and for the militant activism that supported it, it did not gain the

legally required number of signatures within the confines of an anti-democratic system so dominated by money that such signatures are routinely bought “to say nothing of the system’s racism and misogyny.

However, the results of Marichuy’s campaign represent a crucial illustration of the bankrupt nature of the present electoral system, in which fraud was even used to register independent candidates for the ballot. The mechanism was designed to make it impossible to legally obtain the requisite number of signatures to qualify for the presidential ballot. In fact, none of the aspirants legally obtained the number of signatures required.

As further proof of fraud, the INE [National Electoral Institute] approved the inclusion of Margarita Zavala on the ballot, despite her use of fraudulent methods to obtain the necessary signatures. Even worse was the decision by the INE to allow Bronco’s registration. El Bronco was approved for inclusion on the ballot by the Electoral Tribunal, the same body that will evaluate the July vote, even though the vast majority of signatures he presented were fake.

The message is very clear: it does not matter that the INE itself recognizes that the majority of the signatures are false, since the Tribunal itself can decide that he has the right to appear as a candidate on the ballots. Today, polls indicate that “you know who” will have the most votes. Tomorrow the Tribunal, with the same impudence as in the case of Bronco, can decide that another candidate is the “real” victor.

This electoral cycle is already by far the most violent in the country’s history “in keeping with a country that has become a cemetery sown with clandestine graves. Political violence, the bloodiest expression of the restructuring of political forces, is becoming one of the election’s defining traits “not just verbal violence and insults, including the

"dirty wars" of these campaigns, but a violence that now accounts for the combined deaths of more than 100 candidates from all parties, especially at the local level and especially targeting women.

But also worrying is the violence employed to destroy candidates, through institutional means, that occurs at the national level, for example, in the election of senators: the attempts to discredit and destroy candidates through legal chicanery as with Napoleón Gómez Urrutia, leader of the mining union, or the calumnies against Nestora Salgado García denouncing her as a "kidnapper."

The violence already expressed in the campaigns reflects the climate of violence nationally, evincing a deep social and institutional decomposition, now bursting forth into a deep crisis of human rights across the country, amid a wave of extra-judicial killings, forced disappearances and femicide. It is not simply a continuation of the violence already present throughout the previous six-year presidential term, but could be the harbinger of the form of electoral fraud, already carried out, that polls are insufficient to banish.

At the same time "and historical experience is rich in examples" the sword of fraud always hangs over the head of Mexico's false democracy.

AMLO himself, together with the ruling class as a whole, fears the social protest that could arise from imposing a new fraud, a protest which they compare to a "tiger on the loose" "a tiger that politicians have wanted to keep subjected, tied down, controlled and respectful of institutional ways.

In reality, this tiger is not a savage animal, because the barbarism has already been sown by the powerful, as evidenced by how the neoliberal regime is dripping with blood. The tiger would be nothing but the eruption of the popular masses, already fed up with the chicanery of the system and seeking to shape their

own destiny "not through the ballot box, but in the streets, on the roads, in mobilizations and through self-organization.

Although it would appear that the oligarchy fears that the rage against fraud would spill out of the ballot boxes and into the streets, and despite the increasingly firm guarantees that leading candidates offer, fraud cannot be excluded from the immediate scenario. If this is to be the case, anti-capitalists and socialists will need to be on the front lines in defense of the popular will.

This was the position of the PRT in 1988, in which we maintained all the way to the end a wholehearted commitment to the fight against fraud around the campaign of Rosario Ibarra de Piedra, after the "fall of the system" imposed on Salinas.

If this is the scenario that results from the election, our position will be the same, for the left has historically been the true promoter and defender of political and democratic rights "from the struggle for universal suffrage and a woman's right to vote, to the legalization of workers' organizations and in defense of voters in the face of all manner of electoral fraud.

The end "and mutation" of this regime of death is approaching. If the right prevails without resistance, the new regime and the realignment of new political forces will be marked by a shift to far-right positions, as we have seen in other parts of the world.

The Law of Internal Security (Ley de Seguridad Interior), the violence already unleashed, the Electoral Tribunal's fraudulent imposition of the "independents" already in this campaign and more indicate that the risk of fraud, and violent fraud, is not yet banished "despite the division within the bourgeoisie and the support of AMLO by sectors that previously

opposed him.

If fraud is imposed before or after the vote (surprisingly, the PRI in the Chamber of Deputies approved the elimination of presidential immunity, and the Senate is waiting until after the elections to decide), sinking definitively into illegitimacy, we must not only fight back, but advance the possibility "greater if there is a social and political anti-capitalist bloc" that with the social explosion the interests of the working people can be present in the restructuring of forces with the fall of the current regime.

In any scenario, there exists a general conclusion: the need to organize and articulate the demands of the anti-capitalist left, which openly questions and combats ecocide, patriarchy and sexist violence, and promotes popular self-organization, either to consistently defend the popular will, or if the government of AMLO opens a new political moment.

In any case, the construction of an anti-capitalist pole that brings together those who seek a profound transformation of the country is urgent. More important than what one chooses to do on July "to vote or not" is for us to organize, to open the space for common ground and debate, to build unity in the middle of the diverse mosaic that is today to the left of AMLO's party.

This, for the socialists of the PRT, is the primary task of the present moment, and every day it becomes more urgent in the face of a new political cycle that will undoubtedly begin after the July election.

Our hopes are not in the ballot boxes, but in the people who fight, with women in struggle, with indigenous peoples in resistance, with every person who faces war and defends life. This is the much larger and substantial meeting point than the meaning of a vote.

Mexico City, 9 June 2018

Socialistworker.org

Land-grabbing and the Financialization of Agricultural Land

27 June 2018, by **Mary N. Taylor , Attila Szócs, Devlin Kuyek, Fábio Pitta**

Mary: First, can you to speak a bit about the report. What are the conditions of financialization of agricultural land and its consequences in Brazil?

Fábio: Financialization of agricultural land is not new in Brazil. It is related to the financialization of capitalism, since the 1970's. David Harvey, François Chesnais, Robert Kurz (among others) have grasped this process, when the centrality or the mediation of capitalist society became dependent on the circulation of financial capital on global terms. Financial investment in farmland had an important shift at that moment in Brazil and it was related to the increase of external indebtedness of public and private debt of the Brazilian economy. Agroindustry developed there at that moment and the increase in farmland prices was explicit. Rolling over indebtedness was the logic of capitalist enterprise everywhere, and also in Brazil. In the 1990's, with the Brazilian debt crisis and neoliberalism, agricultural expansion was very slow, and land prices decreased at that moment. That also allowed small agrarian reforms in the Brazilian countryside.

The main shift occurred after the 2003 bubble in commodity prices, that burst in 2008/2009, after subprime crisis in the USA. Between these bubbles , agroindustry in Brazil increased in area, production, and productivity (including soybean, sugarcane, corn, cotton and timberland). That increase promoted the expulsion of labor from the production process, generating structural unemployment (also called the crisis of labor) and raising the issue of how capitalism could accumulate over surplus value if all its production processes have less and

less labor to be exploited.

Rolling over indebtedness throughout this financialization process changed into asset price inflation, the same character driving commodity prices all over the world, and real estate prices in the USA, Great Britain and Spain higher and higher. The logic of capitalist bubbles was at the core of the reproduction of (fictitious) capital.

Actually, the commodities prices burst was related to the subprime crisis, from the end of 2007 and onward. The logic of capital accumulation based on financialization / fictionalization of the economy and of everyday life is the logic that determines the world today, as capitalism is the only form of social relationship to exist on a global level.

The subprime crisis was the core of world economic crisis. People were buying new houses with their mortgages that had other houses as guarantees. There was credit to construct houses and credit to buy houses. This is fictitious capital sort of accumulation I was talking about before, with its asset price inflation logic of moving the economy. Even if there was the production of a merchandise with materiality (houses), it was all about "artificially" increasing house prices and renting over that. This process inevitably achieves a moment where the bubble bursts, the prices go downward, and we become inserted into forms of social barbarie connected with the social crisis of capitalism.

The so called fictitious increase in the area of agroindustry, production and productivity also drove the demand for new farmland, which was responsible for the increase in farmland prices. After 2008 / 2009, the search for

farmland as a financial asset, as a financial investment detached from commodity prices. Commodity prices decreased at the same time land prices kept climbing higher because of the search for it.

What is new all around the world regarding this topic is that huge financial investors and huge agroindustries began to create joint ventures to invest in land as a financial asset on its own. That had never happened before. Radar S/A, for example, is a joint venture between TIAA (USA pension funds) and Cosan S/A (The biggest Brazilian sugarcane, sugar and ethanol producer from Brazil). Radar S/A is exclusively a rural real estate company. Its only business is buying cheap land, waiting for the price to climb, and then selling it with "profit" (the conceptual term would be "financial rent").

In the report mentioned earlier we have pictures from Radar S/A farms in the Brazilian Cerrado region that were bought and sold untouched, showing the speculative character of such business.

As the core of this sort of business has to do with financial logic, namely, buying cheap to sell expensive (land in this case), the search for the cheap creation of new farms through illegal land grabbing practices results in the eviction of rural communities, deforestation, huge environmental destruction, severe droughts and so on, to simply sketch a panorama. This conditions prevent communities to survive on the small pieces of land that they manage to keep for themselves.

Rural conditions for the social reproduction of communities and for

workers are even worse nowadays. Wage workers and evicted communities can't find any labor places (because of the industrialization of agriculture in the last 40 years) and because of competition between workers, labor conditions has worsened in the last years in Brazilian countryside. The situation is a tragedy.

MARY: Can you speak to how these conditions need to be understood as a global issue?

Devlin: What is happening in Brazil is connected to a global phenomenon that erupted after the financial crisis of 2008, as financial managers starting looking at farmland as a new asset class. The scramble to acquire farmland is also related to food security concerns in some import-dependent countries and the increasing industrialisation and corporate control of the global food system.

Fábio: I would suggest we consider the chapter in Saskia Sassen's book "Expulsions" about the creation of a global rural land market after 2008. The phenomenon I described about capitalism's shifts over the last decades and also the shift inside financial capitalism from rolling over indebtedness to asset price inflation enabled this very peculiar circumstance of the existence of a global rural land market, with financial investors searching for business all around, including Africa, Latin America and even inside the USA.

Attila: The issue of land has escalated a lot in Europe too. For more than a decade, the European Union and national authorities were looking towards the Global South, witnessing the massive land grabs done in African, Asian and South American countries, but land grabbing is escalating in our own backyard. Drivers include large scale monocultural farming, forestry, mining, energy, tourism, and ultimately speculation - and the process is weakening rural economies and hampering the development of a dynamic rural sector. In my country, Romania, after the fall of the communist regime where most of the

land was in state control (dominated by an elite group of people), along with the privatization and liberalization of the land market, land has rapidly become the object of speculation and massive private investments. Regardless of the exploited resource, presently the land owned by Romanian peasants, who total almost 5 million people, is being grabbed and transformed with far reaching effects. Small-scale farms are rapidly vanishing. Statistics from the Romanian National Institute of Statistics show that approximately 150.000 small farms disappeared between 2002 and 2010. That is 3 farms per hour! It's a massive transformation of our society, where, through land concentration or outright land grabbing, local food producers are dislocated from their rural areas and forced into migration and unemployment while 40% of agricultural land is already concentrated in the hands of a few private companies.

On top of that, most EU member state governments are escalating the development of neo-liberal agro-industry and making substantial efforts to attract multinational investments. We can witness structural policies moving towards very large scale, export-oriented agriculture fueling a global market. As millions of Eastern European peasant farmers and agroecological food producers are being marginalized, land is becoming merely a commodity on which companies can speculate. Just like in other regions of the world, land has become the new gold in Europe. Through this, the struggle for food sovereignty is getting much harder here too.

Mary: How do the structural conditions for these land grabs affect the way in which the land is used?

Fábio: I would say that the basis of these structural conditions are indeed the current asset price inflation of financial capitalism nowadays. That is responsible for a global competition to see how to produce commodities in industrialized manners. The only ones able to compete in this scenario are transnational global corporations. They can grow over the inflated prices

of the commodities or over their own stock options prices in stock markets through indebtedness that has the same inflated prices as guarantees. While the prices keep climbing everything seems to be ok, but as with all financial bubbles, a burst will occur. The use of land to produce commodities or as a financial asset will happen within this worldwide logic.

Attila: Eastern Europe is an interesting case, as it has experienced a failed communism on one side, under which private lands of peasant farmers were forcefully expropriated and put under state run control and exploitation, and capitalism where in most cases land was re-privatized and competition was left at the mercy of the so called free-market. Both failed and the gradual disappearance of millions of Eastern European peasant farmers can be seen as a collateral damage of all these political and social experiments. Presently, land use is being rapidly transformed from being a resource supporting food production and rural stability to a financial asset and speculative commodity. This is best reflected by booming land prices all over Europe, but also the huge variation between prices, with 1 hectare of arable land in the Netherlands reaching EUR 63000 while the same hectare in Romania costs EUR1958 on average (Eurostat Newsrelease, 48/2018). Trick question: in which place would investment funds sitting on millions of EURO invest first under this scenario? Indeed, once lands have been transformed into an affordable speculative merchandise, land grabbing has unfolded rapidly in Eastern European countries like Romania.

This has led to a scene where multinational companies and investment funds have managed to accumulate a little less than half of the total farmland surface of the country. Indeed, several millions of hectares of land are controlled and put into the service of agroindustrial production or pure real-estate speculation.

Mary: The report exposes the way in which pension funds in North America and Western Europe are implicated in these land grabs, and

contributes to the campaign to influence the investment practices of the TIAA (Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association) pension fund. [6] I understand that these funds are in control of more investment capital than the largest hedge funds. This is quite interesting, as pension funds are quite often seen as a victory of the left. How can we think about the consciousness or praxis of workers who seek security in old age in precaritizing conditions and the effects of these funds on workers elsewhere?

Devlin: Pension funds are perhaps the most influential actors in today's global financial system, with over \$41 trillion in assets under management. If these pension funds decide to allocate even just a small fraction of their portfolios to farmland, the impacts are huge. This is why we feel it is critical to apply pressure now, when most pension funds are still debating the merits of farmland as a speculative investment. In theory, since pension funds are based on worker contributions, these funds should be more susceptible to social and environmental concerns, and indeed many of them have guidelines for socially responsible investment, and some have even developed such guidelines for farmland. The reality, however, is that pension funds are deeply entrenched into the capitalist system. With farmland, this means that their investments will inevitably promote real estate speculation and bubbles, as well as industrial forms of agriculture, which are based on the exploitation of labour and the environment and corporate supply chains. The pension fund managers have zero interest in investing in small scale farmers and local food systems, and it's hard to imagine how they could even do so. The guidelines can only mitigate the most egregious violations "but as we see in Brazil, even this is not happening.

This points to deeper questions around pension funds. In much of the West, pension funds were indeed a big victory for workers, but they have also played a dual role by supporting the growth and power of global finance, which has been hugely destructive to working people. And today, few

workers have any pension security and most fall out of the defined benefit plans that were successfully fought for, and which people are today struggling to maintain. We are at a necessary moment where these two strands of activism have to converge: the struggle for a universal retirement system that provides adequate financial security to all of the elderly and a savings system that makes social investments in the interests of working people everywhere (including farmers).

Fábio: The end of the question is a very important issue. How can workers be responsible for overexploiting other workers? That's what the financialization of capital does. Everybody's savings are driven into financial markets and financialization is at the core of productive enterprises because it has become necessary to fictionalize capital accumulation. That happens through the substitution of labor inside industrial production (robotization and automation after the 1970's). Society's savings are used as investments, as money in abstract sense. This sort of reality (workers overexploiting and evicting other workers) has to do with the core contradiction of capitalist society. We only can grasp that with critical theory and this is only a suggestion here. It is impossible, in this short opportunity, to scrutinize in a deep way the problems capitalism brings to society as a whole nowadays.

Attila: What I can add to the conversation started by Devlin and completed by Fábio is that in Eastern Europe, pension funds are still largely state-controlled. As outlined above, due to the political processes suffered by countries from this region, there is a blend between capitalist and post-socialist approaches. Pension funds and other welfare services fall more under the latter one. So, as pension funds are still feeding the state budgets, rarely are political decisions made to put that money into land investments (largely also because the funds have barely enough to assure the actual purpose). On the other hand, Western Europe is a different story...one best illustrated by the case of the Dutch based multinational bank, Rabobank (discussed in Eco Ruralis

Factsheet no. 7, March 2016). Through subsidiary companies belonging to a ~315 million investment fund for farmland in Romania and Poland called Rabo Farm, Rabobank has acquired over 21,000 hectares of farmland across Romania since 2011, as part of a fifteen year investment which is expected to give returns of up to ~900 million to investors. The investors are different pension funds like TIAA-CREF or APG (Algemene Pensioen Groep) or PFZW (Stichting Pensioenfonds Zorg en Welzijn).

Mary: Given the "fiduciary responsibility" of pension funds, how limited is a divestment campaign? Wouldn't funds just move into another set of high return investments? Is there some way to use these reports to question the financialization of everyday life more broadly?

Devlin: It's not so much of a divestment campaign as it is an effort to prevent the financial industry from acquiring farmland. This can target laws at the local or national level that block corporations from buying farmland, as exists in a number of US states for example. It can also involve supporting organising efforts with local communities where the land grabbing is occurring, to make it more difficult for corporations to throw people off the land. But it can also involve what you might call "making noise". This means exposing the pension funds that are involved in land grabbing, showing how their investments are bad for rural communities and the environment, and getting this message out as much as possible in the media and amongst their clients (workers). The idea is to scare off pension funds that are considering investing in farmland and to make it more difficult for TIAA and the other big pension fund managers that are spearheading the pension fund investments into farmland globally from attracting further investment. So it's not a divestment campaign in the sense where we are just pleading with TIAA.

Fábio: I would agree with Devlin that divestment is only a strategy in a certain point. Land was one of the higher investments on the last years

around the world. TIAA has almost 1 trillion dollars to invest in anything that brings good return. Funds are competing against each other and it has to do with capitalist society again and the merchandise form of relationship between people as the form of this society. I would say that there is no other way to criticize pension funds investments without giving emphasis to financialization of everyday life.

The more theoretical parts of the report have to do, again, with a global process in which everyone of us is inserted. To give just one concrete example. When Trump launched the Mother Of All Bombs (MOAB) in Afghanistan some months ago, the bomb's producer (Raytheon) had a huge price increase in its stock options right away on the next day. [7] Beyond this increase, they can contract (through indebtedness) new investments and produce more bombs. If we follow Jeremy Scahill's assertions in his book "Dirty Wars", this sort of "War on Terror" operations directly creates more terrorists, which increases the justification of more bomb attacks in a self moving and expansionist process. Financialization of capital is at the core of such a movement and it has the same social logic regarding investments in land, food or anything else.

In the text *World Power, World Money*, Robert Kurz relates what I called above the crisis of labor with the existence of a mass of superfluous impoverished people (capital enterprises are no longer able to overexploit the workers that need jobs to survive) all around the world. It is not only in the so called peripheries as we knew it some decades ago, but also inside what once were considered "developed countries". The necessity of social repression is a promise that drives up stock option prices of military industry, refueling structural unemployment and overexploitation of labor and social exclusion.

Stephen Graham, in his book *Cities Under Siege*, shows how militarization is related to financial capital nowadays. Accumulation by dispossession is being used also inside the producers countries and against its "excluded citizens". It is not only

about foreigners, "terrorists", but about internal repression.

Just to complete the argument, China's ("socialist") government is rating its citizens. The rating is about personal default, crimes, and other characteristics that can classify people as a sort of financial asset. This article in Portuguese talks about China forbidding citizens who score badly to use trains and airplanes. [8] This is happening right now.

The most important case of the logic of asset price inflation and the impact of its bubble bursts on everyday life, in a worldwide sense, is the 2007/2008 subprime crisis, which started in the USA but spread to enterprises and other countries. Hedge funds went into bankruptcy, AIG, General Motors, Island, Greece, only to give some examples. When I was in Detroit in 2015, the impacts on families were very clear. People had bought houses with mortgages when there was lots of money to be lent, either to enterprises, either to families; either to construct houses or to fund families consumption. This whole process inflated house prices and allowed families to take out new loans on the inflated prices of their houses. The process refueled itself for a while. When the bubble burst families owed a lot of money, they lost their houses, and the price of the houses dropped precipitously. In Detroit, beyond the crisis in the historical city related to structural unemployment, I met people who owed more than \$200,000, and even having paid more than one \$100,000 still lost their houses, which at that time valued at \$20,000. College loans, auto loans, and wealth insurance are also directly related to the asset price inflation logic I am trying to describe here.

Mary: Formerly state socialist Eastern Europe is subject to land grabs of this sort. Can you tell us about some cases and conditions and effects of these?

Attila: The geographical distribution of farmland grabbing in the EU is uneven and is particularly concentrated in eastern European member states. Here, the lack of transparency around large-scale land deals in the EU implies that farmland grabbing

operates in part through "extra-economic" forces and it involves a huge diversity of actors, including a new asset class made up of large banking groups, and pension and insurance funds, who are controlling an ever-increasing share of European farmland.

Our data shows that already more than 4 million hectares of land have been grabbed in Romania alone, with the strong presence of banking institutions and investment funds like Rabobank, Generali or Spearhead International. The range of investors is "exotic"...from Austrian Counts to Romanian oligarchs and Danish and Italian agribusiness companies. Eco Ruralis (Land Grabbing in Romania, 2015) argues that investors are mainly preoccupied with how to increase efficiency and how to financially develop. Labor conditions or local economic development are not of high importance for transnational companies. They grow vertically, usually controlling the full process of production all the way to export. Thus, small farmers are forced to reduce the price of their products to compete with highly profitable and subsidised businesses. As the possibilities in the countryside retract, many decide to sell out and leave their livelihoods behind.

Then there is the land grabbing unfolding in non-EU countries like Ukraine. Not being part of the EU, countries like Ukraine are left to face the corporate takeover that is unfolding after the fall of the Soviet Union alone. Besides the massive land control by the national oligarchy, which controls some 80% of the large mega-farms that are hundreds of thousand hectares, international trade deals recently under discussion only define who gets the leftovers (to control and exploit agricultural lands).. Signing the EU partnership agreement also meant opening up the land market to the same actors that have been grabbing land in countries like Romania. A 2014 report done by The Oakland Institute also details the role of the World Bank and its International Finance Corporation in these massive land grabs. [9] In the middle of all this, 7 million Ukrainian small farmers suffer and are left-out completely even from statistics, held

crippled and left unable to participate in their own food market.

Whether in the EU or not, Eastern European countries and their millions of peasants currently face huge challenges and transformations. These are partially a result of the post-

communist era and its "state land-grabs", but mostly because they became a territorial hot-spot for private capital investments in search of rapid returns, while completely disregarding the major social, environmental and economic impact

that they are generating. Due to the aggressive manner through which this land grabbing is unfolding, we can also call the region the Wild Wild East where everything is up for grabs and the last bastion of the resistance are the peasants and other rural communities.

After the fall of Rajoy in the Spanish state: the unstable succession?

26 June 2018, by **Josep María Antentas**

1. Without a doubt, to see the Popular Party (PP) driven out of power produces enormous satisfaction. The abrupt and unexpected form - a motion of censorship with highly improbable geometry - that allowed Rajoy to be expelled from the Palace of Moncloa was particularly cruel to the PP, which has an absolutely patrimonial conception of power.

Political crises are generally conducive to surprises and changes of scenario. They operate in the field of political representation, which has its own particular logic, even though they fit into a specific social and economic context, in which determined relationships of forces and of power prevail, defining a given range of possibilities. One of their characteristics lies in the inability of the ruling elite to centralize and unify their interests in a global perspective to avoid a permanent headlong forward rush and the hasty actions of actors in distress in the internal play of the system of representation. There are frequently imbroglios and that of these last few days was a major one.

So this is the end of a stage. What is coming up now is nevertheless uncertain. Certainly better than what we have been given so far, but in no case a government of "change", if we give the term a strong and authentic meaning. The events took place within the framework of the parliamentary logic of a system of representation in crisis and not as an operation

emanating from the state sphere.

They are leading to a change that does not enjoy much sympathy among the politico-financial elite and the state apparatus, whose choices for dealing with the crisis of the regime have long been focused on the option of Alberto Rivera (the president of Ciudadanos). It is as if the "spirit of offensive resistance" of the PP and the shadow of a neo-restorationist threat from Ciudadanos had generated enough antibodies, not to provoke a break from the regime or force a solid self-reform from above, but to activate the improbable mechanisms making possible an unlikely resolution of a prolonged institutional crisis.

The rise of Sánchez embodies an imperfect succession, a succession almost against the prevailing wind, which reflects as much the depth of the political crisis as its limits. A PSOE government replaces a PP government, but in unprecedented conditions of weakness.

2. Sanchez is a person with changing ideological convictions. But his principal quality is tenacity. To get to where he is now, he played every possible role, doing one thing and the opposite within in a very short time. Throughout his political career, he has never presented any project that even only timidly stands out from neoliberal orthodoxy.

To survive politically during his first

period as general secretary of the PSOE (from July 2014 to October 2016), he had to oppose any logic of "a grand coalition" with the PP, and he realized he was staking his future in the competition with Podemos for the leadership of the left. Following his resignation, after the internal coup that targeted him, he was forced to reinvent himself by engaging in a regenerating rhetoric, left and democratic, and by giving a political meaning and a coherent problematic to his project of resuming his post as general secretary, thus channelling the malaise of the party rank and file towards a project of regeneration of a political force, the mediocrity of whose apparatus was a source of shame for its own militants. But once he reconquered his post in June 2017, he quickly gave up any left-wing inclinations and, engulfed by the Catalan crisis, he bowed to the *raison d'état*, without any ifs or buts.

All these complicated twists and turns as the head of the PSOE have allowed him to acquire a relative but real autonomy with regard to the economic and media powers and the state apparatus concerning his policy of alliances which, when the time came, proved decisive for being able to present the motion of censure against Rajoy.

3. Sánchez is coming to power with no plan except to try to survive and consolidate a government policy which seeks on the one hand to comply with

the strictest neoliberal orthodoxy and on the other to complement that by measures with real or symbolic impact on the democratic and civic terrain and in social policy. In short, a neoliberalism mitigated by social palliatives, progressive values and a de-escalation of authoritarian politics.

He will try to set out a battery of proposals, including the announced reform of the "gag law", [10] intimately linked to mainstream progressiveness and which generally prove to be as spectacular as they are superficial, which does not make them less necessary.

The goal of the head of the government will be to strengthen himself by the exercise of power, to get a weakened PSOE back on its feet and to reaffirm its hegemony on the left by marginalizing Podemos, in order to subsequently be at the head of a government in a less precarious position. Sánchez will not have much room for manoeuvre. What he has may even shrink sharply in the face of the perspective of a deterioration of the economic situation, in a delicate conjuncture on a European level.

He will be faced with the fierce opposition of a right that controls the Senate and holds the majority in the Bureau of Congress, while there is fierce competition between the PP and Ciudadanos to appear as the main spearhead against the left. In 2004, the political, media and cultural right never recognized the legitimacy of Zapatero's victory after the attacks of Atocha on March 11th, nor will it accept the legitimacy of Sánchez today.

Paradoxically, Sanchez's main asset is the strategic disorientation of those who brought him to power, Podemos and the Catalan independentists.

4. Apart from the PP, Ciudadanos is the big loser in this situation. Credited with a meteoric rise by the polls, it had only to continue to contemplate the erosion of Rajoy and harvest the fruit during the next election. The turn of events obviously thwarts the plans of the party of Rivera, a party that in general has a weak capacity for real reaction beyond its opportunist propensity to take advantage of

favourable circumstances.

The unpredictability that characterises any situation of crisis confronts Rivera with two opposing scenarios. Either the possibility of remaining confined to opposition over a long period, and seeing whether his rise in the opinion polls will take off again, in a context where Sánchez turns out to be capable of stabilizing the situation; or else to capitalize on the wearing down and possible failure of the PSOE government, to then establish himself as the winner of the next elections and demonstrate the definitive return of bipartisanship.

We must neither take Rivera for dead nor consider that his victory is inevitable. We must rather have a clear idea of the responsibilities of the left: the *raison d'état* to which Sánchez is loyal and towards which Iglesias seems to lean can become the landing strip for Ciudadanos if the new government proves to be incapable of offering something other than the same old politics.

5. Exhilarated by the Catalan crisis and having become the preferred option of economic and financial power, the Ciudadanos project is a combination of youthful modernity and a business friendly approach in the style of Macron, of identity-based Spanish nationalism and exploitation of social resentment, compatible in addition with a slightly modern and liberal-competitive touch in questions of society and lifestyle, such as its position during the women's strike of March 8, when Ciudadanos tried (not without contradictions or ridicule) to stand out from traditional anti-feminist neo-conservatism.

If we applied the hackneyed term of "populism" to Ciudadanos, we would have to take into account that its populism is neoliberal, nationalist, non-solidarity and modernizing. It sells to the middle classes and to the declassed working classes the meritocratic dream of an employer or a professional who succeeds, in the image and likeness of the party's own leaders. It summons, in a classical schema, national identity as a mechanism for the dissolution of class antagonisms, and exploits in a non-solidarity sense the frustration of the

most disadvantaged layers, in order to line them up against other sectors of the subaltern classes.

This last aspect, as highlighted by Nãria Alabao [11], is the most recent in the politics of Ciudadanos and the most decisive feature in the medium term as to the success or failure of its attempt to convert electoral and media sympathies into a project of socio-cultural hegemony in the longer term. It is not sure that it will succeed, and the shortage of local cadres, the weakness of its organizational base and its lack of punch significantly complicate its progress.

Ciudadanos was born as a party built on television platforms and as the right-wing superficial-mediatised imitation of Podemos, but deprived of the militant and activist dynamic that characterized the formation of Pablo Iglesias in its early days. It is weighed down by its original limits in terms of organization and political culture. But, without a doubt, it would be a very ironic paradox if Ciudadanos turned out to be capable of sinking roots and really implanting itself on the ground, whereas Podemos is undergoing a process which is hollowing out its base as a result of affirming a relationship with society that is more and more exclusively electoral and mediatised.

6. Podemos presents itself on this new scene weakened by its permanent internal crisis and by important errors as regards its relations with the PSOE. After dynamiting the political landscape with its anti-caste, anti-regime discourse and its rejection of bipartisanship, with its eruption in 2014, it took a radical turn once the general elections of December 20th, 2015 were over, setting as an immediate horizon a coalition government of both parties. This proposal of a government with the PSOE resulted in an unnecessary rehabilitation of the latter as a party of change.

It was the same with the abandonment of the schema "pro-regime forces and caste versus. constituent and popular forces", with the acritical and abrupt reappearance of the "right vs. left" schema, moreover in its most superficial version, that is to say by making relations with the PSOE the

structuring element of this schema. Furthermore, this turning towards the PSOE in terms of a government of coalition took place without any examination of the situation nor any kind of public programmatic discussion and, therefore, without formulating a clear agenda of anti-austerity and democratic measures (with the exception of the Catalan referendum) which can be used to expose political differences between the two parties.

What has emerged since then is the inability to simultaneously maintain an anti-bipartisan discourse and a unitary policy towards the PSOE.

7. In the new stage that is beginning, the worst scenario for Podemos would be that Sánchez capitalized on its successes and that on the other hand Podemos remained stigmatized by its failures. To avoid this, it must appear as an autonomous force, capable of exerting pressure on the government, in symbiosis with struggles and social organizations. The renewed demand of Iglesias to form a government with the PSOE is, on the contrary, to move in the wrong direction, that of complete integration into the space and the logic of government. Beyond that, the basic question for Podemos is whether it is going to help moderate expectations of social change or, on the contrary, fight to maintain them at a high level by exerting maximum pressure on Sánchez.

In the current historical conjuncture, marked by the harshness of the political and social situation, by the accumulated weight of decades of retreats in the absence of any decisive victory and by the lack of alternative socio-cultural points of reference, the main adversary of any project of social change is the tendency to conformism. In other words, the abyssal gap between the difficulties of daily life and expectations. This always leads to a lesser evil policy which, in the long run, proves a deadly adversary for forces like Podemos.

Embellishing the "change" that Sanchez claims to be making does not help us to remain vigilant and to prepare for a policy of pushing forward and overflowing. Perhaps this is just a trivial anecdote, but the

image of Podemos deputies shouting "¡Sí se puede!" ("Yes, you can!") In parliament after the investiture of the new president appeared as a sinister self-parody.

8. Different scenarios for the future are imaginable, but schematically three options can be defined. The first would be the relative stabilization of the political situation to the advantage of Sánchez. This requires a government that keeps Rajoy's economic policy intact, while spraying it with some secondary social measures, making some dramatic change on the democratic terrain and relaxing the situation with Catalonia, but without any major changes.

Sánchez's path would then be in a certain sense the most audacious in terms of a stuttering self-reform of the regime, insofar as it supposes the definitive neutralization of Podemos as an alternative and the deactivation of a disoriented Catalan independence movement. But this requires an audacity that has been lacking so far both in the political personnel and in the most intimate circles of power, as well as a consensus in the media and in intellectual circles of which there is no sign today. The PSOE is too weak and Sánchez and his team lack depth and strong links with a financial oligarchy that for the moment is not putting its money on him.

If, in the end, an operation by the left (and by the plurinational flank) was successful at the state level, it would be rather a surprising and almost accidental event, and to a large extent the result of the strategic weaknesses of the opponents of the regime.

9. The second option is that of a precarious, unstable and fragile government, harassed in the media by the right, unable to register visible victories, reduced to a simple transitory change in bankruptcy, which rushes headlong towards elections without being able to reinforce itself. In this hypothesis, two opposite scenarios emerge.

The first, faced with a failure of Sánchez, victim of the harassment of the right and trapped in his social-liberal and pro-regime corset, driven by the expectations of change and his

inability to satisfy them, would be that Podemos succeeds in conducting a policy of permanent pressure on the PSOE. This hypothesis is not envisaged today by the majority of forecasters and if it were realized it would probably be due to a relaunch of social mobilizations rather than to the merits of the leadership of Podemos, which has anointed Sanchez without any criticism, thus showing itself to be incapable of appearing as a factor conditioning the action of the government.

The second scenario is that the possible bankruptcy of the government of Sánchez leads to a victory of the right, of Ciudadanos in all probability. As is often the case in history, a pitiful "leftist" government could then be merely the prelude to a new demoralizing victory for the right. Not a mere routine victory, but the access to power of Alberto Rivera's new right with a restorationist project of regeneration.

10. The joy expressed at Rajoy's downfall must be measured against the lack of enthusiasm felt for Sanchez. The challenge now is to push him and Podemos to go further than where they want to go. And to do so starting from organizational and strategic autonomy with regard to the apparatuses of the two political formations. In other words, it is a question of pushing in a conflictual fashion and without illusions those who are specialized in suffocating aspirations, without giving the slightest hope to those who are masters in the art of sowing cynicism.

The evolution of the new situation will not only revolve around the question of the government's ability to reconcile its neoliberal agenda with a minimum of democratic and social measures, and thereby consolidate its authority. It will be especially important to know whether the successes appear as merits (and renunciations appear as faults) attributable to the PSOE, Podemos or the mobilization of citizens. The scenario is not the same depending on whether Sánchez imposes his orientation, whether Podemos seems to be taking the initiative or whether the social struggle enters the scene autonomously and thus constrains the

movements of the major parties.

The government of Sánchez will be doubly fragile, due as much to the great heterogeneity of its parliamentary support as to the weakness of the PSOE. A situation of this type is always favourable for those who know how to use it wisely. It is not a matter of foolishly joining the hyperbolic applause that

completely exaggerates the significance of what has happened and giving up the entire initiative to the government and the party apparatus, nor of falling into a fatalist defeatism that would be content to prepare a minority movement of resistance that would produce its own defeat.

The challenge lies rather in seizing the opportunity of the change of political

cycle to free ourselves from the disappointment of the last few particularly sombre months and in trying to revive an agenda of social struggles and socio-political reconstruction that interact in a critical manner and not in a way that is subordinate to the forces that support the new government.

June 18th, 2018

Greece: the so called debt reduction is a sleight of hand

26 June 2018, by **Éric Toussaint**

Eric Toussaint, what do you think of the agreement between the Eurozone ministers? Has Greece got through the crisis?

E.T.: The crisis is not over. What's more, from the point of view of the European leaders, the situation is not particularly brilliant either. To claim a reduction of debt, when in fact it is a ten year delay in repayments to some of Greece's European partners, is to seek to create an illusion. The sums due to the IMF, the ECB, European Stability Mechanism and to private creditors are not concerned in the arrangement. They continue as usual. The IMF has made €5 billion in profits on Greek debt since 2010 and the ECB has made €8 billion. The measures that spread out repayments over a longer period are a consolation prize to the Tsipras government that has faithfully applied the hard austerity driven reforms demanded by the creditors over the last three years. Tsipras needs to be able to tell the Greek people that the austerity programme is finally working. At the same time the antisocial policies imposed by the creditors are to be reinforced. The Greek leaders wanted to show by the agreement made on 22 June that private investment funds could safely purchase Greek securities after the end of August under full institutional guarantees.

Greece is the whipping boy for the European Union's policies

What is the Greek economic situation?

E.T.: Appalling. GDP is about 30% lower than in 2009/10. Greece's overall economic indicators are very poor. Three hundred and fifty thousand highly qualified young professionals have left for Germany, France and other North European countries. Not counting refugee arrivals in 2016-2017, the population is falling and is now expected to continue to fall, youth unemployment has risen to 40%. According to Eurostat, 47% of Greek households are in arrears on at least one of their instalment policies and the bank repayment default rate is at 46.5%. Whether it is unemployment, the financial system or productivity the situation is very bad, and this is because of the policies imposed on Greece. Greece is the whipping boy for the European Union's policies. The leaders wanted to show any Eurozone peoples who elect a radically left-wing government with a will to change and break with austerity that they will be

severely punished!

What should have been done?

In 2010, the banking crisis should have been solved instead of keeping afloat banks that had taken enormous risks. Instead of injecting tens of billions of Euros to recapitalise them they should have been put in order and under public control. There are four banks in Greece that control 85% of Greek banking. The big French and German banks who had massively lent to the Greek private sector should have been left to assume the risks they had taken. As it was, they were bailed-out by the Greek government who borrowed the money from the Troika. Politically, when the Greek people chose, in 2015, to support a coalition that proposed important changes in social justice their democratic will should have been respected. Whereas, the democratic aspirations were systematically trodden down by the European authorities, very satisfied with Tsipras' capitulation in the summer of 2015 when he signed the third memorandum, that made the Greek crisis worse.

Should the debt have been written-off?



E.T.: Certainly, it is done quite often. When Poland left the Warsaw Pact in the early 1990s its western creditors granted a 50% debt reduction. At

about that time, Egypt took part in the first Gulf war and so was granted a 50% debt write-down. After the American invasion of Irak in March 2003 Iraq was granted a debt relief of 80%. Important debt reductions have been taking place for decades. It was absolutely necessary to do the same for Greece. Of course, a citizens' audit would be necessary to identify who was responsible, among the Greek parties and their lenders. Remember that Greece is in third or fourth position in the World in armament

spending compared to GDP! The principal arms suppliers being... Germany, France and the US! In the first memorandum, in 2010, one of the one of the unaltered repayment schedules was armaments. This preference continues. In early 2018 after Alexis Tsipras met Donald Trump, purchases of arms from the US for $\hat{\text{a}}$, ~1.6 billion were announced.

Translated by Mike Krolkowski

Source: [TV5 Monde](#)

Endless Wars, Swirling Chaos.

25 June 2018, by **Against the Current** Editors

The Singapore summit happened, and both principals got what they were looking for. Kim Jong-un received an important measure of international recognition, apparent suspension of U.S.-South Korean war exercises, and implicit promises against tighter sanctions; Donald Trump's prize was a well-orchestrated photo-op and press conference in the wake of his disastrous G-7 conference performance. (To our knowledge, plans for a Trump Tower in Pyongyang haven't crystallized.)

As our readers well know, it's unusually confusing and difficult to discern elements of policy within the swirling chaos of scandal, nationalist bluster and Trumptweet emanating from the administration. Furthermore, the string of war threats $\hat{\text{a}}$ €" with North Korea before the summit, and more menacingly with Iran $\hat{\text{a}}$ €" can't be neatly separated from the vicious reactionary, racist and ecocidal domestic agenda of Trump and his Republicanmen.

A toxic combination of factors $\hat{\text{a}}$ €" the permanent imperialist U.S. drive to rule the world (so-called "strategic interest"), ideologically driven folly, Trump's ego and blatant political pandering to his base $\hat{\text{a}}$ €" are involved. We'll try to partially sort out some of them here, recognizing that

things can change quickly and unpredictably.

Endless war, of course, didn't begin with Trump and his cons. It's conventionally repeated that Afghanistan, since the post 9-11 U.S. invasion, has been "America's longest war." Actually, that's not even close: The Korean War, beginning in 1950 with an armistice reached in 1953, never officially ended. It's a story barely mentioned in American history school curricula, since it didn't end in "victory."

Korean Division and Crisis

With Japan's defeat in World War II and the end of its occupation of Korea, the victorious powers divided the peninsula between a Communist government in the north and a U.S.-occupied southern zone. Following rounds of provocations on all sides, war broke out in 1950.

After halting an initial North Korean invasion, U.S. General Douglas MacArthur carried an offensive into the North all the way to the Chinese border, bringing China into the war. The United States bombed the North into near-oblivion, including its agricultural dikes.

The fighting ended in a bloody stalemate, leaving two Koreas in a permanent state of imminent confrontation. The global Cold War ended with the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, but the Korean conflict seemed permanently frozen with periodic bloody flare-ups.

Over the decades, North Korea devolved into a grim semi-autarkic extreme nationalist family dynasty (Kim Il-sung, Kim Jong-il, Kim Jong-un) flying a Communist flag of convenience. South Korea meanwhile suffered a long period of U.S.-supported military and presidential dictatorship where popular opposition movements were brutally crushed $\hat{\text{a}}$ €" with over 600 people killed in the May, 1980 Kwangju massacre alone.

After long democratic struggles, South Korea has developed a political system with not only free elections, but where the recent corrupt president Park Geun-hye was removed from office, convicted and even imprisoned $\hat{\text{a}}$ €" a development comparing favorably to a certain country that we won't name here. Her successor Moon Jae-in moved to open up what might possibly be a generational opportunity to resolve the crisis of the Korean peninsula.

Trump appeared to blow up that

chance, citing North Korea's expressions of "tremendous anger and open hostility," diplomatic interventions salvaged the U.S.-North Korean summit that took place just before our press time.

Whatever may eventually result from the meeting, a relaxation of tensions and U.S. "fire and fury" threats is obviously a good thing. The official U.S. expectation that North Korea's "denuclearization" would be unilateral, irreversible and essentially instantaneous is an obvious non-starter. The reality is that North Korea is now an actually-existing nuclear state "and isn't going to disarm unilaterally, let alone quickly.

Will the United States recognize that in practice, if not officially? It would actually make strategic (although not ideological) sense to do so, since North Korea hasn't proven the technical capacity to deliver a bomb-carrying missile to the North American continent "and the Pyongyang regime certainly knows that it's much safer without that apocalyptic ability, so long as its real status is accepted in practice.

There does happen to be one meaningful case of a state giving up its nuclear weapons capacity in exchange for entering the commercial and political "international community" "not Muammar Qaddafi's Libya or Saddam Hussein's Iraq, but post-apartheid South Africa. Why the U.S. administration doesn't mention that example is left as an exercise for the reader (maybe because there's no Trump Tower in Johannesburg?).

Iran, Palestine: Strategy and Ideology

Meanwhile, Team Trump finished dynamiting the corpse of the Israel-Palestine "peace process" by moving the U.S. embassy in Israel to Jerusalem. The grotesque ceremony unfolded while unarmed Palestinian protesters and medical workers at the Gaza border were being mowed down by Israeli snipers with the most

sophisticated weapons and high-velocity bullets "on the very anniversary of al-Nakba, the Palestinian catastrophe that birthed the Israeli state in 1948. [12]

This action had little to do with strategic interest, but was about U.S. domestic politics "mainly targeting Trump's most loyal evangelical Christian fundamentalist base, for whom protecting Israel's supremacy is a sacred American duty, a sign of the coming Rapture and Armageddon.

Most ominously, Trump has severed U.S. participation in the multilateral nuclear deal with Iran, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action [13]

While Trump spews tweets like the Kilauea volcano spits lava flows, in politics as in geology what happens under the surface is more important. A great Israeli human rights campaigner and political critic, Professor Israel Shahak, observed that the actions of state powers and elites in their strategic or material interests were dangerous, but ideologically motivated acts much more so.

Shahak had in mind examples from European history and the modern Middle East, particularly the influence of Jewish religious fundamentalism in Israel. How to understand the toxic tangle of U.S. motivations in the Middle East today?

The catastrophic 2003 invasion of Iraq was motivated in part by a drive to control oil supplies and markets, in part by domestic political calculations, but also partly by ideological conviction that the United States was mandated to control and reshape the Middle East to its own wishes "leading to imperial overreach with the most devastating consequences. That's how Iran became the power it is today.

Trump's withdrawal from the Iran deal is at least as ideologically driven as George W. Bush's war, if not more so. With today's climate changing "in more ways than one "it has much less to do with direct control of oil, in the context of a glutted market and depressed prices.

In part it's an exercise to show that

the United States can not only impose crippling economic sanctions on Iran, but enforce them on global corporations despite European, Russian and Chinese opposition. Trump is trying to demonstrate his power to ram the unilateral U.S. policy on Iran down the throats of a weakened European Union and particularly the EU's main leader, German chancellor Angela Merkel. This power play intersects with Trump's crude attempt to impose U.S. trade terms on Europe and on the NAFTA negotiations "and with his friendships with Israel and the Saudi monarchy.

On the other hand, the absurdity of the demands on Iran laid out by new Secretary of State Mike Pompeo "that Iran not only surrender its entire enrichment capacity but end its regional commitments in Syria, Yemen and Lebanon "crosses the line into other-worldly ideological fantasy and a road toward war. The dead-end neoconservatives who still think that invading Iraq was a good idea now want to double down on it "having had Iran in their sights as the ultimate prize back then, and believing that the present is their moment to "finish the job." Why would the Iranian regime give in to arrogant U.S. demands now, when Washington has so isolated itself?

It's necessary to review what the JCPOA was, what it wasn't and what it could never be in the real world. The deal with Iran halted regional nuclear proliferation on a verifiable basis. It did not change the character of any hideous regime "not Iran, not Saudi Arabia, not Egypt or any other. It could not prevent the malicious mischief perpetrated by regional and outside imperial powers "Iran and Saudi Arabia and Turkey, Russia and the United States.

It could not put an end to the civilian holocaust in Syria or the endless disaster in Afghanistan, or Israel's continuing massacre and settlement expansion in Palestine.

The Iranian rulers for their part, despite all their "marching on Jerusalem" rhetoric, have never intended to go to war with Israel. The nuclear program they undertook in the

1980s was a response to Saddam Hussein's Iraq, which invaded Iran with U.S. encouragement and began a decade-long war that included the use of poison gas and the danger of biological and chemical warfare.

The U.S. military command, for its part, is aware that war with Iran is "winnable" only with all-out firepower up to and possibly including "tactical" nuclear weapons. That's where ideological insanity and strategic reality would meet, with incalculable consequences.

New Antiwar Movement Needed

Is the United States on the road to (a) war, (b) fiscal bankruptcy, (c) political and Constitutional crisis, (d) all of the above? The present regime occupying the White House has a legitimate shot at hitting the trifecta "and that doesn't even count provoking a trade war with Washington's closest allies in North America and Europe. These are not inevitable outcomes, and political action and social struggle can influence the results.

The United States' drive to control the world obviously didn't begin with Trump. His delusional belief in unilateral U.S. muscle in military as well as trade matters is dangerous and frightening, but runs up against real-world facts "that North Korea is a nuclear-armed state, that Washington by itself can't bring down the Iranian regime, that the Palestinian people will not surrender or disappear.

Meanwhile, the United States can't extricate itself from Syria and Afghanistan, despite president Obama's efforts and Trump's bluster, and Washington's efforts to conceal the real extent of its continuing military involvements.

At the same time, the U.S. population is sick of these endless wars and certainly doesn't want another one "not Trump's voter base, nor the majority who detest him. Even conventional militarists think it's a bad idea. Only ideologues and some half-crazed Christian fundamentalists think that war with North Korea or

Iran would solve anything or "make America great again."

Right now, a U.S.-backed Saudi offensive is creating an unimaginable catastrophe in Yemen. Yet at this dangerous moment, the peace movement itself is weak. The mid-April antiwar actions in several cities were generally small and had little ongoing impact. In part, of course, a great deal of energy is quite rightly devoted to fighting this administration's brutal policies at home. And frankly speaking, antiwar organizing is weakened and divided "on the one hand, by forces who want to channel the movement into Democratic Party electoral campaigns, and on the other by the sick politics of some left currents that support the Syrian Assad and North Korean regimes.

These obstacles won't be overcome quickly or easily. But in the event that today's dangerous flashpoints erupt into shooting wars, the existing antiwar sentiments of tens of millions of people in this country will need to be crystallized and organized. We salute the work of Code Pink, Voices for Creative Nonviolence and others who carry on the heroic tradition of resistance to the insanity of war.

It will be incumbent on the healthy currents of the peace movement to recognize that we represent the feelings of the majority, and take responsibility to act accordingly.

July/August 2018

After Singapore, Are We Safer "and What Next?

"Little rocket man" is now, in Donald Trump's tweetworld, "the very talented and smart leader who loves his people." Even better, when Kim Jong-un speaks, "his people sit up and listen. I wish it was like that here." Indeed.

To be fair, Trump is not solely

responsible for the twisted form the debate over North Korea has taken after the Singapore summit. While he proclaims that the "North Korean nuclear menace" is over, leading Democrats seem to be channeling their inner John Bolton, denouncing Trump for giving Kim respectability and suspending provocative war games (yes, that's what they are) without getting tangible concessions from Pyongyang.

Let's state the most important fact first. Yes, after Singapore the world is a little safer, because the main threat of catastrophe on the Korean peninsula has receded: the immediate danger that the United States, as Bolton advocated, would launch an attack on North Korea "or that the North Korean military might mistake a too-well-simulated U.S. attack for the real thing, with incalculable consequences. That the United States was the most dangerous potential aggressor remains, of course, unstated in post-summit punditry.

As for the summit itself, who got "played" by whom? Both principals got what they wanted: Kim Jong-un got a measure of international recognition and an implicit promise of relaxed sanctions "almost surely, China and Russia will unofficially be letting up on sanctions enforcement -while Trump got his big-time photo-op and press conference (and maybe long-term dreams for Trump Towers and resorts on those fabulous beaches).

The aftermath is less clear. North Korea is now, in fact, a proven nuclear-armed state, and the question is whether the United States will accept that reality in fact, although obviously not officially. The delusion of "complete, verifiable and irreversible de-nuclearization" is a fantasy that can only have further destabilizing implications. (For some historical background and context on the post-World War II division of Korea, see the editorial statement above.)

Meanwhile, an even more dangerous scenario is developing as the U.S. administration is seeking to destroy what's left of the multilateral nuclear agreement with Iran "a campaign setting the Trump regime against the closest U.S. European allies, the

overwhelming majority of world public opinion, and elementary common sense, although the Democrats' defense of the deal negotiated by president Obama has been rather feeble. It's a far "better" deal, in fact, that anything the United States can ever hope to get with North Korea.

Since the nuclear deal was negotiated under the Obama administration, there's been a wave of pro-American popular feeling in Iran. That will now change, as people's hopes for improvement in their lives are dashed. Further, Trump's move immediately plays into the hands of the most reactionary forces in Iran's internal factional blood feud, at the expense of the reform-minded moderate supporters of president Hasan Rouhani. New arrests and repressive crackdowns on women and human rights defenders like attorney Nasrin Sotoudeh show that religious fundamentalists who control the courts are emboldened. Tight U.S.

sanctions on Iran, while they badly hurt Iran's economy and ordinary people, also enable leading elements in the Revolutionary Guards to enrich themselves through control of smuggling and sanctions-busting schemes.

The Trump gambit also aims at forcing European companies to withdraw from investing in Iran, due to the pressure of crippling U.S. secondary and financial sanctions. It's doing this when the European Union is severely weakened by crises that could threaten the future of the eurozone and even the EU itself "and at the same time that European states and the U.S. may be locking into a round of mutually damaging tariffs and counter-tariffs. Although the major European nations have said they intend to protect their companies against U.S. financial blackmail, whether they can effectively do so is very much in question. Chinese investment will step in to partly fill the

gap.

If the deal collapses completely, the Iranian regime will resume nuclear enrichment and the world will be a step closer to the war that Israel and Saudi Arabia, Trump's closest Middle East allies, openly advocate.

Exploiting European weakness, the Trump gang is aligning with Israel and Saudi Arabia in the expectation of crushing Iran and restoring U.S. rule over the world. Already, the nation of Yemen is "collateral damage" as the United States enables the Saudi and United Arab Emirates' destruction of that country.

What might happen first "another hideous Middle East war, or a full-scale U.S.-China trade war that crashes the global markets? Do we really want to find out? If not, we need a new antiwar and social justice movement on a scale we haven't seen in decades.

June 22, 2018

Trump's Immigration Policy: The Family Separations are Over (sort of) The Racism and Exploitation Remain

25 June 2018, by Kay Mann

Some of the most widely reported voices of indignation came from both mainstream and "moderate" Republicans like Susan Collins and Laura Bush, as well as reactionary ones like Texas Senator Ted Cruz. Even Trump's wife and daughter expressed various degrees of opposition to the separations. Let nobody be fooled by their crocodile tears. It is easy for them to condemn the obvious cruelty of the child-parent separation policy, while overlooking the broader attack on immigrants, including the precarious position of young people in the DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) program. The indignation of these ruling-class voices is pure hypocrisy,

and serves to cover up the shameful past and present of U.S. immigration and border control policy.

The mainstream media never discuss the causes of Mexican and Latin American immigration to the U.S.. These are rooted in the legacy of colonialism, exploitation, and support for murderous, reactionary dictatorships, not to mention one of the great imperial land grabs in history: the forcible annexation of huge amounts of Mexican land by the U.S. in 1848, including much or all of what became the states of Texas, California, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Colorado, and Wyoming.

Immigrants as Scapegoat

Fear-mongering about immigration and security of the U.S.'s southern border is largely a smokescreen to avoid discussing the real problems facing most people in the U.S.: income inequality, attacks on social services, particularly education and health care, and the growing political space for the expression of racist, misogynist, anti-immigrant and anti-LGBT sentiments.

There is nothing new about capitalist politicians and ideologues scapegoating immigrants for the social

problems arising from capitalist rule. Racist prejudice, fear of cultural minorities, fear of real or imagined political radicalism, and the interests of capitalist labor markets have always driven U.S. immigration law. President Herbert Hoover, who presided over the onset of the Great Depression in 1929, blamed Mexican immigrant workers as its cause. That is deeply hypocritical. U.S. employers have always played it both ways regarding immigrant workers, giving lip service to immigration restrictions while profiting from the restricted rights of their immigrant workers, taking advantage of their weak market position and lack of union protection. Moreover, they have done so in close collaboration with national and local government bodies.

Agribusiness, where many immigrants from Mexico and Latin America have long looked for and found work, is a prime example of this hypocrisy. As early as the 1920s, fruit, vegetable, and cotton growers engaged in deliberate over-recruitment of immigrant workers, which was accomplished through close collaboration with government immigration officials who opened the border or looked the other way as large numbers of workers crossed into

the U.S. The intended effect was to drive down wages and dilute the power of work stoppages, strikes, and other forms of labor protest. During World War II, businesses and the government devised the Bracero Program that regularized residency and work permits for Mexican workers for fixed periods. The starvation wages paid to most immigrant workers in the fruit and vegetable fields were matched by long working hours, poor housing in company-owned facilities, lack of schools, and rampant racist discrimination to boot.

The brutality of the Trump-Sessions deportations of undocumented immigrant workers, which often involves the splitting up of families also has ample precedent in U.S. policy. Herbert Hoover's Secretary of Labor William Doak deported large numbers of Mexican workers. Doak also instructed his border agents to recruit, admit, and transport Mexicans during strikes and labor shortages. The icy cruelty of Kirstjen Nielsen, head of the Department of Homeland Security, who offered a vigorous defense of the policy and border patrol behavior in general a day before Trump's reversal, may be in perfect step with the brutal tone of the Trump presidency in general. But here again,

the history of U.S. immigration policy suggests more continuity than novelty. In his day, secretary Doak defended his border agents against charges of abuse and brutality in the name of protecting "American" jobs. Draconian immigration practices have not been exclusive to Republicans; more immigrants were deported under Obama than his Republican predecessor, George W. Bush.

The hyper-exploitation that immigrant workers still experience in agriculture and other low-wage sectors of the U.S. economy makes Trump's associating violence and gangs like M-13 particularly insulting. The intent, of course, is once again to scapegoat immigrant workers for the problems arising from the contradictions of the capitalist system and divide workers along lines of race, ethnicity, citizenship, and national origin. All working people have much to lose when immigrant workers are under attack.

Solidarity with Immigrant workers and their families

An injury to one is an injury to all

June 23, 2018

[Against the Current](#)

Kim-Trump meeting brings fragile hopes of peace

24 June 2018, by Pierre Rousset

It's better to listen to those directly affected, namely the Korean, than bellicose blowhards, even those deemed to be on the left. It is certainly too soon to break out the champagne, but the relief is evident. The South Korean president Moon Jae-in presented his "heartfelt congratulations" and hailed "the success of the historic North Korea-United States summit". Regional, local and municipal elections (together with more than a dozen partial elections of

deputies) took place in the midst of the summit. The governing party scored a crushing victory, while the opposition parties, the far right and militarists who had railed against Moon's pacifist policy suffered a debacle.

In late 2017, the tension was extreme in Korea and nothing ruled out a drift towards a murderous, indeed nuclear, conflict. The absolute urgency was to start de-escalation, and this has been done, beyond what could then have

been envisaged. The Singapore summit should first be judged in this light.

The Seoul-Pyongyang initiative

The de-escalation began from January 2018 with the Seoul-Pyongyang tandem throwing Washington off

balance. Moon reiterated the offers of dialogue previously ignored by Kim, which led to the spectacular participation by North Korea in the Winter Olympics held in the South.

Meanwhile, Kim implemented a series of measures from halting the firing of missiles to the destruction of a nuclear test site. The will for normalisation of relations between the two regimes was strikingly manifested at the Panmunjom summit on April 27, on the North-South demarcation line.

Blind to this dynamic and to the changes underway in North Korea, Trump for a long time pushed a hard line, convinced that international economic sanctions and military pressure would make Kim yield: no negotiation, a surrender! Unconditional denuclearisation which would be rapid, complete, and verifiable; the handing over to Washington or destruction of the documents and the exiling of scientists so that nuclear know-how itself would be eradicated. The objective was clear: regime change, a knockout victory.

The big turnaround

The toughening of sanctions and the military threat have probably weighed strongly on the recent political decisions of Kim Jong-un, but not to the point of making him surrender or lose his capacity of initiative. He made a personal visit to Beijing to meet Xi Jinping and re-establish conditions for cooperation with China, then met the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergueï Lavrov. He confirmed that he was ready to negotiate on the question of denuclearisation and sent regime heavyweight Kim Yong-chol to Washington.

Effectively, at the Singapore summit, Donald Trump accepted the framework Kim Jong-un proposed: a process of negotiation concerning the denuclearisation of the peninsula (and not just North Korea), aiming at the signature of a peace agreement (there has not been one since 1953, at the end of the Korean war) without any prior regime change. Trump also

recognised, during the press conference, the “provocative” character of the joint military manoeuvres periodically carried out by Washington and Seoul off the North Korean coasts – taking up the terms usually employed by Pyongyang.

The public presentation of the summit was the occasion for a careful staging placing the two heads of state on a basis of equality: same number of flags exposed and same number of steps of the presidents while walking towards each other. Here again, Kim attained his objective, a formal recognition in the international arena.

Why did Trump change his tune in such a way? His motivations are certainly multiple and only Trumpologists can untangle them – also, we don’t yet know the secret part of the negotiations underway. If we seek a geopolitical rationale, we can say respond: because the international pressure for a military de-escalation in Korea was very strong; because the main enemy is Beijing; because US military hegemony has been re-established in the north Pacific; because henceforth the main sites of tension in the region are Taiwan and the South China sea. The showdown is no longer centred on the Korean peninsula.

State of war and human rights

The North Korean regime remains a brutal dynastic dictatorship, undoubtedly, and the burning question of human, social and democratic rights cannot be ignored – but the permanent threat of war imposed on the country since 1953 has helped Pyongyang to justify the maintenance of a permanent state of repression against all potential opposition, as well as against the population.

Such a question cannot be settled by an imperialist intervention. It does not constitute a necessary condition for de-escalation and the opening of a peace process. It should not be forgotten that Democrats who criticise Donald Trump are not pacifists, far from it. Barack Obama and Hilary

Clinton notably waged a particularly aggressive policy on the Korean front, which Trump prolonged then amplified.

The question of human, social and democratic rights can only be approached in the specific context of the Korean peninsula, interactions between North and South and local popular mobilisations. By downplaying the military threat, the Singapore summit can contribute to creating this space.

Concretely, in the Korean situation, initiating a dynamic of peace is a necessary condition for the fight for basic liberties in the peninsula – and not the opposite.

Centrifugal and centripetal dynamics

We are however only at the very first step of a process which remains very unpredictable. The regime in Pyongyang is no longer the “hermit kingdom” of yesterday. The tolerated development of a market economy has created a social élite aspiring to “normalisation” and if possible a “Chinese” transition towards a new capitalism is on the agenda – giving Kim still more reason to negotiate peace. Nothing ensures however that such a transition is possible without a major crisis.

China and Russia will try to weigh on the course of negotiations and defend their own specific interests. Until now, Japan preferred a state of war to peace, allowing prime minister Abe to continue his militarist and hyper-nationalist policy. Seoul supports the process but is worried that Trump had not felt the need to inform it in advance of his decision to suspend the joint US/South Korean air and sea manoeuvres.

Only two parties are involved in the negotiations: Washington and Pyongyang. According to how they develop, they can favour centrifugal as well as centripetal dynamics. Kim can both strengthen his cooperation with Beijing or Moscow and increase his

independence in relation to his powerful neighbours.

Immediately, the Singapore summit was the opportunity for Xi Jinping to return to the diplomatic game, after a long period of tension where he had lost the initiative. As shown by the trip made by Kim Jong-un to Beijing on June 19, 2018, a week after his meeting with Donald Trump.

The North and South Korean regimes have opened a very progressive policy of rapprochement, rejecting a

“German” model of brutal unification. That can help them to continue to act in concert to consolidate the dynamic of peace. However, the position of Moon Jae-in on the implications of a denuclearisation of the peninsula remains ambiguous – the issue of the THAAD anti-ballistic missile system or the use by the US 7th Fleet of the naval base on the island of Jeju are explosive. Kim could be tempted to act alone in negotiating deals with Trump going beyond what Seoul wishes.

In late 2017, Kim interrupted his nuclear programme just before it

became truly operational, by downsizing the warheads sufficiently to place them effectively on intercontinental missiles (which can pose unresolved technical problems). To what point is he now ready to denuclearise the North and in exchange for what guarantees? For now, the Singapore declaration remains very vague on this question.

There are many question marks! And Korean geopolitics is of global importance. One to be followed, then...

Support the Popular Rebellion in Nicaragua - Oppose U.S. Intervention

23 June 2018, by Dan La Botz

Daniel Ortega and the Sandinista Front for National Liberation (FSLN or Sandinistas) led a popular revolution to overthrow the Somoza dynastic dictatorship in 1979, and, despite a U.S.-organized and U.S.-sponsored counter-revolution and subsequent civil war, they attempted to improve the lives of the Nicaraguan people. Daniel Ortega was first elected president in 1985, but lost popularity because of refusal to distribute land to the peasants, heavy-handed dealings with the indigenous, and the adoption of conscription; above all the war demoralized the Nicaraguan people who wanted peace.

Nearly Thirty Years of Accommodation to Conservatism

With the loss of the 1990 election, the Ortega government carried out the famous *piñata*, giving government property to Ortega and other FSLN leaders. Once the conservative government of President Violeta

Chamorro took power, Daniel Ortega and his brother Humberto Ortega formed a relationship with her son-in-law Antonio Lacayo and began a process of accommodation to the corrupt Conservative and Liberal parties, formed relationships with the country's business class, and joined with the conservative Catholic Church under Cardinal Obando y Bravo. There followed a series of unethical political and economic arrangements that continued through the presidencies of Arnoldo Alemán and Enrique Bolaños governments over a period of 15 years.

When Ortega's won election to the presidency in 2001, he turned Nicaragua into a typical "developing" capitalist country, suppressing democracy, social movements, and the labor unions to attract U.S. and other foreign investment. The Nicaraguan economy grew rapidly, but the benefits flowed to the capitalist class. Government social programs financed by the United States or by Venezuela, failed to raise the standard of living of the people despite rapid economic growth. Ortega meanwhile gathered all power into his own hands: the presidency, the National Assembly,

the Supreme Court, as well as controlling most of the TV stations and many organizations, such as the labor unions. Having changed the Nicaraguan Constitution, he was reelected in 2006, 2011, and 2016; that is, he has been president for four terms, three consecutively. In 2016 Ortega's wife Rosario Murillo was elected vice-president.

Part of the American Imperial System

While Ortega and the FSLN claimed to be "anti-imperialist," in fact they made Nicaragua an integral part of the U.S. imperial system of economic dominance, political hegemony, and military supremacy in Latin America. Under Ortega, Nicaragua adopted policies intended to attract U.S. and other foreign investment, such as suppressing independent worker movements, crushing independent labor unions, and maintaining a low-wage economy. The strategy was successful and Nicaragua sent 54 percent of its products to the United

States and 8.4 percent to Canada. Ortega also worked closely with the U.S. government, being a large recipient of U.S. economic aid, engaging in collaboration with the U.S. Army and Navy, and working with the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) of the United States. While he had many photos taken with Communist and populist leaders (the Castros, Chávez, Maduro, and Evo Morales), his government had become an integral part of the U.S. security system as well as of U.S. economic hegemony in the region.

Yet Part of the Reactionary “Axis of Resistance”

Yet it is also true that Nicaragua’s opportunistic foreign policy, however, has never been in line with that of the United States. At the time of the Nicaraguan Revolution, through the 1980s, and until the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989, Ortega and the FSLN maintained strong ties to Fidel Castro’s Cuba and to the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc, as well as with Kim Jong-Il’s Communist government of North Korea. Ortega and the FSLN saw themselves as part of the “socialist camp,” never raising any criticism of its undemocratic regimes. At the same time Nicaragua received aid from Mexico and other Latin American countries, as well as from Social Democratic party governments in Europe.

After the fall of Communism in Europe, Ortega reoriented Nicaragua’s foreign policy, supporting the authoritarian regimes of Muammar Gaddafi of Libya and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in Iran. At the same time, he formed strong ties to the more populist and democratically elected governments of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela and Evo Morales in Bolivia. Chávez of Venezuela, through the regional economic institution ALBA, provided Ortega with billions of dollars in economic aid. He has continued to be allied with Venezuela under the Maduro government.

By the 2010s we could speak of Nicaragua as part of the so-called

“Axis of Resistance,” an alliance of rightwing and authoritarian governments including Iran, Syria, and Russia. Beginning in 2006, Ortega expanded relations with Russia and by 2015 strengthened military relations, opening ports to Russian Navy ships and receiving Russian military equipment, such as armored personnel carriers, aircraft and mobile rocket launchers, and T-72 tanks. While the “Axis of Resistance” is sometimes referred to as “anti-imperialist,” it is in reality several of the nations involved have their own imperial ambitions in Europe or the Middle East, most obviously in the case of Russia’s seizure of the Crimea in 2014.

The Nicaraguan government has never spoken out in favor of the democratic social movements in the authoritarian countries with which it has allied itself.

An Authoritarian Regime

Beginning with his election in 2006, Ortega used the power of the government “controlling the executive, legislative, and judicial branches” to strengthen his party to construct an authoritarian regime. For over a decade he has used not only the police but also the FSLN and Sandinista Youth and their *turbas* (thugs) to impose his political power and to attack and beat political opponents, social movement activists, labor union organizers and workers, as well as university students. Physical attacks were often preceded with and accompanied by attack from the media attempt to denigrate and discredit any opponents. Most notorious was Ortega’s and Murillo’s attack on the feminist movement that advocated a liberalization of abortion laws and other improvements for women. Murillo vilified them as agents of imperialism. The authoritarian and violent character of the Ortega regime first came to widespread public attention in 2013 and 2014 when police and thugs violently attacked farmers and environmentalists concerned about the building of a transoceanic canal.

The current popular rebellion began with protests by elderly people against the social security reform, which met with police repression. That led students to join the peaceful protests. After Ortega’s government and his party began fire on and kill students, the entire society erupted in a popular, peaceful rebellion. The full brutal violence of the regime against its population, which went so far as to murder mourning mothers leading the Mother’s Day march, killing thirteen and wounding dozens. Since then the Ortega government’s police and thugs have been murdering activists involved in the movement, attacking small towns, burning public buildings and markets, and beating and torturing as they went along, the people reacted by blocking the highways (*tranques*) and barricading their towns or their neighborhoods.

After several weeks, the situation became chaotic and other actors, such as criminal gangs, have sprung up to take advantage of the situation through looting and theft, and they have also increased the violence. While this is extremely unfortunate, it does not change the fundamental political situation, which is a conflict between an authoritarian government and a popular rebellion.

The Opposition

Since the movement arose from below through social networks organizing social media, a spontaneous and grassroots movement, it has been difficult to identify leaders. The students did attempt to create leaders and various groups have attempted to create coalitions, but give the chaotic and violent situation, it has been very difficult to create very stable organizations. Outside of Ortega and the FSLN, the best organized groups in the society are COSEP, the business council, and the Catholic Church hierarchy, both fundamentally conservative organizations that had accepted and supported Ortega’s government for more than a decade.

The left has virtually no organization in Nicaragua for quite understandable reasons. First, Ortega and the FSLN, who had led the 1979 revolution, had claimed to be the left, raising the

slogan of “Christian, Socialist, and in Solidarity.” So on the one hand, they claimed the title of being the left, but on the other hand, their authoritarian regime, with its oppressive and exploitative character, discredited the left. It is not surprising then that socialist ideas would not have much appeal to most Nicaraguans today.

Two splits from the FSLN, the Sandinista Renovation Movement (MRS) and the Movement for the Rescue of Sandinismo (MPRS), formed by former Sandinista *comandantes* and political leaders, both developed a critique of the Ortega regime and a social democratic political platform. Neither, however, despite their democratic and pro-working class views, succeeded in finding a social base in the society. A Christian Alternative group, inspired by the Theology of Liberation, also failed to build a movement or a real party. These social democratic and theology of liberation ideas, however, have some resonance, and no doubt university professors and priests who espouse them have had some impact on their congregations.

The Alternatives Facing Nicaragua at the Moment

At the present moment, faced with an overwhelmingly popular rebellion, Ortega and his government are trying to keep themselves in power by attempting to discredit the opposition and to slow the movement. Ortega and his spokespersons such as Paul Oquist suggest that the United States government has organized the

movement and is carrying it out through agents in Nicaragua, though they provide no evidence of such a conspiracy.

The popular rebellion has raised the slogan, *Que se vayan ya*. (Let them get out now.), that is that Ortega and his party leaders should leave office and ideally leave the country. This appears to be the sentiment throughout the country.

The business council (COSEP) and the Catholic Church have called and been carrying out intermittently a national dialogue with Ortega aimed at seeking a peaceful resolution to the crisis that has included among other things calling early national elections. COSEP has attempted to establish ties with the U.S. government and with Congressional legislators, no doubt with the hope of U.S. support for a conservative, pro-business political outcome.

The United States government has come out strongly against Ortega, but it would clearly favor some transition that brings to power a new conservative, neoliberal, pro-United States government that can take over the existing state, that is the army and the police. No doubt that U.S. diplomats and political fixers are busy in Nicaragua attempting to construct the government they want and preparing to foist it on the Nicaraguan people.

What Can We in the United States Do?

We as Americans should give our full

support to the popular rebellion and its call for a return to democracy because the elimination of the Ortega dictatorship and any increase in democracy would be a progressive outcome. If Ortega’s government falls then farmers and environmentalists can work to stop the canal, women can organize for abortion rights, and workers can strike to build independent unions.

We should take a strong stand against any U.S. political or military intervention in the country. The United States government under either Democrats or Republicans has never been a friend of the Nicaraguan people, and the Trump government would certainly not be an exception. We should raise the slogan “Hands Off Nicaragua!”

We should at the same time be proponents of international solidarity among the world’s peoples to support the Nicaraguan people against their oppressive government. Whenever the situation calms down, we should make personal contact with the Nicaraguan people to let them know that they support from people abroad. We should especially work to develop relations with Nicaraguan labor and social movement activists.

At present, we should support the calls for democracy, social justice, and national sovereignty, though if things were to radicalize and move to the left, we should call for not only a political but also a social revolution that would lead to a democratic socialist society.

June 21, 2018

[New Politics](#)

Sadr, Sectarianism, and a Popular Alternative

22 June 2018, by **Joseph Daher**

Last month, in the first Iraqi elections since ISIS’s defeat in Mosul, Sairoun, or “March for Reforms” — an

electoral alliance led by Shi’a cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, the Iraqi Communist Party, and several other smaller

groups — placed in first. [14]

Sairoun was followed by Fateh

Alliance, the political branch of Hashd al-Sha'bi (Popular Mobilization Forces), Iranian-backed, Shi'a Islamic fundamentalist militias; the Victory Alliance, led by current prime minister, Haider al-Abadi; and, finally, the State of Law Coalition, headed by former prime minister Nouri al-Maliki. Many members of parliament, some of whom had been in office since the first post-invasion elections in 2005, lost their seats. [15] In total, 215 of 329 deputies in parliament are rookie legislators.

The election sparked a cascade of fraud accusations, particularly from prominent political figures who were unseated. The parliament has ordered a manual recount and the scrapping of all ballots cast by Kurdish security forces, internally displaced people, and diaspora voters. It has also voted to suspend the electoral commission and appointed nine judges in place of the commissioners. (The commission said it would appeal the move.)

The Sadrist movement â€” known for fighting occupying US forces throughout the 2000s as well as for its involvement in sectarian crimes during the same period â€” has rejected these measures. Sadr's top aide, Dhiaa al-Asadi, declared in a tweet that while any fraud or violations in the electoral process should be condemned, the electoral commission and the federal court should handle it. He also expressed concerns that some parties are trying to sabotage Sadr's victory, accusing opponents of hijacking and manipulating the parliament.

The postelection contretemps has increased tensions in a country already on edge. In the lead-up to the election, the Communist Party's Baghdad headquarters were targeted by two homemade bombs. Since the election, an explosion has rocked Sadr City, Sadr's main stronghold in Baghdad, killing eighteen people and wounding more than ninety. On June 8, a string of explosions hit the city of Kirkuk.

Then, on June 10, a storage site holding half of Baghdad's ballot boxes went up in flames. The warehouse contained votes cast in the predominately Shi'a al-Rusafa area of

Baghdad.

What's Behind Sadr's Victory?

The victory of Sadr's "March for Reforms" alliance should be read in two ways. First, Iraqis have expressed their disgust at the country's sectarian political system, social inequalities, and decrepit public services. According to the Iraqi government, absolute poverty levels reached 22.5 percent of the total population in 2014. Other estimates put the number even higher: some claim that nearly 10 million Iraqis, or well over a quarter of the country, live in abject poverty.

The second major reason for Sadr's first-place finish is discontent with the sectarian ruling class, an outgrowth of the US and British-led invasion. [16] The sectarian ruling class is composed of all the various heads of ethnic or sectarian-based political movements in the country. The Shi'a fraction of the political and economic elite has been by far the dominating actor since 2003, gaining nearly absolute control over the state's institutions and resources. This isn't to say that Iraqi Shi'a are a privileged community â€” the vast majority have not benefited economically from their leaders' political dominance and have suffered from the corruption and dysfunction of the state public services.

Since 2015, Iraqis of various stripes have launched massive popular protests against that very system. The alliance between the Sadrists, the Iraqi Communist Party, and other groups emerged from these mobilizations, which chanted: "Bread, freedom, civil state (nonsectarian)." The Iraqi Communist Party and other secular groups organized weekly protests at Tahrir Square, a short walk from the Green Zone and the seat of the Iraqi government. Sadr's supporters joined the protests early on, and in 2016, his supporters stormed the heavily fortified Green Zone and temporarily took control of government buildings.

Still, an electoral alliance between the various protest camps wasn't a

forgone conclusion. Iraqi Communist Party secretary-general Raid Jahid Fahmi said that in preparation for the elections, his party and the Sadrists agreed to focus on the issues that unite them â€” fighting unemployment and corruption, opposing foreign influences in Iraq â€” rather than those that don't: namely, women's rights and secularism. The Sadrists, for example, have not mobilized against the "Jaafari law," which would have allowed women as young as nine to marry. [17]

The Iraqi Communist Party has looked past such shortcomings in order to access the Sadrists' popular base, largely composed of Shi'a popular classes. It also hopes to push Sadr and his movement â€” a countrywide network of political, social, religious, and military actors â€” towards a more "civil" (*madani*) position. (Many in Sadr's movement were also unhappy with the alliance, criticizing the pact as a bridge too far toward secularism.)

In its election program, Sadr's movement emphasized anti-terrorism, anti-corruption, national reconciliation and unity, a new electoral law, improved governance, and guaranteed access to human and social rights (education, social security, decent living standards, and housing). The program was short on specifics, remaining vague about how to fight corruption or political sectarianism, the militarization of society, or regressive economic policies.

As Iraqi feminist and researcher Zahra Ali and others have noted, many leftist movements and anti-sectarian protesters have been critical of this alliance with the Sadrists. [18] [19] While some fear the instrumentalization to their advantage and the monopoly of the Sadrists in this movement originally from civil society, others see an essential contradiction between the "civil" nature of the protests and the sectarian and Islamist identity of the Sadrists, as well as their involvement in government corruption and sectarian violence. Thus, in the face of the failure of massive protests demanding a reform of the electoral law that favors the major parties in power, many have simply decided to

boycott the elections.

The boycotts contributed to historically low turnout rates. Only 44.52 percent of the electorate voted, the lowest since 2003. In Baghdad, which has sixty-nine seats in parliament, only 33 percent of voters came to the polls.

Jockeying for Position

Sadr is well known for his pronouncements in favor of Iraqi sovereignty. After the 2003 invasion it was Sadr's Mehdi Army militia that staged two uprisings against US forces, and American officials described him at the time as the biggest security threat in Iraq. Sadr later dissolved the group when he left for Iran, then formed the Peace Brigades militia, in 2014, to fight the Islamic State.

He's also denounced Tehran in the past, bristling at any Iranian political or military interference in Iraq. On the night election results were announced, his supporters gathered in the center of Baghdad, chanting slogans such as "Iran out." Recently, though, Sadr has toned down his rhetoric. He now says that as a neighbor, Iran has regional interests to protect; he simply hopes they do not intrude in Iraqi affairs. He's also demanded his supporters drop anti-Iran invectives and warned that those who continue "will bring war and violence to Iraq." Sadr is likely seeking a degree of consensus with Iran rather than fundamentally challenging its influence in the country.

Nevertheless, Iran, which enjoys a great amount of political, military, and economic power in Iraq, has viewed Sadr and Sairoun warily. In February, Ali Akbar Velayati, the closest adviser to Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, declared, "We will not let liberals and communists rule Iraq." And in the immediate aftermath of the vote, Tehran launched a political offensive to try to unite its allies and block Sadr's path to power. When they realized that pushing Sadr aside was too tall of a task, they sought to integrate Sadr into a Shi'a alliance

that could neutralize his influence. Iranian officials have said they want "a strong government, far from American and Saudi pressure and from foreign interference."

Other countries are also jockeying for position. Sadr has met with ambassadors from all of Iraq's neighbors — Turkey, Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait — save for Iran. And US special presidential envoy Brett McGurk traveled to Iraq to confer with various parties to influence the government's formation talks.

Sadr, suddenly the diplomat, has struck a more conciliatory tone with the current Iraqi government as well. Following the explosion in Sadr City, the cleric called on all armed groups to hand in their weapons and declared the district a weapons-free area. While Sadr had already suggested last December that his militia was ready to disarm after the defeat of the Islamic State — and he stressed that the disarmament campaign should be directed at all armed groups, not just his followers — his comments appear to be a genuine olive branch aimed at easing tensions between Sadr and the government.

National Government

Because Sadr didn't run in the elections himself, he can't become the next prime minister. But he's clearly the leading force in the negotiations to establish a new government.

On June 7, Sadr announced the establishment of a new coalition with Ammar al-Hakim's Hikma Movement and Salim al-Jabouri and Ayad Allawi's al-Wataniya called the Majority National Paternal Alliance. They issued a brief road map outlining their core principles, including the strengthening of Iraq's unity, democracy, and freedoms, and a commitment to the constitution. They also signaled their support for economic reforms that would bolster the private sector and encourage investment. In other words, more neoliberalism.

A few days later, on June 13, Sadr and Hadi al-Ameri, head of Fatah Alliance, announced a pact of their two political blocs and the beginning of talks to form a government. Sadr made clear that this alliance did not negate his previous agreement with Wataniya and Hikma. The two main Kurdish parties, KDP and PUK, jointly stated they supported the Ameri-Sadr alliance as well. (Officials from the Wataniya list declared that Sairoun's alliance with Fateh violated their coalition with Sadr's list because they reject "armed wings" — a clear reference to Fatah.)

Despite calls to fight corruption and pass reforms, this alliance — hatched with two key personalities of the sectarian political system — seems to be a continuation of the status quo. Before the election, Sadr had declared he would not engage politically with Ammar al-Hakim or share a platform with him. Now he's close with him. This isn't a blow to sectarianism, but rather the bolstering of an unequal political and economic system.

Same with Sadr's alliance with Ameri. Rather than challenging Iran's influence in the country, the pact consolidates it while at the same time entrenching sectarian dynamics in state institutions. Ameri is a close ally to Tehran and former head of Badr's militia organization, which controls the interior ministry.

A Popular Solution

Last month's elections laid bare the dissatisfaction that ordinary Iraqis have with the political system and its representatives. They know that different fractions of the Iraqi bourgeoisie have used the oil industry to build and consolidate massive corruption networks, even as they suffer from unemployment and shoddy services. They know that the political system makes it very hard to address the country's problems of democracy, inequality, and economic development.

The hope for a more egalitarian and democratic political system does not lie in the electoral alliance led by Sadr, or postelection elite deal-making, but in the ongoing popular

protests against sectarianism, corruption, and the neoliberal economic policies. Many workers and trade unions have continued to strike and demonstrate against the electricity privatization. Protests have erupted against the failure to provide essential services like water. The continuous resistance by feminist and women's associations and groups

opposed to the Jaafari Law has also been significant. [20] A bright spot in last month's contest was the reelection of Majida Al-Tamimi, who became famous for fighting corruption, social injustice, and sectarianism, as well as for her rejection of the Jaafari law, as a Sairoun candidate in Baghdad.

The recent elections could therefore represent a new step forward in the deepening of popular resistance from below and in the building of progressive alternatives to the Iraqi ruling class – a ruling class that increasingly includes Sadr himself.

[Jacobin](#)

Support the AWP's campaign for the 2018 General Election

21 June 2018, by **Awami Workers' Party**

Alarming, the forces that seem best placed to exploit this situation are the political movements of the fascist right. Under state patronage, the forces of organized religious fundamentalism have risen at a frightening pace as they exploit popular resentments to target minorities, women and other oppressed groups in their attempts to capture state power. Even as they prop up the organizations of the fascist right, both military and civilian institutions continue to engage in widespread repression of nationalist and progressive forces across the country, be it enforced disappearances of political workers in Balochistan, FATA and Sindh or trumped-up terrorism charges against peasant activists in Okara.

Amid such overwhelming obstacles, it is imperative that progressives come together to challenge the onslaught of authoritarian and fundamentalist forces and bring their politics into the mainstream. This year, in order to provide a genuine progressive alternative to the Pakistani people after decades, the Awami Workers Party (AWP) will contest the General Election in different parts of the country.

Pakistan's largest and fastest-growing party of the socialist Left

The Awami Workers Party is Pakistan's largest and fastest-growing party of the socialist Left. Formed in 2012, it represents an attempt to rebuild, after decades of progressive decline, a popular left-wing party that represents ordinary people and is adapted to the new challenges of the 21st century. Since its formation, the party has worked to reintroduce progressive ideas into a political arena that has shifted alarmingly to the right in Pakistan. It has worked to build movements that challenge the political and economic status quo; for public housing, for land reform, against bonded labor, in opposition to privatization, for a progressive fightback against growing rightwing fascism and terror and in support of women's liberation amid rising patriarchal violence.

AWP has provided unconditional solidarity to movements against enforced disappearances and ethno-national rights, including to the Pakhtun Tahaffuz Movement and movements in Balochistan and Sindh (and now, even Punjab) for the

recovery of illegally abducted missing persons. AWP has consistently worked for complete internal autonomy and political and economic rights for the people of Gilgit-Baltistan, because of which AWP leader Baba Jan and remains a political prisoner serving a dubious life sentence in GB to this date. AWP has organized with farmers struggling for the right to land in Okara and Derah Saigol and fought their cases both in the streets and in the courts, for which AWP Punjab leader Ghulam Dastagir spent over five years in jail.

For many years, AWP has organized katchi abadi residents against evictions in the long struggle for housing rights in Islamabad, among the results of which was the Supreme Court finally acknowledging the constitutional right to housing and ordering the government to stop summary evictions and make policies for low-income housing. The party has stood with religious minorities being targeted for their faith in an atmosphere of rising religious bigotry and organized against the religious right demanding the decriminalization of domestic violence against women. It has stood with trade union movements, including those by the workers of PIA and PTCL, against privatization fueled by crony capitalist interests. It has taken up the cases of Pakistani workers expelled from Gulf states and helped return and

rehabilitate them in Pakistan. It has stood with students across the country who face mistreatment and repression without any representative platform or union to articulate their interests.

Despite the challenges explicit in such a political undertaking in present-day Pakistan - AWP members have faced censorship, violence, arrests, jail sentences and abductions - the party has grown exponentially in the space of five years, with thousands of members in all provinces and nearly 70 districts across the country. In its first foray in the electoral arena, the countrywide local government elections in 2015, the party overcame resource constraints to win 155 local seats across the country, in regions ranging from Buner in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa to Toba Tek Singh in Punjab, to Nasirabad in Sindh and the capital city of Islamabad.

Our manifesto

Building on its local successes, the AWP will base its campaign for this year's election around the principles and policies enshrined in its manifesto, the most progressive platform of any political party in Pakistan. It calls for:

- The creation of a just economic system that benefits everyone rather than just a tiny elite through the use of progressive economic and fiscal policies;
- The separation of religion from state power and an end to the cynical abuse of religion for political interests and repressing minorities;
- Achieving economic, legal, social and political equality for women and sexual and gender-based minorities through a socialist-feminist struggle that roots out all anti-women laws, structures, practices and patriarchal social norms in our society;
- The overhaul of Pakistan's broken education system to ensure a free, universal public system that provides quality, progressive, humane and scientifically-sound education to all, while allowing its students to explore and express themselves creatively;
- The creation of an inclusive, multi-national Pakistani identity through a genuinely federal, democratized and decentralized state that recognizes all

national and ethnic groups as equal and promotes indigenous cultures, languages, art and progressive traditions;

- Recognition of the inviolable right of freedom of expression and non-violent political association for all citizens and an end to political and ideological censorship by the state and other violent groups;
- Deepening democracy through limiting the influence of big money in politics and a genuine devolution of political, legislative and fiscal authority to the lowest tiers of governance;
- An independent, non-aligned foreign policy through abandonment of previous militaristic and imperialism-aligned doctrines, & based on peaceful co-existence, fair trade and regional integration with all neighbors
- A model of development that is sustainable, ecologically-balanced and prioritizes the well-being of individuals and the environment above the demands of profit.

Building on years of organizing and movement-building, the 2018 general election is an opportunity for Pakistani progressives to present a genuine political alternative to the people on the national stage in the form of the AWP and provide a reminder that a genuinely pro-people progressive politics is still possible in the 21st century. Amid widespread cynicism in Pakistan and the monopolization of the political agenda by rightwing forces, the AWP will seek to demonstrate how progressives and ordinary working men and women can break through the status quo and address people's collective problems if they organize and provide leadership. In standing up electorally to the country's mainstream parties, the AWP will publicly press them on issues like housing, water, education, health, employment and other basic needs that it has long worked on and force such critical matters on the electoral agenda and into parliament.

A finance appeal by AWP to all its

members and supporters

For this purpose, the AWP requires your support. Elections in Pakistan are dominated by moneyed candidates with billions at their disposal, with no regulation of campaign spending by election authorities. While the AWP's strength lies in its trained cadres and grassroots organization of working class voters, it cannot hope to compete against the parties of the billionaire elite without a modicum of campaign funds to meet basic expenditures, including campaign materials, media outreach, printing, transport, logistics, administrative expenses, nomination costs and others.

Any and all donations are welcome. We are writing to you for assistance as fellow progressives and people invested in different processes of transformative politics around the world, who understand the value of such initiatives in the contemporary age. The AWP will ensure that the funds are utilized with utmost diligence and transparency and will provide accountability for them. The party will keep a meticulous record of donations and send out a newsletter to all those interested, updating on the use of resources and related mobilization and campaign activities.

Please donate on:

Account Title: Awami Workers Party
Bank name: Bank of Khyber
IBAN: Pk19 KHYB
Account No 0114000001726002

Or send your amount by any means while contacting any one of the four members of the fund raising committee.

Our deepest gratitude in advance for help in this process of building a new politics of equality, resistance and progress in Pakistan. Please feel free to get in touch for any queries or further details needed.

Regards,

Akhtar Hussain (general secretary
AWP)

Shazia Khan (Finance Secretary AWP)
Farooq Tariq (Spokesperson AWP)
Asim Sajad Akhtar (president AWP
Punjab)

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A critical left approach

20 June 2018, by **Tomas Andino Mencia**

These events require an explanation. And in this regard, there are three explanations placed on the table: that of the right and the gringo empire, that of the Nicaraguan government, and that coming from the critical left.

The explanation of the right and the empire is that this is a “socialist” or “left” government which by its very nature is dictatorial and an enemy of democracy. But if that were the case, ownership would be collective, and it is not; private capitalist ownership is omnipresent, and the country is as neoliberal as many others in Latin America, so this argument does not help us to understand anything.

The government’s explanation portrays the movement of young Nicaraguans as a conspiracy by the CIA. In his speech on April 21, 2018, Daniel Ortega accused the youth of being “small groups of the extreme right” who wanted to “destroy the peace enjoyed by Nicaragua.” As a result, his government would be the “victim” of a well-orchestrated offensive, similar to that of the “guarimbas” of Venezuela.

My explanation does not share anything with the previous ones.

In my opinion what we see is the outbreak of a very deep social discontent, accumulated over a decade, which is based on a set of contradictions between the government and the people, incubated in Nicaraguan capitalism, hand in hand with the unpopular decisions and the dictatorial and authoritarian attitudes of the duo Daniel Ortega and Rosario Murillo.

I will cite only ten of these

contradictions between the government and the people:

First, the approval of the building the interoceanic canal by a Chinese company at a very high economic and social cost (US \$50 billion), has generated a strong discontent because it involves destroying many rural communities, obviously against their will, and giving up territorial sovereignty to the said company for a century. From this there has emerged a broad peasant movement and citizen opposition, which is repressed and vilified by the government, but which remains to this day.

Second, extractive activity, in particular mining, has almost doubled in terms of the area devoted to it in this period (from 12% to 22%), generating strong conflicts in rural areas and with environmental movements, which are also repressed.

Third, the pressure on land exerted by industrial monocultures such as African palm and sugar, as well as the great increase in livestock activity, leaves less land available for peasants.

Fourth, environmental neglect, whose last manifestation was the government’s neglect of the reserve fire in Indio Maíz, has mobilized youth sectors in protest. [21]

Fifth, an authoritarian attitude to non-governmental organizations, especially human rights and feminists, who do not forgive arbitrariness, repression and accusations of sexual abuse, have led to high tension in governmental relations with the world of so-called “civil society”.

Sixth, the presidential re-election,

prohibited by the Constitution, which was imposed using the same mechanism that Juan Orlando Hernández used: a Supreme Court ruling, which looked authoritarian. [22]

Seventh: The accusations of electoral fraud in the last two presidential elections, where the Ortegaista ticket was victorious.

Eighth: The Vice President Rosario Murillo, Ortega’s wife, exercises a strong control over the media that is resented by independent media, and has tried to control social media networks.

Ninth: The widespread corruption of public officials, who become millionaires overnight, while the people are experiencing economic difficulties, causes much discomfort. Starting with the same presidential couple, who are questioned for having accumulated resources from the “piñata” (the term used in Nicaragua to refer to the pillage of state assets). agreed with Arnoldo Aleman, and for managing around 4 billion dollars of ALBA resources, without accounting for their fate; also, there are cases such as that of Orlando Castillo Guerrero, an airport manager who embezzled millions.

Tenth: After several years of good relations with the government, a part of the Nicaraguan business community (affiliated with the powerful COSEP) has begun to doubt the convenience of continuing the marriage that it has maintained for a decade with Ortega-Murillo, a period in which it has benefited all along the line, for fear of losing the favour of the empire, after Donald Trump had the

Nica-Act enacted and began to apply sanctions to Nicaraguan officials.

Despite this, Nicaragua has a good reputation for its cheap labour and the absence of crime. Maquilas flock there precisely because wages are among the lowest in Central America and in these conditions capitalist companies feel themselves to be in paradise. [23] The absence of crime, which goes hand in hand with employment is effectively Nicaragua's best competitive advantage. Therefore, Nicaragua is a country which has had a significant if inequitable capitalist growth, in which strong economic and social contradictions have accumulated.

INSS, the detonating conflict

In this context, there was the conflict over the reform of the INSS (Nicaraguan Social Security Institute) demanded by the International Monetary Fund. It was not the first time that a reform was attempted (in 2013 there was one that failed), but this time it occurred when discontent for the causes indicated was at its maximum, especially among the youth who were born after the revolution of 1979. The protests began with those directly affected, the pensioners, and they were followed by the students and then other sectors of the population. Finally, the employers, who had previously broken off negotiations on this issue in the Tripartite Commission, joined in.

Therefore, the current crisis did not fall like lightning from a clear sky, but is explained by its background, structural and conjunctural problems which are difficult to resolve for a closed, authoritarian and repressive presidential couple.

The irrationality of the official argument

Therefore, saying that social demonstrations are a "conspiracy" to destabilize the government from small

groups of the "ultra-right", is a claim of a dictatorial government, unable to give the rational answers necessary to the problems raised, which insults the intelligence of the public.

Even the most uninformed observer would see that it is impossible for the CIA to have so many agents infiltrated and paid for throughout the country, retirees, workers and an army of young people enrolled as university students, to, at the appropriate time, "destabilize" the government. But it is understandable: the government, accustomed to prevailing all the time, never expected such a strong social reaction and has not been able to string together a "better" explanation.

It is the classic strategy of a "progressive" government that feels cornered by its people: they manipulate the anti-imperialist sentiment of the people, who feel deep respect for the 1979 Sandinista Revolution (including he who writes these lines), so that any argument is created, under the authority of the "leader", Daniel Ortega. Arguments that reach the absurd; for example, that university students are destroying their own universities, that as snipers they shoot their own classmates, that they torture themselves and disappear; they are burning public buildings to attract social repudiation towards themselves and so on. A scenario which seems more like one written by an advisor to Juan Orlando Hernández or the Honduran Military Police.

They do not say that the violence was initially unleashed by motorized gangs of the government's youth clientele, used as a shock group and cannon fodder against other young people. Everything in the sight of and tolerated by the police authorities. And when young people defend themselves from these groups, or when they unleash their indignation on symbols of the government, then the ruling party proclaims the "demonstration" of their accusations. Do they think we are idiots? Fortunately, the diffusion of cellular technology has made it possible to film when the government shock groups have been protagonists of such events.

Some comrades tend to make

simplistic comparisons. They say it's a script similar to the one used by the gringos in Venezuela. If we were talking about Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, Ortega's explanation would make sense because, in Venezuela, the "guarimbas" were organized by a far-right party (Voluntad Popular, the party of Leopoldo López) to destabilize that government. But it is **not** the case in Nicaragua. In this country, the movement was self-convened by progressive sectors of student youth. The analysis to be objective, has to be based on reality.

Seeing things from this perspective allows us to explain several "strange" things about the Nicaraguan government: is it not strange that Ortega was the first government to recognize Juan Orlando Hernández and that he never questioned the criminal repression of the latter against the Honduran people? Is not it strange that the US government during the last eleven years did not "bother" Ortega with any serious attempt at "destabilization"? In comparison, the empire promoted coups in Venezuela, Honduras, Paraguay and Ecuador in that period. Although Nicaragua is a much weaker country than those, during that time, it was left "quiet".

This is explained by the eleven-year-old honeymoon that he sustained benefiting private, national and international companies, with which he cultivated juicy business deals, including the putschist governments of Pepe Lobo (another Honduran president) and Juan Orlando Hernández, and with the reactionary Nicaraguan Catholic Church (hence his slogan of "Christian Socialism and Solidarity").

Now those times are past. The Ortega-Murillo presidential couple now faces the hostility of the empire, which seeks to domesticate its government, through economic boycott actions; there is also the divorce with national private business or a significant sector of it; and it is actively repudiated by a good part of the people. The direction that the country will take will depend, on the one hand, on the response of the government to the protest movement launched by its youth and

other popular sectors, as well as the capacity of this movement to conquer better democratic and social standards. The coin is in spin and it is

still premature to say what will happen. But there is no doubt that, with the social mobilization of recent weeks, whether it advances or

retreats, a new era begins, in which a new historic subject has arisen without fear of speaking out and deciding its fate.

A feminist revolution engulfs Chile

19 June 2018, by **Clémence Carayol, Mathieu Dejean**

On Wednesday 6 June, 100,000 women marched through the streets of Santiago, the capital of Chile, according to the University Feminist Coordinating Committee (Confeu), with the slogan: "We are all victims of precarity: students, migrants, mothers and women who work in the streets!" For a month, this South American country has been living to the rhythm of demonstrations and occupations of universities, against harassment and sexual assault.

This feminist movement is "unprecedented" in this country marked by the dictatorship of General Pinochet (1973-1990), where the Catholic Church "exerts considerable weight" on the political apparatus and on society, explains Franck Gaudichaud, senior lecturer in Latin American civilization at the University of Grenoble and a specialist on Chile.

It all started out with a professor at the University of Southern Chile in Valdivia, 850 kilometres south of the capital, who was found guilty of sexual harassment of a woman employee of the college. His only punishment was that he was simply forced to change jobs, which led to the first feminist occupation of the university on 17 April. The University of Chile, in Santiago, where two professors were accused in 2016 (respectively for abuse of power and sexual harassment), followed suit. As did twenty universities in the country, which have also been blocked since then. "It is the spark that ignited the movement: the demand to end impunity in Chilean universities. Moreover, people are talking about the 'Chilean May'", notes Franck Gaudichaud.

Untouchable stalkers

This feminist uprising is part of the continuity of social gains that have recently - and belatedly - been won by women. The right to divorce was only recognized in 2004 in Chile. And it was only in 2017 that the state enacted the right to abortion, limited to cases where the life of the mother is threatened, where the foetus is not viable, or if the pregnancy is a result of rape. "Since 1990, and the end of the dictatorship, the right has done everything to block the advancement of women's rights in Parliament," says the specialist. "In people's mentalities, the role of the woman is still to be a mother and a wife" - so it is "a long-term struggle" that is being undertaken.

This is all the more so since in this Latin American country, sexual harassment is punishable by law only in the context of labour relations, from which the academic framework is excluded. This is one of the reasons for the anger of Chilean students like Maria Fernanda Barrera Rodriguez, who is studying for a Master's in Political Science at the University of Chile: "We are asking for an end to gender inequalities, the culture of rape, machismo and the patriarchal system, problems whose most extreme expression lies in feminicides (it is reported that there were 36 in Chile in 2017), whose origin lies in a cycle of violence - in particular among families - which are not legally punished."

Inès Belhous, a French student in Santiago, points out that "street harassment is blatant". "On the way

between my home and the university, I'm whistling at, mentally undressed by passing men, honked at by motorists, non-stop." And she concludes bitterly: "Men justify themselves by saying that machismo is part of the culture and that it is a way of valuing women."

A political response that is deemed insufficient

For more than a month, students have multiplied blockades of universities and spectacular events, sometimes topless, like the Femen, to "denude patriarchy," in their own words. For Maria Fernanda, it is about questioning "the reification of women's bodies, and their reduction to consumable objects conditioned by male canons". "We are facing a very radical movement, not a minority, very inventive. I am rather optimistic. It's a movement that shows that there is a generation that is fed up with it and will not let it go," rejoices Franck Gaudichaud.

Given the scale of the movement, Chilean President Sebastián Piñera announced in late May a series of measures in the "women's agenda", the most symbolic of which is to put gender equality in the Constitution. He hopes to calm student anger, whose ungovernable nature he knows only too well. His previous term (2010-2014) was marked by a historic student movement in favour of free, quality public education, which involved the biggest demonstrations

since the fall of the Pinochet dictatorship in 1990.

Those who today demonstrate against the patriarchal system have kept the memory of this struggle, and have been politicized by contesting the neoliberal conservatism that this right-wing billionaire embodies. The rapid and solemn response of Piñera does not convince the ranks of the activists of the "Chilean May". "The government's statement was necessary, but it is symbolic and insufficient, argues Maria Fernanda Barrera. For example, to eradicate the inequality of the cost of health insurance between men and women (who currently pay two to three times more than men), he proposes to align this cost with that of women. It is his particular conception of equality that hinders any real progress in the field of rights and gender equality. Nor does he speak about non-sexist education. To sum up, the

government's political sector has historically opposed the reproductive rights of women, the law of gender identity, and feminist demands in general."

"The educational factor is essential"

The Chilean feminist movement, which is in part inspired by the powerful "Ni Una Menos" movement, which has spread from Argentina throughout Latin America, thus marks its radical autonomy from institutions and the political class. It also calls for the resignation of the Minister of Education, Gerardo Varela, who said that Chilean women suffer only "small humiliations and discriminations". "This is a symptom of the patriarchal political context, the power of men and white elites in Chile, where the weight of the Church and the right - which is linked to it - remains very

much present," said Franck Gaudichaud.

On the political level, few opposition MPs echo the current movement. And Piñera must deal with the most conservative fringe of his coalition, firmly opposed to feminist demands. It is therefore unlikely that substantial change will come from above. Faced with the inertia of institutions, and the reluctance to change of the ruling classes, the movement therefore intends to establish the relationship of forces at the base, leading a cultural struggle to change mentalities. "The solution cannot be only punitive, the educational factor is essential, in the opinion of Maria Fernanda. That is why we demand a non-sexist education that is applied throughout the country. I do not think this movement will solve all the problems, but what is happening in Chile will bring about a profound cultural change - it has already done so."

Trump's trade war on the world

18 June 2018, by **Lee Sustar**

Smacking down Canada while wooing North Korea may appear to be just another example of the impulsive behavior a man singularly unqualified to be president of the United States.

But however destabilizing Donald Trump's policies may be, they reflect an increasingly sharp debate in the U.S. capitalist class over how to cope with challenges from both a rising China and longstanding allies in the West and Japan.

If Trump targeted Canada during the Group of Seven (G7) summit in Quebec, it's because the U.S. wants the rewriting or even the elimination of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) as a warning to the rest of the world to bend to Washington's agenda "or else."

Trump's hostility to G7 countries, even as he was preparing to flatter North

Korea's Kim Jung-un, signals much more than his typical boorishness. [24]

This dynamic isn't confined to the U.S. and its reality TV president, but rather the latest phase of an ongoing shift in world politics that has seen the rise of right-wing populism at the expense of established political parties across the industrialized world and a sharp turn toward economic nationalism that is breaking from decades of free trade and deregulation policies of neoliberalism. [25]

The precise shape of the economic nationalism that comes next is still hard to determine. But Trump's election, the UK referendum on "Brexit" from the European Union and the new Italian government's clash with Germany over EU policies portend a new period of great power competition.

The rivalries aren't simply economic. Beyond tariffs and trade barriers, Trump's showdown with Europe is underpinned by raw imperial power.

For example, any European company with business in Iran could soon be barred from doing business in the U.S. as a violation of renewed U.S. sanctions following Trump's rejection of the Iran nuclear deal. [26] Meanwhile, Trump's ambassador to Germany is openly backing far right political forces that want to weaken the EU from within. [27]

The U.S.-EU trade battle over steel and aluminum and the resulting diplomatic crisis must be seen in that context. Likewise with Trump's

proposal for Russia to rejoin the G7.

Trade tensions between the U.S. and EU are nothing new. Such conflicts, however, are usually handled through bureaucratic channels, via the World Trade Organization (WTO), a multinational body set up in 1995 by the U.S., the major European countries and Japan to impose a global trading order favorable to all of them.

The then-dominant economic powers used the WTO “as well as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank” to pry open the formerly closed economies of the former USSR and China, as well as many Latin American and African countries as they become integrated into the world market.

The WTO imposed a version of “free trade” on poorer countries while regulating conflict between the major powers “such as the perennial conflict between Boeing and Europe’s Airbus over commercial aviation, or the price of certain agricultural goods.

U.S.-EU conflicts over steel are chronic too: In 2003, the WTO okayed the EU’s imposition of \$2.2 billion in retaliatory tariffs after the Bush administration, in a move backed by the United Steelworkers union, first imposed tariffs on imported steel. [28]

As new entrants to the WTO, rising powers like China were expected to abide by conditions that favored the established players.

But things didn’t turn out that way. Since China joined the WTO in 2001, it has emerged as a dynamic new center of capital accumulation, moving from a low-wage export platform for U.S., European and Japanese companies to a global competitor in its own right.

China’s hyper-speed industrialization injected growth into the world system by boosting the economies of commodity exporters in Africa and Latin America. But it also laid the basis for world economic instability “by contributing to a crisis of overcapacity and resulting downward

pressure on profits. The growth binge, heavily reliant on debt, slowed dramatically during the recession of 2007-08. [29]

The coordinated global stimulus policies of 2009 “including government bailouts of the banks, the nationalization of entire industries and massive government spending” kept the Great Recession from turning worse than it already was.

When growth resumed, China again became the pacesetter, pulling many developing countries along. The World Bank predicts that China alone will account for 35 percent of the growth in world gross domestic product (GDP) in 2018-19. [30]

China’s economy is full of contradictions, with its heavy dependency on debt. The Bank for International Settlements (BIS) estimated that by mid-2017, China’s debt-to-gross domestic product ratio reached 256 percent, compared to the 190 percent average for emerging countries and 250 percent in the U.S. [31]

China’s debt-driven expansion also exacerbates the problem of overproduction, which is the dynamic driving down prices and setting the stage for the trade wars in steel and aluminum. But at the same time, China is making a bid to compete with huge Western and Japanese multinationals in aerospace, microchips and more.

The rise of China and persistent subpar economic growth in the U.S. have become the focus for protectionist policymakers around Trump.

Growth in the U.S. has averaged about 2.2 percent since the end of the recession in 2009, compared to a 3 percent average annual growth rate since 1945. It has taken nearly an entire decade for U.S. GDP to recover from the Great Recession a decade ago. The U.S. remains mired in what former Treasury Secretary Lawrence Summers calls “secular stagnation.”

Along with the decline of U.S. relative economic strength is an intractable crisis for U.S. imperialism as the result of failed wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which have opened the door for both China and Russia to reassert their influence from Africa to the Middle East. [32]

All this represents a challenge for a U.S. capitalist class that has been lacking ideas and leadership to cope with the decline.

Trump’s “America First” politics represent a populist gloss on a serious project by elements of the U.S. ruling class to come to grips with this. This is expressed in the Trump administration’s National Security Strategy document that focuses on regional powers China and Russia rather than the “war on terror.” [33]

The conflicts around trade are driven by these same questions.

Peter Navarro, the China-bashing academic oddball who is director of the National Council on Trade, furnishes Trump with talking points. But the agenda is driven by a billionaire businessman, Wilbur Ross, who took up the role of Commerce Secretary to implement this program, not because he needed the job.

Another key player is U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer, who led U.S. negotiations in the 1980s that squeezed Japan hard to contain the U.S. trade deficit. [34]

The economic nationalists orbiting around Trump represent a minority view within Corporate America, where the success of free trade make CEOs reluctant to face change. The mainstream media, inevitably, has reflected this view in the highly critical “not to say panicky” views of Trump’s performance at the G7.

But change is already here. Neoliberalism, free trade deals like NAFTA and bodies like the WTO were embraced by Washington because they strengthened and consolidated

U.S. dominance on the economic scene. If they are proven to be impediments to that end, they must be ignored or abandoned.

The U.S. decision to abandon the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal “promised by both Trump and Hillary Clinton during the 2016 U.S. presidential election” was a watershed event. [35] Even NAFTA, engineered to lock in U.S. power in the North American economy, can be jettisoned.

While many trade wars erupt during economic crisis, this one comes as an economic recovery has taken hold in most of the world.

The International Monetary Fund

reported in April 2018 that “the global economic upswing that began around mid-2016 has become broader and stronger,” even while signaling caution over the hangovers from the crisis “chiefly, “higher debt levels worldwide” and political aftershocks leading to “nationalistic policies.” [36]

That was a not-so-veiled reference to Trump and the right-wing forces that have upended or displaced or pressured established political parties in much of Europe in recent years.

The trend toward economic nationalism is likely to strengthen in the next recession “which is coming, even if its start can’t be predicted and looks distant now. [37]

The trigger may be unpayable debts, a crash in the financial markets or a slow slide in corporate profitability. Rising interest rates set by central bankers like the U.S. Federal Reserve may choke off growth too soon.

Whatever comes next, a post-neoliberal world economy is emerging. Even if Trump steps back from all-out trade war now, economic nationalism and shifting trade blocs will become cornerstones of U.S. economic policy. It’s a conflict in which working people “whether in the U.S. or in the rest of the world” have nothing to gain.

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Climate change and the next left

17 June 2018, by **David Camfield**

In a thoughtful article, “Revolution in a Warming World: Lessons from the Russian to the Syrian Revolutions,” Andreas Malm writes,

Lenin spoke of the catastrophe of his time as a “mighty accelerator” bringing all contradictions to a head, “engendering world-wide crises of unparalleled intensity,” driving nations “to the brink of doom”... Climate change is likely to be the accelerator of the twenty-first century, speeding up the contradictions of late capitalism – above all the growing chasm between the evergreen lawns of the rich and the precariousness of propertyless existence – and expedit[ing] one local catastrophe after another. [38]

In advanced capitalist countries, we could see even more aggressive attacks on public health care, education and social services as states cut there while they spend more in response to floods, droughts and other effects of climate change. It’s easy to imagine mass international migration out of regions of the South hit hard by climate change leading to an

intensification of racism and repression and the growth of fascist and other far right movements.

As more catastrophes happen and cause problems for capitalists and governments in advanced capitalist countries, ruling-class strategists will attempt to come up with responses to reduce the impact of climate change and manage these problems on their terms. Geoff Mann and Joel Wainwright plausibly suggest in *Climate Leviathan* that this could involve the US or China leading an effort with other imperialist states to “save the planet” using geoengineering and other measures, backed up by military might. [39] Supporters of such a move would present it as the only possible response to an emergency situation.

People on the left would be under a lot of pressure to go along – worse than the pressure to support the “War on Terror” after September 11, 2001. Rulers wouldn’t let a serious crisis go to waste – they’d do their best to take advantage of the situation to boost their power and profits. Strikes and

protests could be restricted even more than they are by “security” measures today. Capitalist democracy, already thinned out in the neoliberal era and especially since 2001, could be further limited or suspended.

What does this mean for radicals in the Canadian state? Obviously we should be working with other people to build the climate justice movement and other organizing efforts. But that’s not enough. We should orient towards building a new left, bearing in mind that climate change will likely accelerate social contradictions. Most of what I’ve written recently about building the radical left on Prairies applies in other regions too. [40]

I’d like to stress two points.

First, as Matthew Brett argues we should “feel the scandal of our divisions.” “We ought to be ashamed of petty interpersonal or ideological divisions. At a time when the activist left is weak and divided, it’s vital to focus on common goals and principles, rather than obsessing over difference and division,” although “some

differences cannot be overlooked.” [41]

The situation we're in - a stable capitalist society where the ruling class rules unchallenged, with the working class highly fragmented, divided and depoliticized and a feeble radical left - calls for us to unite on the basis of politics that can guide our activity in the current period. That's different from organizing around a specific political tradition like Trotskyism or anarcho-communism (or as part of a narrower current within a tradition). It's also different from adopting a basis of unity that claims to have answers to questions that we just don't face in this moment of history, such as precisely what kind of society beyond capitalism we're aiming for or exactly how a transition beyond capitalism could be started.

For us to advance struggles and start

building a new left in this era we need anti-capitalist, anti-oppression, social-struggle ecological justice politics with a commitment to constructive involvement in broad workplace, community and campus organizing. Uniting on such a basis doesn't mean forgetting about other political questions - it's about putting the emphasis on what matters most now.

Second, talking about the urgent need to build a new left doesn't take us very far. We need to get serious about learning how to build better in the circumstances in which we find ourselves and getting to work in whatever ways we can.

There's been an almost complete break between cohorts in Canada, so that almost none of the lessons learned between the 1960s and the mid-1990s about how to build the

radical left have been passed down to today's activists. It's not that everything we need to know merely awaits rediscovery. Far from it! But some methods have been tested and shown to be effective, while others have been shown to be ineffective. Let's learn and use what works. And let's learn from our experiences, like the failure of the Greater Toronto Workers' Assembly and, for a positive example, the process leading to the launch of Solidarity Halifax. [42] [43] There are no short cuts to a new left. [44] The best next step will be different in Toronto, where the radical left is larger than in other cities but also more divided, than in other places. Quebec Solidaire, a sizeable left-reformist party, makes the landscape of the left different in Quebec. But we can and must try to take a step towards a new left.

[Canadian dimension](#)

Banning abortion is violence against women

16 June 2018, by **Ni Una Menos Collective**

IN 2015, the sound of our footsteps and the power of our voices echoed from one end of the country to the other. We began a revolution. One million people in Argentina raised a cry: Stop killing us! Not one more! We want to live! The earthquake continues. Today, for the fourth time, cis and trans women, lesbians, bisexuals and transvestites are all here together, and in every province across Argentina at once, they cry out for an end to violence against women and femicide: Not one more!

We are a powerful movement, diverse and heterogeneous, one that knows how to expose how every act of violence perpetrated against us is born from the violence perpetrated by states and governments each time they exploit our bodies, each time they disregard our human rights, each time they enforce neoliberal and capitalist economic formulas that produce more hunger and brutality.

We are not victims. We are rising up with the power of a collective dance. Our feminism is based on international struggles across Latin America and beyond, like the raised fists of Ireland that conquered the right to abortion. States and governments owe us a debt that we've come to collect. We are organizing and rebelling in every corner of the planet.

There are many more of us than those here today. We are the heirs of the mothers and grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo (who demanded the return of their children disappeared by the dictatorship). We are the people's champions. We come from the poorest neighborhoods. We are trans, lesbian, bisexual, non-binary, transvestite, Indigenous, African, migrant and HIV+ women. We are each of the activists who initiated the 2005 National Campaign for Safe, Free and Legal Abortion. We are the ones who refuse to let you victimize

us, and we affirm our right to pleasure, to decide our own destinies, to dispose of our own time, to neither be exploited nor obligated to fulfill desires that are not our own.

We stand in opposition to President Mauricio Macri's government, the conservative Cambiemos party, the governors and bosses, and the dominant, elite, white, misogynist, heteronormative, racist, macho, patriarchal, neoliberal, capitalist justice system that serves only the interests of the rich and powerful. Today we come to this plaza outside of Congress to state that we will not be disciplined any more. We do not accept that the state and its authority was created owners of our bodies. We do not accept that they can tell us how, when, where and with whom we may live, with whom we may partner and with whom we may have sex.

We are here to tell them we are making history! We are alive and we

are taking responsibility for those who have come before us. We are organizing ourselves to demonstrate to those who will join us tomorrow that, together, we can overthrow the patriarchy and capitalism. And to say no to illegitimate, international financial agreements that only bury us in debt. We know we will pay these unjust debts with our very lives. And we are here to say once again Yes to control over our own bodies and Yes to legal, safe, and free abortion.

No to Macri's agreement with the IMF!

Not one more!

We want to live!

The state is to blame!

Point 1: Sin #AbortoLegal, No Hay #NiUnaMenos Without Legal Abortion, No End to Violence Against Women

Pass the National Campaign for the Right to Legal, Safe and Free Abortion bill, and nothing less! We want abortion legalized now! Based on our strength and our mobilization, we insist that Congress take up the right to legal, safe and free abortion. And we will hold our green banners high to demand that Congress approves the Voluntary Termination of Pregnancy bill authored by the Campaign for Legal, Safe and Free Abortion. We reject any bill that seeks to muddy the waters by proposing merely "decriminalization" — we demand legalization!

We don't want any church interfering with our bodies. We reject so-called religious conscience as an excuse for denying us our rights. We demand the separation of church and state and the end of state subsidies for the Catholic Church and religious schools, which this year totals more than 32 billion pesos (\$1.2 billion). Our demands are

comprehensive: Sex education so we can decide, contraception so we don't get pregnant, legal abortion so we don't die.

We demand that the legalization of abortion ensures access, and that it will be covered by guaranteed health care plans for all private and public hospitals. And that this include high-quality Misoprostol manufactured by the state that is authorized for gynecological-obstetric use in order to end the private monopoly on that drug that has today led to exorbitant prices. And that we be guaranteed access to it, that it be distributed at no cost through the public health system, and that it be sold at affordable prices in pharmacies.

Enough with forcing victims of rape carrying their pregnancy to term! For the immediate, nationwide application of the National Procedures for Comprehensive Treatment for Persons who have the Legal Right to Terminate a Pregnancy. We demand a budget that guarantees that legal abortion be available in every hospital in the country.

We demand funding for sexual education and sexual health and responsible pregnancy programs, as well as the regulation and implementation for comprehensive sexual education. We want comprehensive, civil and gender-sensitive sexual education in all levels of schools and in every province in the country. Get the church out of education!

We denounce the state's hypocrisy that forces us to seek back-alley abortions. These often put our lives at risk because they are conducted under the same miserable and precarious living conditions in which we are forced to live. We demand the right to access to economic conditions and health care that will allow us to decide whether we wish to be mothers.

We repudiate any government that prohibits abortion anywhere in Latin America, and, in particular, we single out the governments of El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Haiti, Surinam and the Dominican Republic for criminalizing abortion. We demand these countries, and the entire world,

recognize our right to control our own bodies. We have the right to be mothers, but motherhood must be a choice, not an imposition. We hope that winning legal abortion in Argentina will serve as a jumping-off point for a movement that spreads across all of Latin America. Not one more death from unsafe abortions! Respect our decision if we don't want to give birth!

Point 2: No to Macri's Agreement with the IMF

No to paying the foreign debt. Down with Macri's structural adjustment policies. No more layoffs, firings and repression. We reject the Macri government's decision to conclude a pact with the IMF that means hunger for our people. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) agreement means cutbacks, layoffs, poverty and precarity for the entire working class and all trans, lesbian, bisexual, non-binary, transvestite, Indigenous, African, migrant, poor and HIV+ women. We denounce the IMF's directives, such as cuts to the already meager budget for health and education, sectors that are historically dominated by women. We also demand the end of new retirement regulations. Down with the retirement reforms!

Down with Macri's so-called Universal Health Coverage program (CUS) and the Southern Hospital Project (that will cut hundreds of beds), both are efforts to privatize the public health system. We say no to Macri's plan to reduce enrollment in teachers' colleges by concentrating instruction in one centralized university (UNICABA), we stand in solidarity with students enrolled in outsourced educational programs.

We are against Macri and the provincial governors' neoliberal program. Their program slices away at us, renders us precarious, and tries to weaken us. But we are united, and we will join in the struggle of workers in Subte, in Telam, in Radio Plata; and we will stand with teachers, employees at the National Institute of

Industrial Technology (INTI) retirees, and Line 144 transit workers, etc. We support each and every struggle against a wage ceiling that the government intends to impose with the complicit silence of the trade union bureaucracy. We also reject productivity and absenteeism clauses that result in pay cuts, above all for women workers. And we reject the persecution of activism by the trade union bureaucracy as well as the national and provincial governments.

Flowing from this political position, we demand a general strike now! As we have said during every strike, every International Women's Day on March: We strike, and we will keep striking!

We reject all forms of workplace violence against women, trans people, lesbians, bisexuals, non-binary people, transvestites, indigenous people, those of African descent, migrants, people who live in the poorest neighborhoods and women with HIV. Why? Because women suffer attacks on their rights, their salaries and face threats of unemployment through the discipline of workplace productivity. Because women's unemployment is 2 percent higher than men's. Because the salary gap between men and women is, on average, 27 percent, while in the informal sector this increases to 40 percent. We demand equal access and conditions for all categories of workers that are on par with their male counterparts. End labor discrimination. We demand comprehensive rights for female workers.

We say again that migration is not a crime! Not one more migrant death! We demand the annulment of the emergency decree of July 2017 that targets immigrants from certain African and Middle Eastern countries (as well as poor immigrants from Paraguay, Bolivia and Peru) and the elimination of the Migrant Detention Center. We condemn the violent clearing of Indigenous community and peasant lands.

We are against oil and mineral extractivism and an addiction to agricultural pesticides that poison and kill us. We are against racism, discrimination and xenophobia toward Black women, African women, Afro-

Indigenous women and all Afro-Argentinian women, whom slave laws forced to participate in the growth of the capitalist system that we confront today. We demand reparations for the historical debt owed to us.

Women living with HIV demand new HIV, sexually transmitted diseases and hepatitis laws. No more budget cuts for prevention, prophylactics, medication and treatment. HIV doesn't kill, but stigma and discrimination do. End attacks on reproductive freedom and genealogical and obstetrician violence. More than 40,000 women end up in the hospital each year because of unsafe abortions! We are out of time!

End repression. We demand reversing legal prosecutions against, and liberty for, all trans political prisoners. Freedom for Milagro Sala (who has been imprisoned since January 2016) and all the imprisoned comrades from the Tupac Amaru Neighborhood Association.

We reject interference by the armed forces in domestic security, who only want to pave the way to repressing social protest. Santiago Maldonado and Rafael Nahuel [victims of state violence while defending the Mapuche community] are with us! We reject Macri's attempt to reform the penal code to incarcerate political organizers.

We stand beside the Buenos Aires Subte transit workers who were severely repressed for defending their salaries. We oppose the political dismissals of subway union delegates and the violence suffered by all women comrades repressed, beaten and incarcerated by the city police. End trigger-happy incursions in poor and working-class neighborhoods. No more repression in the villages, illegal search and seizures and detentions like those of Iván and Ezequiel, comrades from the Powerful Woman collective (La Poderosa), who were tortured by police.

We demand repeal of the anti-terrorist law as well as all repressive laws and regulations.

We demand the dismantling of human trafficking networks and the

repressive state forces and their accomplices. We condemn pimps outright. We want public policies created to supplement the trafficking law and procedures to ensure legal protections for victims and their families. We denounce the closure of victims' shelters. End repression, persecution, abuse and police extortion of sex workers and those engaged in prostitution.

We denounce the genocidal invasion by the state of indigenous lands. No more criminalizing and prosecuting us for demanding the return of ancestral lands. We demand an end to institutional violence against indigenous fighters. We reject the extractivist model that only brings benefits to the multinationals and the governments complicit in the clearing of peoples. We want a nation of many nations!

Point 3: #NiUnaMenos, #NotOneLess

End femicide and transvesticide. Hate toward women, lesbians, transvestites, bisexuals and trans people is murder. Misogyny is fascism.

We denounce all forms of sexist violence. While a woman is killed every 30 hours, Macri and his ally Fabiana TÃ±ez [the director of the Nationalist Institute of Women] have held up the proposal for the National Women's Institute, allocating what amounts to a mere 8 pesos to investigate each crime against women. We demand a budget to implement Law No. 26485 pertaining to eradicating violence against women. We demand shelter for the victims of violence and adequate psychological and legal protections. We demand genuine and well-compensated work for the victims of violence and their children.

We accuse the judiciary of the Argentine Republic of reinforcing patriarchy. Judicial power is misogynist, racist, lesbian-hating and trans-hating. It makes us invisible,

discriminates against us and subjects us to re-victimization. We demand that the state immediately remove and dismiss all judges, accountants and judicial workers who exercise institutionalized gender violence.

In confronting violence, more draconian legal penalties do not stop misogynist crimes. This is merely punitive demagoguery designed to appease public opinion. We will not let you invoke our names in pursuit of increased criminal sentencing. The call for more prisons does not help solve the fundamental problem. We declare solidarity with women prisoners because we understand that the system doubly oppresses them: it stigmatizes them for being imprisoned and for being women.

We state emphatically that that compulsory hetero-cis-sexuality is violence! It is time to stop homosexual-lesbian-bi-trans hate. We ask for implementation of the gender identity law "this means real access to the right to comprehensive health care, speedy clerical corrections for legal identities and respect for everyone's identity.

We demand a national law establishing a workplace quota for trans people and special protections for trans people in their early childhood and elder years. We demand historical reparations and acknowledgement for transvestite and trans genocide. We hold the state responsible. Our integrity demands

that we stand for respect and autonomy for obese and intersex bodies that are stigmatized and pathologized. We demand that public policy take into account women with disabilities.

We are here to declare that we want to live, that we have the right to pleasure, to go out freely at night without fear, to enjoy our sexualities without repression, without mandates, without harassment, without hierarchies. We have a right to parties and to love, we have a right to free time and to give consent when we want to give consent, just as we will say no and rebel against what is imposed on us against our will! And now we are together demanding justice for the transvesticide of Diana Sacayán [murdered in October 2015] and for all of our women comrades assassinated in hate crimes!

We are here to shout that there is no Ni Una Menos without demanding freedom for Higua [a queer woman imprisoned in 2017 for killing an attacker who threatened to rape her], for Mariana Gómez [jailed for kissing her wife in public in 2017], for Yanina Farfán [accused by a justice system that stigmatized her as a bad mother] and for Joe Lemonge [a trans boy imprisoned for defending himself against patriarchal trans hate].

There is no Ni Una Menos without demanding justice for Marielle Franco, riddled with bullets in Brazil

under the Temer government, and there is no Ni Una Menos without crying loudly and clearly for freedom for 17-year-old Palestinian activist Ahed Tamimi.

We will not allow this white, capitalist social system (a system that is misogynist, heteronormative, racist and sexist) to be placed above our right to live in this world being as we wish to be. We are against all forms of exploitation and oppression, we call out to our sisters around the world to keep fighting for our lives. Our movement will defend its anti-capitalist, anti-clerical, anti-patriarchal character.

We are independent from the state and its governments. We were the first to organize a national strike against this austerity government and now we say "No" to the agreement between Macri and the IMF. We demand the trade unions convene a national strike and propose a fighting plan to defeat the government.

We are going to conquer our right to safe, legal and free abortion. We demand the separation of church and state. We hope that all women will mobilize outside of Congress on June 13 when the abortion bill is scheduled to be debated so we can paint all of Latin America green.

**Sin #AbortoLegal, No Hay #NiUnaMenos
Without #AbortionRights, No #EndViolenceAgainstWomen**

How Britain's colonial legacy still affects LGBT politics around the world

15 June 2018, by **Enze Han, Joseph O'Mahoney**

And while stopping short of a formal apology, she used her speech to explicitly acknowledge Britain's responsibility: "As the United Kingdom's prime minister, I deeply regret both the fact that such laws were introduced and the legacy of

discrimination, violence and death that persists today."

Her speech came in the aftermath of a recent court decision by Trinidad and Tobago to decriminalise homosexuality. On April 12 2018,

Justice Devindra Rampersand of the High Court of Trinidad and Tobago ruled that sections 13 and 16 of the Sexual Offences Act are "unconstitutional, illegal, null, void, invalid and of no effect to the extent that these laws criminalise any acts

constituting consensual sexual conduct between adults". [45]

The drama came later during an interview with BBC Radio 4's Today programme, when Trinidadian Anglican Bishop Victor Gill called comments made by May a form of "neo-colonialism" when he denounced the ruling - without noticing the irony that it was British colonial administrators who introduced the anti-gay law in the first place. [46]

As we show in our newly published book, British Colonialism and the Criminalisation of Homosexuality, many laws that make homosexuality a crime today were imposed during rule by the British Empire. [47]

Britain cracks down

From 1860 onwards, the empire spread a specific set of legal codes and common law throughout its colonies, among them laws proscribing male-to-male sexual relations. The British Empire drafted these penal codes with a moral, religious mission in mind. The intention was to protect local Christians from "corruption" and correct and Christianise "native" custom. Two particularly prominent examples are the colonial criminal codes of India and Queensland, both of which specifically criminalised male-to-male sexual relations - though they both set a penalty of long-term imprisonment rather than death. [48] [49]

In contrast with the British experience, the other major colonial powers did not leave such an institutional legacy on criminalisation of homosexual conduct. This is why former British colonies are far more likely to still have these laws in place than the former colonies of other

European states or other states in general. Of the 72 countries with such a law still on the books in 2018, at least 38 of them were once subject to some sort of British colonial rule.

Although these laws are superficially similar, they were drafted very differently and specified penalties of varying severity. Compare for instance Ghana and other African countries with a British colonial legacy. Ghana's criminal code currently classes "unnatural carnal knowledge" as a misdemeanour, with a potential prison sentence of up to three years. [50] By contrast, Kenya, Nigeria, and Gambia treat gay sex as a felony, with a penalty of up to 14 years' imprisonment. [51] [52] [53] And in Uganda and Zambia, the maximum penalty is life. [54] [55]

So why the difference?

The spread of criminalisation during the British colonial period was not centrally co-ordinated. Instead, a number of variables - including in several cases the fact that a colonial administrator happened to have dealt with the introduction of a criminal code in their previous posting - seem to have been relevant to why a particular criminal code was introduced into a territory, or why one was introduced at all. This is why colonial Ghana, then called the Gold Coast, received a completely different colonial-era criminal code from British administrators from the other colonies.

An uneven landscape

There's plenty else to unpick in this strange, complicated history. For example, we also investigated whether

former British colonies are less likely or slower to decriminalise on average than the former colonies of other European imperialists.

We compared several former British colonies such as Singapore, Uganda and India, that still criminalise homosexual sex with another group of former colonies that have made significant strides toward greater social inclusion of their sexual minorities - among them South Africa, Belize, and Fiji. To test the still quite prevalent idea that British imperialism "poisoned" societies against homosexuality, we looked in some detail not just at the historical origins of these countries' anti-homosexuality laws, but of the contemporary political processes that have so far prevented some of them from scrapping the laws. Based on our research, we argue that the evidence in favour of the claim is inconclusive at best. Among former colonies with laws like these, former British colonies do not seem to have decriminalised homosexual conduct any more slowly than colonies of other European states. This suggests that the "stickiness" of repressive institutions is relatively consistent across different countries and histories, and not specific to a particular type of colonialism.

It's important to remember that where these sorts of laws are still in place, the degree to which they're enforced varies greatly. Where Uganda actively and frequently persecutes LGBT people, for example, Singapore penalises them much less regularly. But what's undeniable is that these sorts of laws have prolonged the stigmatisation of LGBT people around the world, and understanding why so many of them persist today is hugely important.

[The Conversation](#)

Parliamentary elections in Slovenia

14 June 2018

LP: Could you explain the circumstances in which Levica was born and what it represents in the context of the political parties in Slovenia ?

The foundations of Levica (The Left) can be traced back to mass protest movement taking place in Slovenia in 2012 and 2013. The agenda of the protests was rather moralistic (anticorruption), but there was an organized socialist group that recognized objective economic factors behind their moralistic appearance. The group organized themselves in IDS (Initiative for democratic socialism), an anticapitalist party that formed an electoral coalition called United Left in 2014, the direct predecessor to Levica. Levica is the only parliamentary party in Slovenia with an anticapitalist stance calling into question the domination of Slovenian ruling classes and their foreign counterparts in the EU and Nato. However, Levica hasn't been able to position itself as an antisystem force amongst the broader public which see it as the most radical of the left-liberal parties (such as Social democrats), but not really opposed to them and the capitalist system. This is, to some extent, the effect of the workings of bourgeois parliamentary system and media apparatus, which always try to flatten the political field into two poles - liberal and conservative - thereby ousting the class struggle of the working masses against exploitation out of the everyday political life.

LP: What is the electoral and militant base of Levica as well as its geographical implantation?

Levica achieved the highest electoral results in the urban centers, especially in the capital Ljubljana. It has the youngest and most educated electoral base of all parliamentary forces. However, that base is petty-bourgeois (public sector employees, precarious workers) rather than working class. This is the consequence of the fact that so-called right wing populists - like Trump in the USA, or Orban in Hungary - were able to impose themselves as an antisystemic forces claiming to represent the "ordinary citizen" although their economic policy promotes the interests of large

capital and their social policies benefit petty-bourgeoisie. The distance between the party and the masses is mirrored by the distance between the party leadership (professional politicians and active) and its ordinary members (taking the role of consumers of the official party ideology rather than its active creators and perpetrators). In this respect, Levica remains an ordinary petty-bourgeois political organization without specific socialist forms of political action and organizing.

LP: Did Levica collaborate in social conflicts and can you describe its interventions?

The greatest problem of Levica - and so-called radical left in general - is its weakness when it comes to radical theory and activism (militancy). Levica has definitively addressed issues of extra-exploited workers and fought for decreasing the rate of exploitation (by increasing wages). But this was done from the distance of the parliament and not usually "on the ground". Despite its relative electoral strength it is still unable to reach the masses directly in their struggle rather than through mediation of the parliamentary apparatus and mass media. This creates the constant danger of opportunism (stances outside the mass-media box are neglected and not communicated to broader public) and integration into capitalist political apparatus (since the party has no direct "access" to the masses it becomes more and more reliant on them).

LP: Two candidates originated from the trade-union were not in a good polling position to be elected in the parliament. Don't you think that it would be worth backing such candidates who could be useful to settle a collaboration between the radical left and the working class movement?

For sure, although this should not mean transforming good trade-union leaders and militants into permanent parliamentary politicians.

LP: The temptation to participate to a new government that could be defined as left-center could be great. Don't you think that this

could drive to dead end issues as it hapenend in Greece with the minister Tsipras?

The comparison with Greece is not very useful, because the current position of Slovenia in the European capitalism and the EU is not such as to require or enable "the troika" to intervene in Slovenia the way it did in Greece. It is also the case that Syriza was the major party in a two-party government, whereas Levica would have to be a junior member of a coalition of 5 to 6 parties. So, it would have much less power than Syriza in a much less radicalized political situation. The most likely outcome of such coalition would be the integration of the party leadership in the political class and/or loss of support because the party would have to "take responsibility" for the decisions which it didn't take and couldn't prevent. This is the phrase used by left-liberal opinion makers cheering for Levica to join the government, not in order to promote the interests of the working class, but to prevent the conservative faction of the political class from taking power from the liberal faction and preserving their esteemed "liberal democracy" without interfering with capitalist exploitation. History teaches us that participating in bourgeois governments has nothing to do with taking power in order to transform the system, which is the task of the socialists.

LP: What were the themes wich were proposed by Levica in the electoral campaign?

Levica promoted the interests of working people, the unemployed and the retired workers against the forces of capital. This included the demands for the abolition of the most precarious forms of employment, higher wages, pensions and welfare benefits, as well as measures for achieving those goals, such as higher taxation of capital and high incomes. The second major issue was the demand that politics should benefit the welfare of the Slovene people rather than the interests of western powers and their organizations (EU, Nato). One of demands was to turn down the plan to invest 1,2 billion €, in military equipment that doesn't

serve the defense of the country but makes its army more useful for Nato's foreign interventions. However, the mass-media backed by the capital and its political representatives were the ones dictating the campaign. Its focus was the demand for tax-cuts for capital and the wealthy. This was imposed (together with the inevitable "migrant problematics" and imagined "security issues") as the decisive question of despite the fact that Slovenia is experiencing rapid GDP growth, has one of the largest balance of payments surpluses in the EU and the taxation in Slovenia is below the EU average. To put it short: capitalist have been able to present their class interests as a formula for development, although even their

mainstream economics teaches otherwise.

LP : What will the the policy of Levica in the parliament?

Levica should immediately put pressure on domestic capital and its foreign supporters in order to improve the status and position of working people and to channel public resources from military spending to public healthcare system and the welfare state. I have no illusions that Levica could gain much in this relationship of force, but this could radicalize the masses and keep the party in the right direction: the direction of developing the political force that will, in proper

circumstances, start the transition to socialism. This might sound pretentious, but it is the only acceptable alternative. Despite the economic recovery, it is evident that capitalist mode of production is in a deep crisis. Everyone, even the left-liberals, should realize that their "normality" cannot be saved with their left-liberal politics, because it is based on exploitation and expropriation of the majority of the population. It is getting harder and harder to reproduce this regime of exploitation (and mode of accumulation) with "liberal-democratic" means. The people have to realize that this regime of exploitation has to be either overcome or left to be governed by the "right-wing populists".

Will this election in Mexico be fraud-proof?

12 June 2018, by Héctor A. Rivera

This isn't because it was ever a tight race between AMLO and someone else. AMLO has been leading opinion polls since before the campaign started. However, the specter of election fraud has loomed so large over Mexico's presidential voting that it seemed almost unthinkable for AMLO and his center-left party, the Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional (MORENA), to ever have a fair shot at the presidency.

This year's general election on July 1 will be the biggest in Mexican history. In addition to the presidency, more than 4,300 public posts are being voted on, including 30 out of 32 state governors, all 500 deputies of the lower house of Congress and all 128 senators. In eight states, every elected position is up for grabs.

Voters will have three main contenders to choose between. AMLO and his MORENA party, in an alliance with the small Partido del Trabajo (PT) and the evangelical Partido Encuentro Social (PES), is the frontrunner by a long ways.

Opinion polls place AMLO 20

percentage points ahead of his closest opponent, Ricardo Anaya of the right-wing Partido Acción Nacional (PAN), which is running in coalition with the decaying Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) — AMLO's old party — and the emerging Movimiento Ciudadano (MC).

José Antonio Meade, representing the establishment Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) — the party of the current president, Enrique Peña Nieto — and its coalition with the Partido Verde Ecologista de México (PVEM, the Green Party of Mexico) and the Partido Nueva Alianza (PANAL), is in third place.

Based on electoral models and opinion polls, the conservative Spanish newspaper *El País* predicts that AMLO has a 92 percent chance of winning. Such high numbers throughout the campaign have given AMLO and his supporters a great deal of confidence about overcoming the probability of electoral fraud orchestrated by the regime which stole the presidency from AMLO in 2006.

This time around, it seems like AMLO's candidacy will be "fraud-proof."

Before heading MORENA, AMLO was a leader of the reformist Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) — he became the mayor of Mexico City with this party.

Under the PRD's banner, AMLO launched a very popular campaign for president in 2006, but after he was denied the presidency as a result of a scandalous election fraud, AMLO launched his own political initiative, which eventually became MORENA.

Surrounding himself with intellectuals, like-minded reformists and politicians opposing the neoliberal agenda of the PAN and the PRI, he registered MORENA as an official political party.

As the current presidency of Peña Nieto of the PRI was caught up in one

scandal and crisis after another, MORENA grew stronger. With the party appearing to be a more viable political alternative, many politicians of the PRD, PAN and even the PRI started joining MORENA's ranks.

Under its political program, MORENA has promised to combat corruption, return to the rule of law, and invest in education and culture. To revamp the economy, AMLO has endorsed a free economic zone on the border with the U.S., high-speed rail in the Riviera Maya and job training programs. More importantly, he proposes to reinvest in the energy sector, to build new refineries, hydroelectric power plants and biodiesel refineries.

AMLO's political project doesn't break with neoliberal policies. On the contrary, he has promised to invite Canadian mining companies to do more business in Mexico if Donald Trump raises tariffs on Mexican mineral exports.

In response to Trump's scapegoating of Mexicans, AMLO has positioned himself as a "responsible" politician open to dialogue about immigration, but also as a defender of the rights of Mexican migrants abroad — a message that has been received well by Mexicans.

The positive numbers at the polls and optimism about what seems to be an inevitable victory has given AMLO the confidence that other candidates lack. During the presidential debates, Anaya and Meade tried to take jabs at AMLO, but this late in the campaign, AMLO seems untouchable.

The real elephant in the room throughout this general election campaign rallies is the incessant wave of violence across the country.

According to a new report by the consulting company Etellekt, since the campaigns begun, 110 people have lost their lives due to their political activism for one party or another. On June 2 alone, five people died in murders associated with political activity, such as canvassing or

attending a political meeting.

One of the cases that brought political violence into the spotlight is that of Pamela Itzammaray Terán Pineda, who rose to national prominence after her political activism to bring aid to her municipality of Juchitán following the earthquakes of September 2017. She was registered as a candidate under the PRI alliance. On June 2, she was murdered, along with her driver and a journalist.

What makes these murders so unusual is they don't just target MORENA's candidates. All parties have lost candidates to the violence. Furthermore, most of the murders have happened at the local level — high-profile candidates running for the senate or state governors aren't the targets.

Part of what explains the killings is that all political parties have ties with organized crime at the municipal level, and the rivalries between political parties have also brought out conflicts among criminal organizations.

This is the result of the festering decomposition of the PRI, which once ruled Mexico as a one-party state and which returned to power under Peña Nieto; PAN, which also has ruled and PRD. As these parties collapse, along with their clientelist networks, they open the door for other forces to take their place.

Without a clear, dominant force like the PRI or the PRD to guarantee established alliances between politicians and organized crime, we are seeing fights over the spoils of local governments and narco-trafficking territories.

This free-for-all at the local level also reveals the broader shifts taking place in the corridors of power in state capitals and corporate boardrooms: the new political order that is being built out of elements of the old one.

The collapse of the PRI's regime and its extensive network of alliances is

leading to a deep restructuring. The PRI is now associated with theft and corruption, and links to the party are turning into more of a political liability. Therefore, various PRI politicians are running under the banner of their long-time ally, the PVEM — Mexico's "Greens," which don't represent a left alternative in any way in Mexico.

The shifting loyalties also reflect a ruling class split. The most recalcitrant sectors of the ruling class, organized around conglomerates like Grupo Mexico and FEMSA — which distributes Coca-Cola — have consistency attacked AMLO and his party. They've gone so far as to issue orders to their workers not to vote for MORENA.

A more pragmatic sector of the ruling class, no doubt concerned with the ungovernable state of the country under the last 18 years of either the PAN or the PRI, has thrown its support behind AMLO.

For example, AMLO's advisor on tourism, Miguel Torruco, comes from one of Mexico's wealthiest families. He is an in-law of Carlos Slim, one of the richest men in the world. Other AMLO supporters link him to the nation's largest media conglomerates and banking institutions.

In short, this formerly anti-establishment politician is very much established.

The reconfiguration of political and capitalist alliances is also affecting parties like the PAN and PRD. These parties are being abandoned for others that aren't as corroded and tainted, such as the Movimiento Ciudadano (MC) or even the evangelical, anti-abortion and anti-gay Partido Encuentro Social (PES), which formed an alliance with AMLO in 2017.

As these shifts take place, the possibility still exists that one sector might try to force through electoral fraud against AMLO, with the help of the military and the blessing of Donald Trump. Unfortunately, something similar to the right-wing governments in Brazil and Argentina is not off the table in Mexico.

The fact that such a harrowing scenario might still play out after AMLO has led polls by such a decisive margin shows the contested nature of the political transition underway in Mexico.

Nevertheless, this scenario would face real obstacles – not the least of which is that if high-ranking officers supported such a move, they couldn't necessary trust the base of the military, which seems to be leaning towards AMLO, to support them.

All this has also forced the radical left to reflect on its own political initiatives.

The most interesting to emerge from the radical left is the candidacy of MarÁa de Jess Patricio, an Indigenous woman known as Marichuy. Her campaign was spearheaded by the Congress of Indigenous Governance (CIG) – the nation's largest representative body of Indigenous groups – with the backing of its most important member, the Ejercito Zapatista de Liberaci3n Nacional (EZLN).

Although the aim of this initiative was to use Marichuy's campaign as a vehicle to fuse anti-capitalist social movements and pull national political

debates to the left, it lacked a clear message and got off to a slow start. To complicate matters further, the earthquakes that rocked the south and center of the country last September derailed the campaign and delayed signature-gathering efforts.

In many respects, the Zapatistas reaped what they sowed – it was unrealistic to think that they could launch a national campaign after years of isolation in Chiapas and sectarian posturing against unions.

The campaign was also poorly organized and run through student collectives and loose alliances. After it was finally launched, it received little support from unions and NGOs, many of which had already committed to AMLO.

Once the Marichuy campaign failed to get the signatures required to get on the ballot, the initiative collapsed, and the Zapatistas retreated. MORENA doubled down on its efforts to pressure the left to close ranks behind AMLO – despite his refusal to address the grievances and demands of the social movements around forced disappearances, femicide, and dispossession at the hands of extractive industries.

If, as expected, AMLO comes to power, he and his government will face a steep uphill battle to stabilize the country. The social and economic tensions of Mexican society will

continue to define politics for the coming period.

For the socialist left, this election will also likely close a cycle that began in 1988 with the creation of the then "center-left" PRD to challenge the newly neoliberal PRI. As MORENA becomes the official left, it will force socialist groups and social movements to reorient themselves in opposition to it and its "social-liberal" program.

Through the Congress of Indigenous Governance, the Zapatistas will continue to play an important role in cohering sectors of the left – in April, they brought together 8,000 women for a three-day gathering in Chiapas. There is potential for a new axis for anti-capitalist organizing to form around the Zapatistas, together with Indigenous movements, urban popular movements, feminist collectives and independent labor unions.

For now, Mexico waits impatiently. The general election campaign has dragged on for more than a year, and the suspense over whether AMLO would endure another stolen election seems to have finally subsided. With or without fraud, however, this year's elections seem likely to close a 30-year cycle – and open a new one in Mexican politics.

June 11, 2018

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

Siege and resistance in Gaza: an interview with Toufic Haddad

11 June 2018, by Omar Hassan, Toufic Haddad

In response, the Israeli military has unleashed waves of violence on unarmed demonstrators. At least 110 have been killed and more than 12,000 wounded since the protests began on 30 March, the bloodiest day occurring at demonstrations on 14 May commemorating the Nakba

(catastrophe), the original ethnic cleansing of Palestinians in 1948, when the state of Israel was formed.

Toufic Haddad, an activist, academic and author of *Palestine Ltd: Neoliberalism and Nationalism in the Occupied Territory*, spoke to Omar Hassan about the meaning of the

protests – and what next in the struggle for the liberation of Palestine.

What is the background to the protests?

The regime of control Israel imposes over Gaza is unprecedented globally, some academics calling it a "digital

occupation". Remote control machine guns and drones monitor and police this tiny territory, which is 360 square kilometres, while Gaza's access regime is so sophisticated that Israel counts every calorie and controls every chemical compound that enters the territory.

It would be imprecise, however, to reduce the protests to purely humanitarian questions. Gaza has been under siege because the international community and Israel want to prevent an alternative political model emerging within Palestinian politics. Hamas has led this alternative political project, and could again legitimately take power if elections took place.

But the issue is far larger than Hamas.

The Gaza Strip exists only because of the 1948 war. It is a rump territory where the victims of the Zionist campaign to ethnically cleanse Palestine ended up. Three-quarters of residents are refugees originating from the coastal and southern regions of Palestine. This is, demographically, the reverse of the West Bank, where refugees constitute only a quarter of the population.

The collective experience of displacement and harsh living conditions transformed Gaza into the crucible of Palestinian nationalism and the refugee return movement. The territory gave birth to the most significant vanguard political tendencies - from the Communist Party in the 1950s and 1960s, to Fatah in the late 1960s and Hamas and Islamic Jihad more recently.

The protests are the latest incarnation of these dynamics. We are witnessing yet another popular uprising launched around all the historical issues of the Palestinian movement (for return, self-determination, liberation etc.), and seeing all the new means that Israel and the international "community" have used to try to control and subvert Palestinian rights.

There is yet another important factor. Hamas, which won the 2006 elections [for the Palestinian Legislative Council] and attempted to reform the Palestinian national movement

through the Palestinian Authority's state-like institutions, eventually concluded that Gaza is ungovernable within existing constraints.

Self-governance - the crowning achievement of the Oslo Accords signed in the 1990s - became a way to alleviate Israel from the most "burdensome" elements of its occupation, while leaving it in ultimate control.

Hamas is abandoning civil governance and service provision because it understands, correctly, that it is a trap. The Palestinian Authority cannot manage Gaza and its contradictions without sovereignty and freedom of movement and goods.

When we add that the Fatah government in Ramallah, in the occupied West Bank, has cut spending on Gaza in recent years to pressure Hamas, we see that the protests are both a popular rejection of the occupation, the siege and the political crisis of Palestinian politics, and a way for Hamas to kick the "problem" of Gaza back to its rightful place - Israel and the international community, which are the main parties responsible for the perpetuation of the problem of Palestine for 70 years.

Who is leading the new movement?

With Hamas' decision to abstain from governance, the path was opened for popular forces, and particularly a younger generation of activists, to take the initiative and see what could be done to change the situation.

Having said this, the traditional structures of the Palestinian national movement - the Palestine Liberation Organisation factions, and Hamas and Islamic Jihad - have gathered around the new mobilisations and their organic leadership to form the Higher Committee for the Great March of Return, which oversees the movement and protests. So it is a combination of new and old actors, experimenting with new and old tactics.

Hamas is still the dominant political player in Gaza, and its ability to mobilise forces is unmatched there. Its decision to abstain from governance essentially green-lighted its members

to join popular mobilisations, providing numerical and logistical weight. This should not be confused with Hamas being the organisers of the demonstrations. Hamas is an organic actor in Gaza, and it is and will be a part of any mobilisation against the occupation there - whether it initiates these movements or follows them.

The base of the movement comprises what can be termed "the Oslo generation". These are youth, mainly up to 30 years old, who grew up in Gaza during the Oslo years, who have never left the Gaza Strip and had minimal opportunities for a decent living.

Remember that Oslo was a cover for Israel to implement apartheid. Israel used the peace process to impose "closure" on the West Bank and Gaza to pen Palestinians in, particularly Gaza residents, and to take their lands.

The majority of Gaza's workers used to work inside the Israeli labour market, and almost everyone was thrown out of work and imprisoned in the economically unsustainable Gaza Strip because of "peace". A fence was built to hermetically seal the area in 1995 - at the height of the peace process - seven years before Israel built its apartheid wall across the West Bank.

So youth in Gaza have grown up isolated from the rest of the world, without opportunities for normal living, with a historical understanding of their refugee status and its causes and with the dashed hopes of the peace process.

Their parents would have witnessed or participated in the first (1987) Intifada (uprising), but have since witnessed the drastic deterioration of life quality because of the "peace process". These older people have also been protesting because the siege means that they cannot take care of their families; it is crushing new and old generations alike.

An Arabic news correspondent went to the buffer zone where the demonstrations were taking place and interviewed an elderly woman there.

He joked that most women of her generation would be at home making bread, and asked her what she was doing. With cold resolve, she responded, "My husband has been killed, two of my sons have been killed, another is in a wheelchair, and I don't care if a bullet hits me through the forehead".

People feel they have little to lose. Non-action is a form of certain slow death. Under these conditions, why not risk an active/fast death if there is at least a chance something can change?

Protests in the West Bank seem to have been more subdued. Is there a reason for this?

Israel has different interests in different parts of historic Palestine and therefore implements different strategies to realise its goals.

Gaza is the most intense of the theatres because it is the least important for Zionist aspirations. Gaza is the territory that former Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin - the Nobel Peace Prize winner - wished would "sink into the sea".

But the West Bank is different. Israel has key strategic interests there: the territory is much larger and contains strategic high grounds, important water reserves and the historical sites important for the Zionist movement to assert its mythology of "returning the Jewish people to the land of Israel".

This is why Israel used the peace process to "separate" from the Palestinians across the 1967 occupied territory, while investing in massive colony construction projects in the West Bank, tripling the number of settlers since 1993. Israel aims to annex these territories, uniting the conquests of 1948 with those of 1967.

In more recent times Israel and the Western states have tried to make the West Bank seem more prosperous compared to Gaza, to lessen the anti-Oslo political tendency manifested most coherently in Hamas.

The West Bank was given a carrot while Gaza was given the stick. But the logic of the arrangement was aimed at getting Palestinians to

believe that resistance was futile. While there were nominal improvements to economic conditions in the West Bank after 2007, the situation remains unstable. In recent years, economic conditions have worsened, and there is a no less brutal occupation regime, albeit administered differently.

The West Bank is also more difficult to organise. Israel is on the ground there and daily enters Palestinian cities and towns to conduct arrest campaigns. This does not happen in Gaza, which helps resistance experience and leadership to accumulate.

Israel holds around 7,000 Palestinian prisoners; the overwhelming majority of these are the political leadership of the West Bank. If they could organise, the West Bank would look different. Israel well understands this.

On top of this is the dynamic of Fatah, and in particular the majority branch of the party, which is loyal to Abu Mazen [Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas] and nominally in control of Palestinian governance in the West Bank.

As far as Fatah is concerned, the Palestinians have paid the price of armed resistance (winning recognition through it) while Palestinians should avoid a damaging frontal confrontation with Israel. Fatah believes this strategy will ultimately defeat Zionist ambitions because, if Palestinians survive and remain in Palestine, organised as self-identifying Palestinians, they will remain "the non-Jews" within the "Jewish democratic state" from an Israeli perspective. Fatah believes that this contradiction will eventually force either statehood or the collapse of Zionism.

So the Palestinian Authority and Fatah in the West Bank are not interested in a popular mobilisation that could threaten their hold on power and displace their claim to be the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian struggle. They are interested in the status quo and demobilisation. Thus, a debilitating, divided situation prevails across the Palestinian political sphere and within the West Bank in particular.

Where do you see the Palestinian movement in the broader context of Middle Eastern politics?

Historically, Palestine has been touted as the "cause of the Arabs". But it's been obvious to most that this hasn't been the case for decades, if it ever was. Palestinians have been left to their own fate, especially after Oslo. With the Arab uprisings of 2010-11, the limited support the cause received further deteriorated in light of local revolutionary dynamics becoming more important.

The Palestinian movement was fracturing internally around the same time, between the West Bank and Gaza, which created a crisis of representation and leadership. Popular forces across the Arab world remain in solidarity with Palestine. However, this solidarity cannot actualise in a context marked by the extreme counter-revolutionary forces and dynamics unleashed.

The counter-revolutionary waves unleashed have understandably preoccupied Arab revolutionary actors, further isolating the Palestinian theatre from its natural periphery. But this is temporary; it will not last indefinitely. Eventually revolutionary dynamics will reignite across the region because the old regimes have no answers to the questions the revolutions posed.

Meanwhile, we are witnessing unprecedented Arab state collusion with Israel - represented most vividly in Saudi-Israeli rapprochement, but also unprecedented Egyptian-Israeli collusion. Egypt has even invited Israel to bomb the Sinai with its fleet of drones to squelch the local opposition movements there.

The Arab states seek to team up with Israel and the Trump administration to counter Iran - but also any perceived local opposition to their rule. These dynamics are debilitating for the Arab revolutionary currents, particularly without a larger progressive movement and network to sustain it.

The Middle East and Palestine feature within a central axis of world trade, energy and political conflicts. This means that any genuine democratic

forces in the area must counter a substantial number of reactionary elements of the world order, with their

local manifestation. The stakes in this respect couldn't be higher.

04 June 2018

Red Flag

“Sooner or later, there will be a new financial crisis’

10 June 2018, by **Éric Toussaint**

In an interview to *The Hindu*, Mr. Toussaint, who was recently in Sri Lanka for a regional seminar on debt, spoke on the risks of banks engaging in speculative activities.

Charging regulatory authorities of being “very lenient” with the banks, he said that governments and regulatory authorities were supposed to moralise the banking system, separate commercial banks from investment banks, end exorbitant salaries and bonuses, and finally finance the real economy. “Instead... all we have had is a long list of misappropriations that have been brought to light by a series of bank failures and big scams.”

The CADTM is an international network of activists working on cancellation of illegitimate debt. Based in Belgium and Morocco, its activists work on developing alternatives to help communities tackle the pile up of debt, with particular focus on the global south. Mr. Toussaint's book “Bankocracy”, published in 2015, drew global attention for its analysis of the role of banks and governments in enlarging public debt.

Now, he warns of a “new crisis”, consequent to a series of misjudgements in policy in recent years.

Central banks “the U.S. Federal reserve, the European Central Bank, the Bank of England, the Bank of Japan” implemented a policy of Quantitative Easing, injecting a lot of liquidity into banks, and buying “very toxic” products like mortgage-backed securities and asset backed-securities.

While the central banks bought such products, giving banks “a lot of money” in return, the banks did not lend it to producers or households. Instead, they used it for further speculative activities leading to “a new bubble” in stock markets for about four years.

“It is absolutely evident that the capitalisation of the stock exchange is totally exaggerated, that it does not correspond with the real value of the assets of the big corporations. Sooner or later, there will be a new financial crisis,” he said.

Private debt

There is also a big concern with the private debt of big financial and non-financial corporations, with their indebtedness increasing tremendously in recent years. “There is a new bubble in this segment of the financial market and that is another possibility of crisis.”

On the banking sector crisis in India and the demand from sections for its further privatisation, Mr. Toussaint said the problem does not come from the public character of the banks, but from them having adopted a behaviour similar to the private sector's.

“The public banking sector, like the private banking sector, is in favour of secrecy and doesn't want to be controlled. The challenge for us is to improve and to materialise the public character of the banking sector” and in the case of India, to defend the public banking sector, but to change it profoundly.”

“Socialisation of banks’

Mr. Toussaint advocated the “socialisation of the banks” where citizens, the banks' employees and local authorities control the activities of banks. “The public banks should intervene in the local economy and help it develop and coincide with the needs of the people.”

On microcredit and its presence in Latin America, Africa and Asia, he said there was a huge propaganda campaign and very strong institutional support “right from the World Bank to most national governments” to microfinance.

From his research, he found that there were more than 120 million borrowers of microcredit loans, 81% of whom were women.

“My visit... has showed me how fast the microcredit industry developed its activity in the country after the end of the war in 2009 and how brutal it could be – it is impossible for people to repay a debt if they should pay 40% to 60% interest rates.”

Excerpts from the interview:

In your book *Bankocracy*, published in 2015, you talk about how governments and banks across the world are colluding to dramatically increase public debt. How do you view the crisis now?

First, it is very clear that the big banks in the US, North America, Western Europe did not clean their

assets. They were supposed to clean their balance sheets reducing toxic products they hold, to reduce non-performing loans, to increase the ratio between their equities and their overall assets. In reality, they did not take the necessary decisions to do that and to stop very dangerous and speculative activity. Regulatory authorities were supposed to strengthen their control on the banks, but we saw in the last two years that they are very lenient with the banks. Governments and regulatory authorities were supposed to moralise the banking system, separate commercial banks from investment banks, end exorbitant salaries and bonuses, and finally finance the real economy. Instead of a moralising of the banking system, all we have had is a long list of misappropriations that have been brought to light by a series of bank failures and big scams.

During Obama's Presidency, the US Congress adopted a law – the Dodd-Frank Act to strengthen the regulation and control on the US banks. And now Trump is dismantling it and eliminating the few policies and regulatory measures taken in the name of the Dodd-Frank Act.

Second, the central banks – the US Federal reserve, the European Central Bank, the Bank of England, the Bank of Japan – implemented a policy of Quantitative Easing: it consists of injecting a lot of liquidity into the banks, buying very toxic products like MBS (mortgage-backed securities) and ABS (asset backed-securities). The central banks bought these products from the banks and gave them a lot of money in exchange. But these banks did not use it to lend money to producers – small or middle level producers or households. They are using this money to increase speculative activities – for instance, to buy back their own shares in the stock exchange. This has led to the development of a new bubble in the stock exchanges for around four years. There is a real risk of a new stock market crash in the near future. It is difficult to predict when this will happen, but it is absolutely evident that the capitalisation of the stock exchange is totally exaggerated, that it does not correspond with the real value of the assets of the big

corporations. Sooner or later, there will be a new financial crisis. There is also a big concern with the private debt of the big financial and non-financial corporations. The debt of these corporations increased tremendously in the recent years, so there is another bubble in the segment of corporate bond markets. These bonds are issued by big corporations to borrow money on a long term basis.

There is a new bubble in this segment of the financial market and that is another possibility of crisis. The previous big crash on the bond market happened in 1987. In the future, we will probably have a crisis in this sector which will be stronger and more dangerous than what happened then.

Coming to the Committee for the Abolition of Illegitimate Debt (CADTM) and the work you have been doing. You say that a lot of existing debt is illegitimate debt, taking into account where the funds go, whether it is used for the majority of the population's requirements. When we take the question of debt, internationally or nationally, governments or banks are seldom willing to share information, it is at times guarded with secrecy legislation. They are not very transparent about where the money goes. In India, it is only after the Right To Information Act in 2005 that citizens are able to demand some information. How do we get a real sense of this illegitimate debt?

There are many instruments to get the information, even though it is clear that the banks and the public authorities try to avoid disclosure of such details. Nevertheless, you can find a lot of data on the internet. The problem is to correctly interpret the information given on the websites of the Central Banks. We can also use the information given by the research departments of several big banks, investment firms and auditing firms like KPMG, PwC, etc. The challenge is to convince more and more citizens of the necessity of trying to understand how debt is used for which purpose, at which interest rates, who exactly receives the money, what were the conditionalities imposed by

multilateral institutions like the World Bank, ADB, IMF. It is important to analyse these contracts and the conditions imposed by the creditors, and to understand the real sense of the policy implemented by the governments. They can say: "We are borrowing money for that purpose", when in reality they use it for another purpose. As CADTM members, our challenge is to help the citizens trying to question the accumulation of debt in order to reach a conclusion about the legitimacy or illegitimacy of debt.

For instance, in collaboration with the President in the Greek parliament, the CADTM coordinated the truth committee on public debt in Greece. The CADTM has an international network, published a manual for the citizen to audit the debt, participated in the audit of debt in Ecuador in 2007-08, and then in Paraguay in 2008. In Spain, we work with new political forces coming from citizen mobilisations like the anti-austerity movement organised around public squares in 2011. After they defeated the traditional parties in many municipal elections, these forces are willing to enforce citizen debt audits. Despite the willingness of these new political forces, we are convinced that this objective can only be implemented under the pressure of popular movements – this is the meaning of our work there.

The massive level of public debt reduces the capacity of public authorities to guarantee to citizens the satisfaction of human rights at the level of education, health, security, jobs. Therefore, tackling the problem of the huge amounts of public money used to pay back the debt is vital if we want to free major parts of the budget to satisfy the needs of the people.

You are saying that huge amounts of public debt weaken public institutions, governance etc. Could you talk a bit about the possible political fallout to this trend? In the last few years, in many parts of Europe and elsewhere, we see ultra nationalist forces gaining more political ground. Is there a link between the financial crisis, the weakening of public institutions due to mounting debt and the rise of the ultra-right?

Yes, it is clear that there is a link. At the same time, I am not sure that the general trend is always in favour of right wing policy. It depends on the situation. In Europe and in North America it is clear that the majority of the citizens are not satisfied with the traditional parties.

Right-wing parties succeed in gathering popular support denouncing the [current economic] situation and proposing nationalist, chauvinist, racist, anti-migrant policies. But at the same time, when real progressive forces try to explain to the citizens another alternative they can gather important support. An example of that is Jeremy Corbyn's campaign in Britain last year. The Tories precipitated the elections thinking that they would have a victory one year after Brexit. As a militant on the left of the Labour Party, Corbyn proposed a radical policy of nationalisation of the railways, of the postal services, of finding a solution to the problem of student debt, of the debt of municipalities and defending an anti-racist, internationalist position. The votes in favour of the Labour Party increased and he won 30 seats in the parliament while Theresa May lost 13 seats! Now the Left is gaining space in Britain and right-wing parties are not.

In the US, the situation was contradictory. If the Democratic Party had decided to support Bernie Sanders as a presidential candidate, it would have won the election against Trump. In the eyes of the people, Hillary Clinton represented the establishment. Trump represented a possibility of change and Sanders too – if Sanders had been selected by the Democratic Party he would surely have been victorious, given that Sanders's engagement in favour of the people is clearly more authentic than Trump's theatrical gesticulations.

It is clear that so-called right-wing populist campaigns are gaining space because of the scandalous evolution of finance and the influence of the big corporations and bankers on the traditional parties. But the situation is not so much in favour of the right when the left is capable of presenting another perspective. Then, the left really has the possibility to be

victorious.

In the wake of the banking sector crisis in India - marked by huge scams to the tune of billions of dollars - many economists, policy makers argue that there has never been a better time for further privatisation of the banking sector. Do you think that would work?

The real problem is that the current public banks are not really acting in favour of the majority of the population. The problem does not come from the public character of these banks, but from them having adopted a behaviour similar to the private sector's. They are not taking the responsibility of service to the public upon themselves. And there is a lack of citizen control on the public banking sector. The public banking sector, like the private banking sector, is in favour of secrecy and doesn't want to be controlled. The challenge for us is to improve and to materialise the public character of the banking sector – and in the case of India, to defend the public banking sector, but to change it profoundly. It should stop speculative activities and clientelism and it should give loans to households, to municipal authorities for useful projects to improve the economy and living conditions of the population. I am advocating the socialisation of the banks. It means that the citizens, the banks' employees and the local authorities should control the activities of the banks. The public banks should intervene in the local economy and help it develop and coincide with the needs of the people.

In Sri Lanka there is an increased awareness about microcredit and indebtedness. Is this a trend in the global south? It seems prevalent in South Asia.

Microcredit is extending its activities in Latin America, in Africa, in Asia, everywhere in the global south. There is a huge propaganda campaign and very strong institutional support – right from the World Bank to most national governments – to microfinance, which is depicted as the solution for the poor through their connection to the market. Big private banks are more and more involved in microfinance. We can really speak of

an industry of microcredit. It is internationally developed, supported and organised. You have now more than 120 million borrowers of microcredit loans in the world and 81 per cent are women.

But why is it more widespread in the global south, almost as if it targeted these countries that have aspirations for development?

On the global scale, two billion adults don't have yet a bank account, and most of them live in the global south. Microfinance aims to connect these adults to the financial markets. Microcredit is the link to connect them to the globalisation of the economy. It is a tool to incorporate them fully to the capitalist system or the mercantile system.

When we spoke about the rise of the ultra-right, you said it was possible for progressive forces to present an alternative. You have also said earlier that there is a need for working class movements and trade unions to widen their struggle to incorporate questions on indebtedness.

Yes! We on the left decayed since Thatcher and Reagan came to power in the beginning of the 1980s. There has been a general offensive of big capital against social rights. The traditional working class has been affected. More and more workers or employees have a very precarious job. The sector of the working class which is in the formal sector is a minority in most of the countries – you know it in India. This trend is also true in countries like the USA and a majority of countries in Europe – precarious, part-time jobs increase. More and more people are indebted, because the wages are going down. To maintain the possibility of consumption, more and more people get indebted.

It was very clear, for instance in the US, with the subprime crisis. After the explosion of the subprime crisis in 2006-2007, 14 million indebted families in the US were evicted from their homes.

My visit to Sri Lanka has showed me how fast the microcredit industry developed its activity in the country

after the end of the war in 2009 and how brutal it could be – it is impossible for people to repay a debt if they should pay 40 to 60 percent interest rates. Giving micro loans at this rate is creating a condition of over-indebtedness. People have to take more microcredit loans to pay back previous ones. It is a vicious cycle which causes tremendous problems for the victims of this

situation, a majority of whom are women. It is incredible to listen to the testimonies – women telling us that microfinance agencies are giving loans to people who have no earning. It is impossible to repay a debt without any earning, so they will lose the few assets they can have – if they have a house, a small land where they cultivate vegetables, they will lose them to pay back the debt.

Both in the global north and in the global south, the challenge for the workers' movements is to take into account the question of private debt of the households, because it is more complicated to participate in social movements and in strikes for people who are under enormous pressure because they need to repay their debt.

[The Hindu](#)

Karl Marx: India's freedom struggle too was influenced by Marxism

10 June 2018, by **Prasenjit Bose**

After the Russian revolution of 1917, Marxism emerged as one of the most influential political ideologies which shaped world events throughout the twentieth century. It not only inspired socialist revolutions in countries like China, Cuba and Vietnam but also influenced the national liberation movements against colonial rule in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Many of the key actors in India's freedom struggle too were influenced by Marxism to varying extents, from the early revolutionaries of Bhagat Singh's HSRA and the Communist Party to leftwing Congress leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhash Chandra Bose and others. This legacy was carried forward in different ways in the post-independence era, through development planning, building public institutions to attain self-reliance and more radical initiatives towards asset redistribution in states where powerful movements of the workers, peasants and deprived sections could create popular, democratic alternatives relatively autonomous to ruling class influence.

The diffusion of Marxism in India has been significant, but often in synthesis with progressive indigenous philosophies, which is not surprising given its immense cultural diversity and complex social structure, where class exploitation is enmeshed with

oppression and exclusions based on caste, gender, language and religion.

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the USSR towards the end of the last century, however, had led to a decline in the appeal and impact of Marxist ideas. The advent of finance-driven globalisation from the 1970s also saw a concomitant rise of neoliberalism as the hegemonic ideology across the world. Not only did socialism of the twentieth century become passé, but social-democratic welfare capitalism too was rolled back to make way for the unrestrained movement of finance, goods, services and technologies across the globe. History had come to an end, we were told, with a rapidly flattening world sounding the death knell of Marx's prognoses.

It has not taken long for such bourgeois triumphalism itself to fall flat on its face. The financial crisis originating in the Wall Street precipitated the Great Recession in 2008, from which the global economy has not been able to recover even after a decade. The incipient trade war between the two largest economies of the world today are reviving the memories of the Great Depression.

Growing inequality of wealth and income, which preceded the global

crisis, have continued to grow more menacingly, with resources getting concentrated in the hands of the billionaire oligarchs and the condition of labouring classes becoming increasingly precarious. With joblessness already at dangerous levels, a new wave of automation driven by robotics and artificial intelligence is already set to make millions of manufacturing and service sector jobs redundant in the near future. Meanwhile, aggravating pollution of air, water and soil, climate change and other degradations underline the worsening environmental crisis.

All these contemporary developments forcefully vindicate Marx's critique of capitalism – concentration of capital and impoverishment of the workers; economic crisis owing to the anarchic nature of capital accumulation, under consumption and speculative bubbles; labour-saving technological change continuously enhancing the size of the reserve army of labour and primitive accumulation of capital inflicting deadly wounds on society and nature. Moreover, for hugely populated countries like India, China and other developing countries, with a major proportion of the workforce outside the formal capitalist sector, the rate of exploitation remains much higher than the advanced capitalist world, alongside higher levels of

underemployment and informality; the rise in inequality is also more stark, annoying and potentially destabilising.

Therefore, on the bicentenary of his birth, the ideas of Marx not only remain distinctly relevant but are also likely to gain wider currency, as the gap between the promise of universal prosperity through globalisation and the actual experience of joblessness, insecurity and deteriorating living standards, widens for the younger generation in the workforce. It may transiently be possible for the purveyors of false consciousness to keep a lid on the systemic malfunctioning by conjuring up delusions of grandeur and provoking hatred or conflicts based on race, religion or caste, like the far-right

demagogues in power, from the US to India, are doing at the moment. But sooner or later, the truth that human conditions can only be changed for the better, not through divine interventions, but through collective human actions, should begin to prevail.

During his lifetime, Marx's revolutionary energies were mainly directed at analysing and critiquing capitalism, for a fledgling proletarian movement. The "greatest head" could not undertake the recondite project of envisioning a post-capitalist society in realtime and working out a transition path. The socialist experiments of the last century committed a fundamental flaw in disempowering the proletariat,

and concentrating all power – political and economic – in the hands of the party-state apparatus. The workers and peasants got gradually marginalised in the soviets, the nomenklatura took over.

If the current renewal of interest in Karl Marx has to graduate into a reinvigoration of the proletarian movement, Marxism needs to be freed completely from its twentieth century straightjacket, and opened up for critical inquiry, especially with regard to participative and democratic forms of socialist construction. In the Indian context, this would imply a serious engagement with the thoughts of Ambedkar and Gandhi.

[National Herald](#)

So Trashy! A Review of EU Waste Management and Inequality Modeling

9 June 2018, by [Ana Tomicic](#)

More than 40 million tons of this waste are classified as "hazardous waste." Nearly 60% of the waste produced consists of mineral waste and soil, most often from construction and demolition as well as mining activities. Approximately 30% is produced by manufacturing, trade, energy, services and agriculture, meaning that waste production generally increases at rates comparable to those of growth.

About 10% is "municipal waste" – in other words, waste generated mainly by households and to a lesser extent by small businesses and public institutions such as schools and hospitals.

If we convert these numbers into kilos, in the year 2015 each European produced 477 kg of municipal waste, taking into account the garbage as well as the waste of the communes (including the sewage sludge). According to the 2017 figures of Eurostat, the statistics office of the

EU, these numbers are "down by 9% compared with its peak of 527 kg per person in 2002, but slightly up, for the first time since 2007, from the 474 kg recorded in 2014." On the other hand, this data hides gaping disparities, since a Dane produces about 790 kg of waste, against a Romanian's 250 kg, with the UK being close to the average of about 490 kg.

Although this downward trend may be linked to EU waste management policy measures, experts argue that it is still largely a result of the global economic crisis that the EU countries have experienced in recent years. Looking at the total number of members, 18 countries reduced the amount of waste, 9 increased it, while Malta remained at the same level. Evidently, we must encourage this downtrend if we want to avoid being swamped by rubbish, as there is no doubt that the method of waste management currently applied is unsustainable, harmful, expensive and ecologically disastrous. Besides simply

producing less trash, the EU has drawn up a strategy to incentivize sorting out our waste, recycling, composting, raw materials, etc., in the form of waste legislation. By 2020, each member state will be required to recycle 50% of its municipal waste.

Throughout the EU, an increasing amount of waste is already being recycled, and less and less sent to landfills. More specifically, over the past decade, recycling and composting have almost tripled, incineration doubled, and the amount of waste that ends up at landfills has decreased by 59%. However, revealing disparities still exist.

The total amount of communal waste per capita varies considerably from country to country, depending on patterns of consumption, economic wealth, demographic trends, but also ways of collecting and managing waste. In fact, while Bulgaria is dumping all of it into landfills, Denmark is the front-runner in terms

of incineration, with 54% of its waste ending up in smoke. Germany is at the forefront of recycling (48% of municipal garbage), and Austria is the champion of composting (40% of its waste). Austria's records are unrivaled, with 70% of its municipal waste being recycled or composted. At the end of the ranking are Croatia, Lithuania, Malta, Bulgaria and, bringing up the rear in terms of sustainability, Greece, far from the average. Also ranking among the states with the worst record in the implementation of waste legislation: Cyprus, Romania, Latvia, Italy, Estonia, Slovakia, Czech Republic and Poland. The reason: identified shortcomings include the absence or inadequacy of waste prevention, lack of incentives to prevent waste landfills, and inadequate waste management infrastructure.

Almost all Eastern EU members are therefore tormented by waste. Croatia, for instance, has long been waiting for a national strategy, and only two of the 13 announced waste management centers have been built. In the meantime, we are required to sort out half of our waste by 2020. During a lecture on waste management organized by the Croatian progressive party Radnička Fronta (*Workers' Front*), the influential environmental activist Vjeran Piranić warned that the European Court of Justice will impose penalties if Croatia doesn't meet its commitments:

"Hungary pays €27,316 per day; Bulgaria €15,220 per day; Poland €67,314 per day! Greece has already paid €10 million, and will need to keep paying €14.52 million every 6 months until they meet the new requirements. Italy paid €40 million and will keep paying €42.8 million every 6 months until it fulfills those demands. If we do not adopt a plan, Croatia will pay fines as well. But what is worse is that we will not have a waste management system."

An economy of circular

exploitation

In December 2015 the European Commission adopted an ambitious circular economy package, including a EU Action Plan with measures covering the entire life cycle of products, from the design stage to supply, production and consumption up to waste management and the secondary raw materials market.

But what happens when member states do not comply with these measures?

While recycling is a priority for the EU, not all of its member states accord it such importance. In Croatia for example, 77% of waste ends up in landfills, which is the most expensive and the most ecologically harmful solution. On top of these costs, however, the Court of Justice of the EU intends to impose fines of tens of millions of euros on the Union's laggards for failing to meet their waste management obligations, forcing these countries to good standing.

The Commission registered 45 infringements in 2010, coinciding with the entry into force of EU legislation. Italy has committed thirteen, Greece seven and Ireland six. An appeal against Slovakia and a fine for non-compliance with the Court's judgment of April 2013 require it to ensure that decisions concerning the operation of the Žilina-Považská Chlmec waste disposal site are taken in accordance with Union rules so as to avoid any serious risk to human health and the environment. In 2014, the Court again imposed on Greece a lump sum fine of €10 million for its failure to close the illegal dumps envenoming its territory.

To make up for the millions in EU fines, bills for communal waste management services (delivered by local governing units and paid by their citizens) will double at best, but possibly quadruple. Still, if they do not sort out their waste properly, "careless" citizens will end up being fined again themselves by the communal guards of their towns and cities - an absurdity given that these fines are issued by the same

governing bodies that the EU has earlier disciplined for ecological misconduct.

The EU's refusal to develop genuinely common policies to help new, peripheral members reduce their economic drawbacks in comparison with the core countries, is largely responsible for structural discrepancies that work against the process of European integration. It also justifies protests from the European periphery against its constant subjugation to the decisions made by the hegemonic core.

If you still think of EU funds as help, think again. First, the EU fund system *factually* serves to leverage the capital of the developed core of Western Europe (in countries such as Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, etc.). Croatia for instance is still paying more to the EU than it withdraws from EU funds and is by no means the only peripheral country thus affected. The money that Croatia gets as "aid" is actually its own money; only now, Brussels is controlling into whose hands the money goes and how it will be spent.

Second, money from EU funds destined for better waste management is likely to come through pre-financing - meaning that the city will first have to raise the loan, and the funds will only be returned subsequently. The catch, of course, is that the loan can in principle only be granted from private foreign banks. And, with 95% of the "peripheral" banks actually owned by Western European banks, this policy, of course, favors capital in the developed Western European core.

What about the tendering of projects of waste management infrastructure? The periphery will surely profit from this in terms of economic growth, one would think.

Not quite. In the Croatian capital, in the current context of the EU-promoted restructuring of waste management, the reforms will be enormous given that Zagreb is a big market. Accordingly, there is potential for huge profit from the purchase of waste containers, trucks, sorting lines, etc. However, given that the western, core countries are much more

developed, their economies stronger, and so their incentives are bigger – and in the free market, the stronger candidate always comes out ahead – it will likely be western companies that benefit from these reforms.

In this light, it seems peripheral European countries, such as Croatia, always turn out to be the financial losers even when they are entitled to EU funds for beneficial projects such as sustainable waste management. In the meantime, while the same pockets will be getting filled, the quality of our air, water and food is at its lowest wherever we might live, core or periphery. Because if our economy might not be circular, the biosystem very much is.

How green is the green core, really?

Given the right education and sufficient infrastructure, most citizens will sort their waste – the issue is that cities have nowhere to dispose of it afterwards. As standards for waste treatment or disposal are less stringent in a number of countries from the Balkans, Eastern Europe, Africa or Asia, where treatment or disposal is less expensive, it is there that the life cycle of unwanted waste from the European center usually comes to a halt. However, the transfer of waste from a country with high environmental standards (and expensive treatment) to a country where standards and costs are lower is obviously not a viable long-term option globally.

The almost entirely unregulated ship-breaking industry is exemplary of the ways in which a national economic power can result in a global ecological null set. The rich North regularly brings unknown quantities of toxic waste aboard end-of-life vessels sent to India to be dismantled and to get rid of its ships full of asbestos, PCBs, lead, mercury, and other toxic chemicals no other European country was willing or able to securely dismantle. Instead, they have it broken up by hand in a scrapyard where impoverished workers are injured and die every day. Hazardous products including dead batteries,

arms waste like empty shells and cartridges, toxic substances, waste oil and carcinogens like asbestos are making their way to the 7,600-km-long Indian coastline, posing a serious threat to hundreds of fragile ecosystems along the shores. Large quantities of this poisonous jetsam from various European countries have been discovered in shipping containers across eight major ports in the country. Most of these highly dangerous goods, many highly inflammable, were part of consignments declared as plastic or newsprint. Moreover, millions of tons of old electronic goods are illegally exported to developing countries, as people dump luxury items.

The North unilaterally strengthens its environmental policy by requiring firms located in its territory to reduce their level of pollutant emissions. For its part, the South does not change its environmental regulations: we are thus in a typical configuration where the South practices passive ecological dumping. Within the EU, waste gets dumped to Europe's trash cans, from the UK, France or Italy to Albania, Romania and Poland. "Dirty business", a recent documentary produced by SkyNews exposes how the export of plastic recycling toward *pollution havens*, where both land and labor are cheaper, is much more lucrative than processing it locally in the North. But in reality, no one really checks whether plastic is really recycled once it leaves European shores. Although it is often consigned to landfill, the shipment of plastic is often registered as recycled by the exporter and therefore counts towards EU recycling targets.

The process of globalization has the effect of reducing the transaction costs of trade in industrial goods. And while waste generation is one of the best indicators of our progress towards sustainable development, market capitalism makes it incredibly difficult to make truly helpful sustainable choices. Firms located in the North are then confronted with a binary choice: either to meet these new standards by undergoing an increase in their fixed environmental cost, or to circumvent the new legislation by relocating their activity to the South. In other words, the

process of globalization sensitizes firms in environmental dumping and thereby affects the effectiveness of unilateralism in environmental policy. Globalization, by accentuating the intensity of the offshoring effect increases the likelihood that Northern environmental policy will paradoxically be accompanied by a worsening of global pollution.

Conclusion

Waste has a direct impact on the quality of life, public health and the environment. It also represents a huge loss of valuable natural resources, materials and energy. Although the reduction or prevention of waste is actually the first and most important step in responsible waste management, a major emphasis is put on the other phases of its processing. Given the priorities, in relation to the costs and risks of harmful effects on the environment, by order of importance after prevention comes recycling, then processing and the least desirable – disposal. When looking at Eurostat data on trends in waste management in the EU from 2005 to 2015, great progress has been made – in numbers, with the EU's directives having the main merit. But despite the good averages in the Union, dumpster countries will continue to be underdeveloped peripheral land – only perhaps slightly more ecologically conscious.

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Left East

The new government and the challenges for Unidos Podemos

8 June 2018, by Jaime Pastor

On May 24, 2018, by chance a day after the approval of the budget proposed by the governing PP in the Congress of Deputies, the National Court finally ruled on the Gürtel corruption network. It found in 28 crimes of prevarication, 24 of bribery, 26 of money laundering and 20 of tax evasion, and handed down long sentences against a significant number of people linked to the PP, such as the former treasurer Luis Bárcenas, the entrepreneur Francisco Correa, the former mayors of Majadahonda and of Pozuelo de Alarcón, as well as the former PP organisational secretary in Galicia.

The judgement recognises what has already been obvious for a long time: that over the years, Correa's companies and the PP had woven together "a genuine and effective system of institutional corruption through mechanisms of manipulation of public procurement at the level of the central state and autonomous and local communities through its close and continuous relationship with influential militants of the said party"

This devastating sentence left no doubt, including for the centre right Ciudadanos party, of the criminal character of the PP and the responsibility of Rajoy as president of the latter. The decision by Pedro Sánchez to present a motion of no confidence appeared as an initiative without hope of success but which was

necessary to respond to the need for simple democratic hygiene, demanding that the most corrupt party in Europe leave government.

Finally, despite uncertainty right until the last minute over whether Rajoy would resign, the Basque PNV party decided to vote for the motion, in exchange for respecting an austerity budget which had just been approved as well as the absence of early general elections. These votes allowed the motion to obtain an absolute majority.

There is no need to stress the different interventions in the debate, but it is interesting to note that once the result was announced, Pedro Sánchez, who seemed to have practically vanished from the scene except for his role as part of the bloc which imposed article 155 in Catalonia, emerged strengthened without however being able to hide his dizziness before the huge challenges faces now.

The big loser on the other hand is Ciudadanos' leader, Albert Rivera, with 32 deputies in the legislature, blinded by the polls which presented him as the winner the next general elections. He has had to endure frustration, at least until the municipal and autonomous elections of 2019. His Spanish ultra-nationalist project, seasoned with a pro-EU neoliberalism of the Macron type, cannot sustain itself so easily in opposition, at least outside of Catalonia.

Unidos Podemos appeared as the firmest defender of the motion of no confidence and thus shared in the success, to the point of proposing to govern alongside the Socialists. As for the Catalan nationalist parties, ERC and PDeCAT, as well as the Basque left nationalist coalition Bildu, they connected with the desire to eject the PP. This allows them now to force Pedro Sánchez into a bilateral dialogue to stop the judicialization of the conflict, knowing that on this front the PSOE leader, subject to the close surveillance of the party barons and old guard, can only promise fine words.

The PP, on the contrary, is baffled, faced with a new scenario which it did not expect, and enters a new stage of refoundation which will probably be again directed by Rajoy. Certainly the PP is not the UCD [Union of the Democratic Centre, a formation resulting from the Francoist party, together with parts of the state apparatus to which other forces were added, which under the leadership of Adolfo Suárez "steered" the transition before disappearing in the early 1980s]. There is no reason to expect a decomposition in the short term, but this could begin following the first elections due, in Andalusia in March 2019, in the event that Ciudadanos gets more votes than them.

In any event, from now on, constrained by the competition with

Ciudadanos, its process of refoundation and construction of a new leadership will be accompanied by a vehement opposition to the new government, notwithstanding truces to allow a common defence of the state and particularly Spanish unity in the face of separatism. The two formations, PP and Ciudadanos, will be egged on by the media opposed to Catalan and Basque independence, ready for a dirty war if necessary to give no respite to Sánchez.

What can we expect from the new government? And from Podemos? The outline of the program so far seems to focus on modest but urgent measures, many of them vetoed by the PP government, such as those related to the Gag Law, the universalization of health care or the renovation of the management of the radio and television network. However, its announcement of a social rescue does not seem able to go very far due to its commitment to respect the austerity budgets which the same PSOE had tried to amend in their entirety. As for its willingness to dialogue with the Catalan independence movement, this would imply, in addition to initiating

the de-judicialization of the conflict, ending the economic control of the government of the Generalitat, something that also seems absent from their plans.

Thus, it is possible that we find ourselves with a new version of what has been proposed as a model by the Socialist parliamentary spokesperson, Margarita Robles: the stage of the governments presided over by Rodríguez Zapatero, between 2004 and 2011. In short, to compensate for the limited room for manoeuvre at the socio-economic level, given the commitments - harsher now than at that time - to the European Stability Plan and on the question of the national-territorial fracture -also very aggravated since then - between 2004 and 2011-with emblematic measures in the field of liberties and social welfare that will help them face the upcoming electoral battles with some recovery of their credibility before a part of the electorate that has abandoned them in recent years.

If, in addition, this government is under pressure from the powerful lobbies inside and outside - the bosses

and the banks who are already demanding that it does not bring in major reforms, especially in relation to employment law, and that it does not introduce new taxes -and because of the hostility of PP and Ciudadanos to any gesture of detente with the Catalan independence movement, appealing to mobilization in the street as they did with Rodríguez Zapatero, Pablo Iglesias is right when he argues that Pedro Sánchez is going to form a weak government.

The problem is that the best way of dealing with this reactionary bloc, is not to offer to be part of that government, as Pablo Iglesias has already hastily done. On the contrary, Unidos Podemos (UP) should reaffirm itself as the political force that, in parliament and together with the social movements, is willing to reach agreements as far as possible with the PSOE from outside the government, as is the case in Portugal, and, form an alternative bloc firmly determined to respond to the attacks of the right and simultaneously, to force Pedro Sánchez to go beyond moderately regenerationist and social-liberal measures. [