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31 July 2018, by **robm**

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Heatwave: A very serious warning!

31 July 2018, by **Daniel Tanuro**

The result of only one degree of global warming

The moment is therefore well chosen to draw attention to the following fact: what is happening now is the result of global warming of only 1°C of the average surface temperature of the Earth compared to the pre-industrial era. One small degree is therefore enough to generate phenomena as disturbing as forest fires in Sweden (not so long ago it was in Siberia...), floods in the Philippines (recently it was in Pakistan), and temperatures so high in the big cities of India that, if it continues like that, any human activity could become impossible for a good part of the year, for physiological reasons!

We are talking about average surface temperature. As the joke says, the guy who has his feet in an oven and his

head in a fridge can have an average temperature more or less normal. Nevertheless, this person may be, let us say, in very poor health... It is the same thing with the climate system. For a number of reasons, global warming is fastest in some parts of the northern hemisphere, especially over the Arctic. Recently, in northern Finland, a temperature higher than 30°C was recorded. In Greenland - but also on the Antarctic Peninsula - the warming observed for several decades is two to three times higher than the global average...

Another look at the Paris agreement

But let's get back to that global average. One degree, I was saying. What is happening before our eyes thus allows us to begin to imagine what would be the meaning of the

global warming of 2.7 to 3.7°C that the specialists project for the end of the century in the hypothesis that all countries would respect the promises made in Paris, during the COP21. (NB: This hypothesis is optimistic: look at Trump!) Such a level of warming would be absolutely catastrophic. Conclusion: The current commitments are totally inadequate. But we already knew that. What we did not know, on the other hand, or not enough, is that staying below 2°C in relation to the pre-industrial era is almost as inadequate. In any case, such a level of warming would not allow us to avoid very big problems.

In Paris, the governments set themselves the goal of staying "well below 2°C and continuing efforts not to exceed 1.5°C" of average global warming. This double-trigger formula is kind of bizarre. What is the key objective: 2°C or 1.5°C? The lawyers are discussing the issue. In addition, it is an objective on paper, with no real constraint. Finally, as has

just been pointed out, there is a gulf between this paper objective and the reality that the commitments made by governments are preparing for us, as part of their "nationally determined contributions". In view of the consequences of the current warming – of only one degree, I insist – the conclusion is imperative: it is vital, essential, not to exceed 1.5°C and to cool the planet to the maximum. The \$64,000 question is this: is this objective still achievable?

Temporarily exceed 1.5°C?

The Royal Society has recently devoted an extensive publication to this subject. It comprises more than fifteen contributions by renowned experts [1]. What emerges is indisputable: in the capitalist, and therefore productivist, framework, 1.5°C of global warming will be exceeded in a few decades. It goes without saying that the venerable Royal Society does not formulate things in these terms; I am making a translation for you. To judge the reliability of it, suffice it to mention that, according to the most radical estimates (not the only ones, but all the same!), the amount of carbon that could still be injected into the atmosphere without exceeding 1.5°C (what is called the "carbon budget") would correspond to... four years of emissions at the current rate. So, we are literally more than ever on the razor's edge, and global emissions continue to increase...

Some of the authors published by the Royal Society therefore imagine a temporary overrun of 1.5°C, subsequently compensated for, by the end of the century, by artificial cooling. This cooling would be induced by having recourse to "negative emission technologies" (technologies that could remove carbon from the atmosphere). This is mainly bio-energy with carbon capture and sequestration, i.e. the use of biomass as an alternative energy source to fossil fuels, coupled with burial in the Earth's crust of CO₂ produced by combustion...

I have already said all the bad things

that I thought about these "negative emissions technologies". It is not ruled out that mankind will be ultimately forced to resort to this, to avoid something worse, but, basically, these technologies come down to putting off to the future the problem of infinite growth on a finite planet. There is only one of these "technologies" (it is not really one) that is fully acceptable – and even advisable, immediately: the generalization of organic peasant agriculture of proximity, also including quality forestry – focusing on the absorption of CO₂ and the protection of biodiversity, showing respect for (and under the control of) populations, particularly indigenous ones. All the rest is geo-engineering solutions that do not dare to say their name, tricks of apprentice sorcerers...

We are really playing with fire... and ice!

A very strong argument against the supporters of the temporary overrun with later compensation is developed by one of the authors in the publication of the Royal Society. It consists of simply pointing out that during the overrun period the climate system can cross tipping points with very serious consequences, which no ulterior compensation will be able to erase. It is here that the information on super-warming in areas such as Greenland and the Antarctic Peninsula becomes fully understandable. This super-warming, in fact, unfortunately makes it very possible – not to say probable – that the overrun period will cause a qualitative acceleration of the dislocation of the ice caps in these regions. But if the ocean levels rise by one metre or more (that is a low estimate!) before the end of the century, no negative-emitting technology can do anything about it afterwards...

Let us note in passing: in terms of rising ocean levels, we cannot be content with projections on the horizon of 2100: in reality, the increase corresponding to a warming of a given magnitude will inevitably continue for about a millennium, with significant effects for at least three

hundred years. Let us take an example: according to one of the contributions published by the Royal Society, a warming limit of 1.5°C in 2100 would result in 2300 in higher ocean levels than those caused in 2100 by warming without any mitigating measures!... (This increase, according to the authors, would be more than 80 cm, but we should be careful: this figure does not include the contributions of the phenomena of dislocation of the ice caps, which are impossible to predict and to model!).

Sound the tocsin everywhere

It must be repeated once again: the situation is extremely serious and urgent. It is a total illusion to believe that capitalist governments will be able to provide the necessary answers. On the one hand, these responses can only be anti-the advocates of growth, anti-productivist, therefore anti-capitalist, and urgency necessitates that they be of great radicality. On the other hand, it is enough to see what these governments are doing concretely for the moment and we will have understood: they are working to revive growth through austerity against working people, they are working to revive the arms race (production that is useless and harmful par excellence!) To support this growth, they are working to help "their enterprises" (those of their capitalist friends) against the competition, they are involved in driving out migrants. (Whereas their policy will force hundreds of millions of people to migrate to escape the consequences of climate change). Incidentally, they are also dealing with the various scandals of corruption and abuse of power which inevitably accompany their neoliberal policies... Concretely, on a daily basis, the current climate change is the least of their worries. The Belgian government's 2019 budget is perfectly representative of this detestable reality.

The way forward is more than ever that of the popular struggle, of the most massive mobilization, the most decided and the most unitary possible. Next October, the IPCC [2] will

publish its special report on 1.5°C. In November, the COP will have on its agenda the key issue of additional measures to bridge the gap between the Paris objective and the nationally determined contributions of the governments.

Those are two opportunities to take to the streets all over the world, in millions and tens of millions. Take to the streets to demand that all means be mobilized and that those responsible for the mess pay in order to stay under 1.5°C of global warming in a framework of social justice. Take to the streets to demand

the immediate cessation of unnecessary and harmful production (with retraining of the workers concerned). Take to the streets to demand public plans to drastically reduce energy consumption and organize a rapid transition to renewables, involving the expropriation of the multinationals that control this sector and the banks that finance their criminal investments. Take to the streets to support the peasant unions fighting against agribusiness and the indigenous peoples fighting to save the forest. Take to the streets for freedom of movement and installation,

against the rising barbarity. Take to the streets to demand the right to live of orangutans and all species threatened with extinction by the destructive madness of capital.

The climate change caused by the race for profit is at the heart of a crisis of civilization. The time has come to dare to opt for an ecosocialist and ecofeminist civilization, a sober civilization that loves and cares for the Earth. As we (especially women, patriarchy imposes it!) take care of our children. As the peasants take care of their vegetable gardens in permaculture.

Nicaragua in Pain

30 July 2018, by **Claudio Katz**

Events of recent months leave little room for doubt. A series of social protests has been brutally repressed. Some 350 from only one side have died at the hands of police or paramilitary forces. In all cases there was gunfire against unarmed demonstrators, who responded to or escaped from the onslaught as best they could.

Information from numerous sources concur in describing an escalating barrage of gunshots at point-blank range, producing at first a handful of deaths and then nearly 60 by the end of April. This tragedy was not interrupted when negotiations began. To the contrary, the dialogue was marked by a further 225 such crimes.

There is no justifying such savagery. Official statements (and the voices raised in their support) provide no proof of the "terrorist actions" that they impute to the victims. Nor have there been any significant losses on the government side, and no evidence of the use of firearms on the part of the opposition.

These events have not only been denounced by supporters of the fallen. A vast range of witnesses and a broad gamut of journalists have

corroborated the accounts. But most important are the authorized voices of former Sandinista commanders and leaders, who have verified what has happened with on-the-scene reports. Their denunciations have great credibility and coincide with the outlook of foreign participants in the revolution. Their judgments have added importance in light of their deep knowledge of the actors in conflict.

The bloodshed unleashed by Ortega's government parallels the reaction of any right-wing president. It has been the typical state violence against the discontented. In face of such atrocious behavior, a movement that had begun with some basic demands was quickly transformed into democratic resistance to repression. The original demands about social-security reforms were sidetracked in face of the Dantesque spectacle of hundreds gunned down by the regime's gendarmes.

To raise one's voice against this crime and demand an immediate end to the repression and the prosecution of those responsible is the first duty in face of these events.

Endless Involution

The initial protests against a social-security tax increase found great support among the population. This reaction pointed up the discontent brewing in diverse sectors. People were becoming annoyed at how official policies were diverging from the government's revolutionary past.

Orteguismo ("Ortega-ism") bears not the least affinity with its origins in the Sandinista movement. Ortega has made strategic alliances with the business class, adopted economic measures demanded by the IMF, and strengthened ties with the Church after imposing an outright ban on abortion. He has consolidated his bureaucratic hold over business enterprises that originated in the appropriation of public goods.

Under Ortega's direction a clientelist electoral system has been put in place. Continued use of old Sandinista emblems and discourse obscures this qualitative change, which reproduces the involution that other such progressive processes have undergone.

Long before its evolution into a simple

network of gangsters, the Mexican PRI had already buried its legacy of agrarian transformation and nationalist traditions. The same occurred with the MNR in Bolivia, which for many years behaved as a reactionary party despite its origins. Such examples of political regression – now reprised by Ortega – extend to other Latin American parties that have completely discarded their original socialist or anti-imperialist aspirations.

But repression consummates a still more irreversible turn. It transforms a bourgeoisified formation into an outright enemy of the left. Cold-blooded killings by its police apparatus mark the final break with any progressive outlook. Such a regression has occurred in Nicaragua in the last few months.

There are significant differences with the Venezuelan case, which is rooted in the persistence of a Bolivarian process that confronts the right wing and defends sovereignty in a context of unheard-of adversity. Facing an interminable succession of guarimbas, [3] Chavismo has done battle against coup attempts, paramilitary incursions, and provocations by groups trained by the CIA. It has committed many injustices and harassed certain popular fighters, but its principal problem has been the destabilization promoted and financed by imperialism.

What is happening in Nicaragua is quite different. The protests were not stage-managed from Washington but arose from below against reforms demanded by the IMF and took shape thereafter in a spontaneous way to defend rights that were under attack. Nor did the principal conservative figures – who have forged any number of pacts with the regime – provoke the rebellion. The demonstrations have gathered up a wide gamut of the discontented, under the guidance of students and the Church. The various currents among the latter are not following a uniform playbook, and the students are grouped in a number of different factions, some led by the left and others by the right.

This movement originated with a low level of politicization but began to

adopt clearer positions in face of the repressive attacks. Its positions were solidified upon the collapse of the dialog that the government first accepted verbally and then boycotted in practice.

Seeing the Whole Picture

Among all the statements distributed in recent weeks, the approach adopted by Manuel Cabieses Donoso, a well-known Chilean revolutionary leader, has some unique merits.

Cabieses Donoso upholds the legitimacy of the protests, denounces Ortega's betrayal, and challenges the complicit silence on the part of many progressive currents in face of the repression. But he calls attention as well to the way right-wing forces are trying to utilize the protests and points out that the United States will take advantage of the conflict to undermine the Ortega regime. He affirms as well that a section of the population continues to support the government, and therefore calls for a peaceful solution in order that the local bourgeoisie and its imperialist master not be the beneficiaries of Ortega's eventual downfall. [4]

This approach synthesizes quite well moral outrage at the massacres with recognition of the complex situation that has arisen in the country. While Ortega has not hesitated to make pacts with all the reactionary forces, the United States still seeks his ouster. It cannot tolerate the autonomy Nicaragua has maintained in its foreign policy. The country not only belongs to ALBA and has close ties to the Venezuela government. It has also sought to build an inter-oceanic canal with Chinese financing – right in the “backyard” of the region's principal imperialist power.

As shown during the coup against Zelaya in Honduras, and more recently in Guatemala, the United States treats the small Central American countries as second-class colonies. It won't accept the slightest indiscipline from these nations. For that reason it has already begun reaching out to coopt the leaders of

the protests and line them up behind a future imperialist puppet that would replace Ortega. The meetings that several student leaders had in Washington with ultra-right anti-Castro legislators (along with similar meetings in El Salvador) mark the most visible episodes of Trump's latest operation.

Failure to recognize the preparations for aggression would amount to inadmissible naivete. The same Ortega who is brutally attacking the people is viewed by the State Department as an adversary to be buried. Such contradictions have been frequent in history and need to be taken seriously by the left when it comes to taking a position. It is vital to avoid joining the campaigns of the OAS or Vargas Llosa's calls to involve the US Southern Command.

Dangers and Definitions

That Ortega's FSLN still enjoys the support of a section of the population is evident from the results of the last election. But Cabieses Donoso does not base his argument for a peaceful solution on that fact alone. Negotiations would make it possible to avoid transforming the current revolt into a wider confrontation, with terrible consequences in the number of victims as well as on the national and geopolitical level.

Events in two Middle Eastern countries provide grounds to fear such an outcome. In both Libya and Syria governments were in power that had progressive origins but had degenerated to the point of unleashing repression against militants and their populations. Qaddafi jailed Palestinians and Assad fired on his people indiscriminately. In each case the prospects for extending the Arab Spring ended in major tragedies. The Libyan state practically disintegrated amid greedy disputes between rival clans. Syria had a still more dramatic outcome in that first the protests were co-opted by Jihadists and then the country suffered the worst humanitarian disaster in recent decades.

The historical realities and the political situation in the Middle East and Central America are quite different. But imperialism acts with the same objectives of domination in both regions. It destroys societies and dismantles countries without a second thought. Had it won the contest in Venezuela, the country would be a cemetery comparable to Iraq, and the oil wealth would be in the hands of the big US energy companies.

For these reasons it is crucial to not forget at any moment who is the principal enemy. A peaceful solution in Nicaragua is the best way to avert the danger that the imperialists will make use of the conflict. The mechanism for such an outcome is quite available in the calls for dialog and negotiation of early elections. This approach avoids equating the government with a dictatorship and demanding its fall.

In recent weeks tensions seem to have

diminished, not because of steps forward in the negotiations but rather due to deepening repression. Ortega has managed to achieve a respite by means of the whip. But his conduct has created an unbridgeable gulf with the rebellious youth. His divorce from the left is definitive. The revolutionary traditions of Sandinismo will rise again, but on the side opposite from Ortegaismo.

Source *New Politics*.

A necktie for Tsipras and a noose for workers

29 July 2018, by **Antonis Davanellos**

True to his word, when he appeared at the Zappeion monument in Athens to publicly announce a new agreement after meeting with the Eurogroup in Luxemburg, Tsipras was sporting, you guessed it, a tie!

Tsipras was sending a clear message from the SYRIZA-ANEL government that its policies since 2015 have been a sort of success story “even if they prolonged and deepened austerity cutbacks enforced beginning in 2010” by finally bringing an end to the hated Memorandum period in which the Greek economy was bled by the Troika.

Of course, Tsipras’ attempt to launch a convincing public relations campaign is doomed to fail because it clashes so sharply with reality.

Hiding behind demagogic claims about a supposed “end of the Memorandum,” the Greek government must follow the Memorandum’s austerity policies for an inconceivably long duration “in fact, a whole historical epoch.

The Eurogroup agreement, in fact, didn’t even match up with the hopes of Tsipras’ negotiators. The “French proposal,” offered by the “not too radical” President Emmanuel Macron, to link repayment of the debt with GDP growth by recalculating mechanisms “supposedly to reduce

the amount of installment payments, based on the strength of the Greek economy” has been tacitly abandoned.

In practice, the decision could be summed up as an “extension” of deadlines for just one-third of the debt “the European Financial Stability Facility’s 96 billion euros in loans made under the second Memorandum” and the creation of a cash reserve that should allow future governments to cover repayment obligations in case Greece’s much-heralded return to international financial markets proves impossible after all is said and done.

THE DECISION is calculated to meet the requirements of Greece’s creditors and the European Union.

On the one hand, it allows them to declare that, henceforth, “no European country remains under a Memorandum.” This is an attempt to reinforce the image of a cohesive European Economic Area, with a view to preparing for the open conflicts brought on by Trump’s protectionism and threatened trade wars.

On the other hand, it protects their interests concretely, and over a long period.

The creation of a treasury reserve was deemed necessary based on the calculation that the SYRIZA-ANEL

government’s prediction of rapidly raising money on the international financial markets is very exaggerated.

A few weeks ago, following a political crisis in Italy, the 10-year interest rate for Greek debt securities reached 4.84 percent “about the same level as before the bankruptcy that opened the way to the first memorandum of 2010-11. Following the release of the Eurogroup decision, it fell slightly to 4.14 percent, but this is still a prohibitively high level.

The so-called “grace period” of 10 years for payments on interest and principal on the European Financial Stability Facility’s 96 billion euro loan “no gift since it adds a decade of interest for creditors” comes on the condition that it facilitates repayments on the total debt, extending the Greek debt crisis to 2032 (instead of 2022 as had been previously discussed) and prolonging European supervision over the Greek economy.

One mainstream newspaper, the Tribune, reinforces this conclusion with quotes from anonymous “experts” who claim that “the deal is clever. The Germans did not give much to Greece, just the bare necessities to get the country out of the danger zone in the medium term. We [Greek financial markets] will need them again in 2032, if there is no quick economic recovery.”

In return, the Tsipras government gave in on the following points:

1. A commitment that the totality of laws signed within the framework of the Memoranda “the reforms and counter-reforms of the entire eight-year crisis” will remain in place without any modification (including secondary changes), even after the supposed end of the Memoranda. What Tsipras describes as an exit from memoranda is, in fact, the transformation of neoliberal counter-reforms contained in the three Memoranda into permanent measures for decades to come!

2. A commitment to enforce further, extremely rigorous austerity measures, including: additional pension cuts beyond those slated for 2019; higher taxes paid mainly by ordinary people; abolition of a ceiling on non-taxable income starting in 2020; an increase of the ENFIA property tax by means of an “adjustment” to real estate evaluations; the demolition of even rudimentary social protections by reducing social security benefits in 2018; and again, an intense program of privatizations that includes the public electricity company (DEI), the water distribution system in Athens and Thessaloniki, and all public lands with considerable market value.

3. A commitment to tighten future economic and social policy within the restricted space provided by the agreement on primary fiscal surpluses, calculated before paying interest on the debt, which will relentlessly push society deeper into neoliberal barbarism. The agreement stipulates that Greece must generate a surplus of 3.5 percent of its gross domestic product until 2022, then an average of 2.2 percent for an additional 37 years, that is, until 2060!

Even those economists who have consistently supported the Memoranda note that no other country in history has ever aimed to generate surpluses of this magnitude for such a long period.

Yet Tsipras isn’t worried, even if the Greek experience of the last eight years shows that these surpluses are paid for in workers’ and poor people’s

blood. The creditors aren’t worried either, since the Eurogroup agreement sets up a draconian mechanism for monitoring and guaranteeing surpluses: quarterly audits, compliance reports, mechanisms mandating additional costs in case budget targets aren’t achieved.

It looks like a fourth Memorandum...hot on the heels of the third.

AS WE have noted before, this agreement presupposes a more or less rapid transition of the Greek economy toward a state of perpetual growth. Where need be, the agreement permits drastic intervention by creditors “first in 2022, and then, probably even more dramatically, in 2032” to mold the Greek economy to their purposes.

Moreover, while IMF Director Christine Lagarde and European Central Bank President Mario Draghi both claim that this agreement is considered viable in the medium term until 2032 “thereby allowing Greece to operate in international financial markets” they still maintain that Greek debt is not viable in the long run.

In fact, it is likely that problems will emerge sooner, since the agreement is not based on economic forecasts, nor does it facilitate growth.

Tsipras’ commitment to generate surpluses at 3.5 percent of GDP means that public investment, the traditional instrument by which “growth” is achieved by Greek capitalism, may not be increased. Worse, it will be reduced.

In response, high-ranking officials are already promising private investments, and Tsipras emphasizes that they will not hesitate to facilitate them. Despite wiping out wages and workers’ rights, investment by Greek capitalists remains at just 30 percent (!) of pre-crisis levels.

N. Christodoulakis, a former government minister from the social-democratic PASOK party in the 1996-2004 Kostantinos Simitis administration, reports a “lack of investments to the tune of 100 billion

euros in Greece today.” He went on to propose reducing primary surpluses to 1.5 percent of GDP, so that remaining fiscal resources could be directed towards “investment in production,” which might spur economic growth.

Given all this, Tsipras will be quickly forced to understand the value of the left’s historical insistence that the only viable debt policy is to repudiate it.

From the point of view of the working and popular classes, SYRIZA’s agreement with the creditors and the Troika constitutes a serious danger. Accepting that private investment, domestic and international, are the sole hope for social progress can only lead to absolute surrender to the appetites of capital.

Wages, pensions, social spending, labor law, environmental protection, public spaces and social rights in a broad sense will come under additional pressure. The “sacrifices” required will be increasingly barbaric, and the results will be even more uncertain than compared to the first Memorandum “which promised an end to the crisis in...2012!

Faced with this policy, we must persistently insist on social organization and re-launching major struggles to challenge it.

Meanwhile, the conservative New Democracy party, led by Kyriakos Mitsotakis, and the far right Golden Dawn party have tried to build a mass nationalist movement by vilifying Macedonian national identity and sovereignty.

They are presenting a rather “soft” face at the moment. They condemn Tsipras’ “failed moves,” while trying to take advantage of popular discontent with the governmental policy. But they are careful not to criticize the core of Tsipras’ policy provided in the agreement because, for the right “both the mainstream conservatives and the neo-fascists” the voice of capital has always been “the voice of God.”

Under these new conditions, the burden to resist and overthrow this government falls once again on the radical left.

July 19, 2018

Source socialistworker.org. This article was translated from Greek to French by Sotiris Siamandouras for A

l'encontre and from French to English by Todd Chretien.

Against austerity, Brexit and Fortress Europe

28 July 2018, by **Ian Parker**

Corbyn recognises well that the EU is a neoliberal power-bloc intent on privatisation, and very willing to collude with the US over trade deals like the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership which would have put the National Health Service and other welfare bodies in jeopardy. Socialist Resistance, the Fourth International in Britain, called for a “remain” vote because the polarised debate was characterised by an intensification of xenophobia, an analysis that was confirmed by an increase in racist attacks immediately after the result was announced.

The election of Corbyn as Labour Party leader opened up new possibilities for resistance to austerity, with the Party increasing its membership, mainly among young newly-politicised activists, to over half a million; it is now the largest mass-membership social democratic party in Europe. This has had consequences for activists, including those from Socialist Resistance, who were active in the small “left of Labour” party Left Unity (which was formed after a call by Ken Loach to defend the National Health Service as one of the historic gains of the working class). There are some marginal groups of revolutionaries who still stand outside Labour giving advice to Corbyn, but

the main struggle now is inside the Party.

Members of Socialist Resistance are active in a new formation inside the party “Red Green Labour” which takes forward ecosocialist politics that characterise the Fourth International in Britain. This was a distinctive political position that enables us to connect with anti-fracking movements and a range of other pan-European and international projects building the basis for a sustainable socialist future.

Corbyn is pitted against a right-wing Party apparatus that is intent on sabotaging his leadership. In the most recent Conservative ministerial crisis over the negotiations with the EU (in which Minister for Brexit David Davis and Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson both resigned), leading anti-Corbyn MPs spoke against a General Election, calling for support for Prime Minister Theresa May. There are calls for a second referendum and, on the left, for a “People’s Vote”. The priority now is to transform this call into a General Election and a vote for Corbyn. This is what Socialist Resistance is mobilising for as part of the Labour Party in England, while operating independently in Scotland (where our comrades have consistently called for

independence and the weakening of the British State).

Corbyn spoke at the demonstration in London on 13 July protesting against the visit of Donald Trump, and in this mass mobilisation which brought together 250,000 people in London and many thousands more around the country, it was clear that many participants made a direct connection between Brexit and Trump. This was a demonstration against xenophobia and for free movement of peoples. Our struggle against austerity and for democratic rights for workers to organise takes place in sectors of industry; in catering and cleaning, for example, where migrant workers from Europe and beyond its borders are a significant part of the workforce.

The fight against Trump, and for a left-Labour government under Corbyn, is inextricably bound up with the defence of workers’ rights, and for links across Europe, and beyond Europe. Most of those who voted “remain” in the EU referendum voted for this spirit of international solidarity that also breaks beyond the limits placed by “Fortress Europe”. It is only on that basis that the left can change the political coordinates, from xenophobia to a united struggle against austerity.

Ali Wazeer; A Marxist in the parliament dominated by feudal and capitalists

27 July 2018, by **Farooq Tariq**

Ali Wazeer was one the main leader of Pashtun Tahafaz Movement and during this year, mass meetings were organised in major cities to raise voices for the fair compensation to the victims of the war on terror” and to demand the release of all “missing” persons or to bring them to the courts if they are guilty.

Two other leader of this PTM also contested for the national parliament and one of them Muhsin Dawer also won the seat after a close competition. Mohsin Javed Dawer got 16526 votes while Aurangzeb of Imran Khan PTI got 10422. However the MMA candidate Mufti Misbahudin MMA got a close 15363.

These two PTM leaders contested from South Wazeeristan, an area dominated by religious fanatics. However, a strong movement for civic rights of Pashtuns had cut across the influence of the fanatics and Pashtuns voted despite all the threats to elect their mass movement leaders.

Two main leaders of PTM presence in the parliament has given a hope to many in Pakistan that at least there would be peoples voices in a parliament dominated by feudal lords, corrupt capitalists and stooges of the military and judicial establishment.

Who is Ali Wazeer

Ali Wazeer is a very special person. His personal ordeal best illustrates what prompted his demands. Ali Wazeer was pursuing a degree in law at the turn of the century when his hometown, Wana, the headquarters of South Waziristan agency, became the epicenter of global terrorism when a host of Taliban-allied groups sought shelter in the communities.

No doubt the terrorists had some individual local facilitators, but ultimately it was the state that failed to prevent them from using the territory. When his father, the chief of the Ahmadzai Wazir tribe, and other local leaders complained of their

presence, government officials ignored and silenced them. Instead, Islamabad spent years denying the presence of any Afghan, Arab, or Central Asian militants.

By 2003, the funamentalist militants had established a foothold in South and North Waziristan tribal agencies and were attempting to build a local emirate. Ali Wazeer elder brother Farooq Wazir, a local political activist and youth leader, became the first victim of a long campaign in which thousands of Pashtun tribal leaders, activists, politicians, and clerics were killed with near absolute impunity. Their only crime was to question or oppose the presence of dangerous terrorists in our homeland.

In 2005, Ali Wazeer was in prison when his father, brothers, cousins, and an uncle were killed in a single ambush. He was there because a draconian colonial-era Frontier Crimes Regulations (FCR) law holds an entire tribe or region responsible for the crimes of an individual or any alleged crime committed in the territory.

Ali Wazeer had committed no crime, never got a fair trial, and was not sentenced, yet he was prevented even from participating in the funerals for his family.

In the subsequent years, six more members of his extended family were assassinated. The authorities have not even investigated these crimes let alone held anyone responsible.

Ali Wazeer and his family faced economic ruin after all of the notable men in the family were eliminated. The government failed to prevent the militants from demolishing his family owned gas stations. They later used the bricks to build bathrooms, claiming they were munafiqin (hypocrites) so even the inanimate materials from his businesses were not appropriate to build proper buildings.

His family-owned apple and peach orchards in Wana were sprayed with

poisonous chemicals, and tube wells were filled with dirt to force them to surrender to the forces of darkness.

In 2016, his family-owned market in Wana was dynamited after a bomb blast there killed an army officer which was an accident. They nevertheless destroyed their livelihoods under the FCR. After the demolition, the government prevented the local community “ mostly members of the Ahmadzai Wazir tribe “ from collecting donations to help them. They were told it would set an unacceptable precedent because the government cannot let anyone help those it punishes.

So all together 16 members of his family, including his father, two brothers were killed by Taliban during these years.

He was one of the main leader of Pashtun Tahafaz Movement, a civic rights movement for the rights of the victims of war on terror. Recently he toured around the country and organised mass rallies in Lahore, Karachi, Peshawar and Swat. Lahore Left Front was the host of Lahore public meeting which was formally not permitted by the authorities, we were not allowed to campaign, no posters stickers were allowed to be spread in the city, Ali Wazeer and seven more were arrested a night before the public meeting and after a massive immediate response, they were released before the rally. Yet, over 10,000 participated in this public meeting.

In April this year, dozens of Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) supporters were injured and 10 were killed as a result of an attack on PTM leader Ali Wazir by the “pro-government militants”, also known as Peace Committee.

However, the PTM sympathisers gathered to welcome Ali retaliated, upon which the militants fled, leaving Ali’s cousin and a Voice of America VOA journalist injured among others.

In an interview during April 2018, Ali Wazeer said,

"The past few months have transformed my life. Amid the agonies I have endured and the threats, suspicion, and accusations I face, the love, support, and respect I receive is overwhelming. Since February, when we began protesting to draw attention to the suffering of ethnic Pashtuns – among the worst victims of terrorism – I have learned a lot about the potential of ordinary Pakistanis. Their thirst for change is inspiring and heralds a peaceful, prosperous future we must build for generations to come".

During those difficult years, he didn't lose faith in mass movement and remained committed to politics of class struggle. He ran in the parliamentary elections in 2008 and 2013.

In 2013 general elections, his victory was changed into a defeat at gunpoint. He lost the election for just over 300 votes after the Taliban intimidated voters and tortured his supporters and campaign volunteers.

Amid the volcano of violence, thousands of civilians have disappeared, and thousands have fallen victim to extrajudicial killings. The leaders of PTM are profiled as suspected terrorists across the

country, face humiliation at security check posts, and innocent civilians face violence during security sweeps and operations. As the world's largest tribal society, the Pashtuns are known for their hospitality, commitment, and valor, yet they were falsely reduced to terrorist sympathizers despite the fact that they are their worst victims.

Ali Wazeer belongs to The Struggle Group, of Pakistan Marxists.

The group has joined Lahore Left Front, a united platform of several Left groups and parties. However, Lahore Left Front has organised some mass activities where Ali Wazeer participated.

The general election of 2018 was the most rigged election in the history of Pakistan. The society has moved further to the right with Imran Khan Pakistan Tehreek Insaaf coming to power. Imran Khan called Ali Wazeer prior to the elections and offered him PTI nomination from the area which Ali politely refused. However such a respect of Ali Wazeer that Imran Khan told him that in any case we will not put up our candidate against you.

Prior to the general elections, a whole sale rigging took place on the behest of the Establishment. PMLN candidates were threatened, forced them to change loyalties and so on. PTI had an open support of the most of the state institutions.

In this background when a more right wing party PTI, than the previous ruling party PMLN has come to power, a Marxist in the parliament will be a wave of fresh air from the stinking parliament.

Although other Left groups also contested including Awami Workers Party and had launched a tremendous election campaign, however, the election campaign of Ali Wazeer was of some special characteristics. He addressed every day few public meetings, went door to door with his meagre resources. Thousands cheered him all the times. We were all sure that he will win but were afraid of any incident that could cancel the elections from this constituency.

Ali Wazeer has opened the gates for the entire Left. He is loved by most of social activists as well, a sober person who is always down to earth in his presentation in workers' meetings but speaks like a lion when he is addressing the ruling class. A fearless class fighter who has emerged as the one of the most respected Left leaders in recent working class history.

European union: for or against?

27 July 2018, by Åge Skovrind

Voters' scepticism about the EU has been reflected in referendums on some of the country's opt-outs from the European Union. Since 1993, Denmark holds opt-outs from European Union policies in relation to security and defence, citizenship, police and justice, and the adoption of the euro.

Most recently, in 2015, a referendum was held on whether to convert Denmark's current full opt-out on

home and justice matters into an opt-out with case-by-case opt-in. Despite support from all major parties, it was rejected by 53% of voters. Also, in 2000, voters rejected the adoption of the euro by 52%.

Voters have always been much more critical than the political parties about transfer of power to the European level. That is why the major establishment parties, basically supporting the European integration,

are very hesitant to be too "EU-friendly" in order not to lose voters.

In Parliament, opposition to the policies of the European Union is notably represented by the radical left Red-Green Alliance (RGA) as well as the right xenophobic Danish Peoples Party (DPP). While the former underlines the Union's pro-capitalist policies in economic, environmental, labor, immigrant and consumerist areas, the latter bases its hostility to

EU on nationalist grounds and is notably critical of "welfare tourism" (i.e. EU citizens residing in Denmark getting social benefits), immigration and border control. While DPP is ensuring a parliamentary majority to the right government, its position on EU may be the main obstacle for full government participation.

On the other side, the RGA holds up an internationalist vision against the Union. It states as a goal to leave EU and until now supported the Peoples Movement against EU in European elections. The Movement has one MEP who is also a member of the Red-Green Alliance. However, in the upcoming elections in June 2019, the Red-Green Alliance will present its own slate in an electoral alliance with the Movement. In June this year, the party launched a common platform for the European elections in May next year together with La France Insoumise, Podemos, Bloco de Esquerda, the Swedish Left Party and the Finnish left alliance Vasemmistoliitto.

Announcing the platform, the spokesperson of the Red-Green Alliance, Pernille Skipper, declared:

"We need a completely new direction for Europe. And we need a co-operation between the countries based upon democracy, solidarity and sustainability. We will achieve this only with a strong European and EU-critical left movement capable of

delivering a response to the austerity of Merkel as well Macron and to the inhumane refugee policies of the right populists."

When millions of refugees came to Europe, "welcome committees" were set up in most Danish cities, providing legal and material support. These networks still exist but given the dramatic fall in the number of refugees arriving in Denmark, support activities have slowed down too. The political challenge is to stand up against the extremely merciless refugee policies adopted by the Danish government, even breaking international conventions. The refugee minister proudly announces on the front page of ministry webpage the number of tightening measures adopted since the government came to power in 2015 (now standing at 98). Most of these measures are supported by Social Democracy, thus hoping to take back some voters from the Danish Peoples Party. The party even supported the government not to accommodate 500 UN-stipulated quota refugees (as all Danish governments did since 1989)

Of course, solutions to the refugee crisis have to be found at international and European levels. However, opponents to the current immigrant policy are on the defensive and tend to oppose specific measures rather than focus on overall European solutions.

Generally, public attention goes to national rather than European policies, not the least because next parliamentary elections must take place not later than June 2019.

However, EU regulation on posted workers (i.e. EU residents working abroad) has been an ongoing issue for many years. There have been many stories about people from Romania, Poland and Lithuania being paid miserably (or not being paid), sometimes even forced to slave-like conditions. Unions are also anxious that low wages are undermining the gains accomplished in collective agreement with the employers. That is why they campaigned for a new EU regulation ensuring posted workers the same wage as workers of the country where they are posted.

This campaign was supported by the European Trade Union Congress (ETUC) and managed to push the EU institutions to update the directive, thus ensuring real improvements and wage corresponding to the country where you work. Only the formal adoption by the Council of Ministers is missing. Still, the consequences in real life remain to be seen. The constitutional EU "freedoms of movement" - by capital and by workforce - may undermine the rights of workers. That is why ETUC and others are now demanding a social protocol attached to Treaty itself as a necessary guarantee for workers' conditions.

Open Letter on Puerto Rico to the NAACP

26 July 2018, by Manuel Rodríguez Banchs, Rafael Bernabe

The 109th annual convention of the NAACP recently approved a resolution supporting statehood for Puerto Rico. The text refers to a similar statement adopted by its previous annual convention a year ago and ratified by its National Board of Directors in October 2017.

This resolution is a disservice to the struggle for decolonization in Puerto Rico and for equality for everyone in the United States. It should be critically examined by all groups committed to social justice in the United States to better understand Puerto Rico's situation and what a

truly just and democratic response to it could and should be.

The resolution is based on the results of a plebiscite sponsored by the administration of Governor Ricardo Rosselló in June 2017, in which statehood received 97 percent of the votes cast. But it fails to consider that

only 23 percent of eligible voters participated in this plebiscite. The ballyhooed 97 percent vote for statehood corresponds to around 22 percent of eligible voters. Supporters of other status options (independence, free association, a modification of the present status) denounced this plebiscite. Their call for voters to boycott this plebiscite was evidently successful.

The 2017 plebiscite was the fifth held by the government of Puerto Rico. Previous plebiscites were held in 1967, 1993, 1998 and 2012. The statehood option received 39 percent of the votes in 1967; 46.3 percent in 1993; 46.5 percent in 1998. In 2012, under statehood governor Luis Fortuño, it received 61.3 percent, but if the nearly 500,000 blank and defaced protest votes cast are counted as rejecting the options included on the ballot, the percentage of votes for statehood drops to 44 percent, close to the 46 percent received in 1993 and 1998. No overwhelming mandate for statehood exists, contrary to what the NAACP's resolution suggests. Why did the NAACP ignore so many in Puerto Rico that prefer options other than statehood?

However, consensus does exist in Puerto Rico that the present colonial status is unacceptable, which includes supporters of independence, free association and statehood. This is what the NAACP should have focused on, instead of endorsing statehood. It should have called for the decolonization of Puerto Rico. It should have called on Congress to respect Puerto Rico's right to self-determination. The government of Puerto Rico sponsored all the aforementioned plebiscites. Since Puerto Rico was seized during the Spanish-American War of 1898, not once—let us say that again—not once has Congress consulted Puerto Ricans on what status they prefer, be it independence, statehood or types of association with the United States.

It is sad, and offensive, that the NAACP gave such a warm welcome to Governor Pedro Rosselló and adopted a resolution to his liking. Governor Rosselló has distinguished himself as proponent of labor law reforms that erase worker's rights. His

administration is busy closing hundreds of schools in Puerto Rico, slashing in half the budget of the University of Puerto Rico and launching a brutal attack on public sector unions inspired by the recent U.S. Supreme Court Janus decision. Are these policies the NAACP wants to be associated with? Is this what it stands for in the United States?

After adopting the recent resolution endorsing statehood, the NAACP issued a "Puerto Rico self-determination statement" that states "Puerto Rico should be free to decide its preferred option in a fair and inclusive manner." This is a welcome statement, but it does not seem to rescind support for one status option. The NAACP should take measures to reaffirm its clarification as its central position: Puerto Rico's right "to decide its preferred option in a fair and inclusive manner."

But what does "a fair and inclusive manner" entail? The resolution adopted by the convention and the statement issued afterwards rightly denounce the inadequate response of the Federal government to the catastrophe caused by Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico. But this does not go nearly far enough regarding the failings of the Federal government in Puerto Rico. A true process of self-determination should call on Congress to address Puerto Rico's economic plight. It should urge Congress to adopt measures enabling Puerto Rico's economic reconstruction.

For well over a century, Congress has perpetuated a colonial relationship in which Puerto Rico's economy has been a source of major profits for U.S. corporations but has never functioned to provide employment for most of its workforce. A shocking 55 percent of Puerto Rico's children live in poverty, with Puerto Rico's overall poverty rate at 45 percent. Its per capital income is half of that of the poorest state. Unable to obtain employment on the island, millions have migrated to the United States, often joining African-Americans and other Latinos among the discriminated and exploited sectors of the U.S. working class.

Congress has further aggravated Puerto Rico's situation by eliminating

economic incentives, such as phasing out certain federal tax benefits. Make no mistake: these measures were never sufficient to promote economic development or employment. But Congress replaced them with literally nothing. Meanwhile, Congress has maintained the cap on some federal programs in Puerto Rico and has continued making the island subject to expensive U.S. coastal shipping laws. As in other countries and jurisdictions, including many major cities in the United States, economic stagnation led to growing government debt and fiscal crisis, which in turn is used to impose public sector cuts that most adversely affect working people and the poor.

In the case of Puerto Rico, these austerity measures are now imposed by a federally appointed, that is to say, unelected Fiscal Oversight Board created by the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management and Economic Stability Act. Puerto Rico's debt was unpayable before Hurricane Maria. To collect it now, after close to \$90 billion in damages caused by the storm, is criminal. The austerity measures inflicted by the Federal board will only prolong Puerto Rico's economic depression.

Therefore, real respect of Puerto Rico's right "to decide its preferred option in a fair and inclusive manner" should include the demand that Congress revoke PROMESA; maintain the stay on claims by creditors on Puerto Rico's public debts; recognize that the doctrines of change of situation and state of necessity justify canceling Puerto Rico's public debt; assign sizable funding for Puerto Rico's economic reconstruction, and take action for Puerto Rico's decolonization.

In many ways these demands are not unique. Extreme as it is, Puerto Rico's current condition cannot come as a complete surprise to people in the United States, and African-Americans in particular. Exploitation or neglect of the poor, deficit reduction as an excuse for cuts in public spending, unelected boards acting to destroy labor and social gains in the context of debt crises, are hardly exclusive to Puerto Rico.

Congress has often ignored and overlooked, indeed provoked and propitiated, much injustice in the United States (affecting workers, women, African-Americans, Native Americans, immigrants, among others).

The federal response to disasters in the United States, such as Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, has been slow, inadequate and discriminatory before.

Cuts in public spending and jobs, often by unelected boards, has been the formula applied against working people in dozens of budget crises, from New York City in the mid-1970s to Detroit in the recent past, and perhaps coming next to your city or

state.

Working and poor people in the United States face the impact of decades of corporate tax, fiscal, social and economic policies, to which we now add the racist and universally reactionary agenda of the Trump administration. Like Puerto Rico, they also need a vast program of economic reconstruction, geared toward job creation and meeting basic social needs. (We discussed this in our [Open Letter to the People of the United States-from Puerto Rico, a month after Hurricane MarÁa.](#))

The struggles of these communities in Puerto Rico and the United States must advance together. U.S. struggles

for economic, social and political justice, as well as to end discrimination based on race, religion, gender and sexuality, affects Puerto Rico directly, not the least because millions of Puerto Ricans live and work in the United States. Their circumstances cannot be divorced from those of other working, Latino, Native-American and African-American communities in the United States. And the struggles for justice in the United States must include decolonization and national self-determination for Puerto Rico, and at least partial reparation for the misdeeds of colonial rule.

We hope that the NAACP resolves to reflect on and rectify its position in this direction.

Stop inhumane policies against migrants!

25 July 2018, by **Fourth International Bureau**

The escalation of inhumanity

Trump's new attack on migrants from Mexico, Central America and other parts of the world seeking to enter the United States, has reached a shocking level of inhumanity. In recent weeks, especially in June, thousands of cases of children separated from their parents attempting to cross the border between Mexico and the United States through the implementation of the Zero Tolerance policy were made public. Thousands of children were put in cages, like animals, and then placed in detention centres in different and distant cities from the border points where their migrant parents were detained.

The protests, internationally but also very significantly within the United States, forced Trump to sign an executive order to stop this separation of children and parents. However, the period for reuniting these families has expired and thousands of children are still separated from their parents,

some of whom were deported during this period, while others have not been located and identified.

Even though Trump has signed the executive order to reunite separated parents and children (which has not yet happened), he has also reaffirmed the continuation of the "Zero Tolerance" policy in immigration - now entire families, even with children, will be locked up in detention centres before the outcome of a legal process, when they have already suffered extreme violence in their home country or on the road.

The torment for the migrants coming not only from Mexico and Central America, but also from countries further, such as Brazil, Haiti or even African countries, does not begin just when they cross the border into the United States, but all along the way there. Especially serious is the situation for migrants passing through Mexico as they are subjected to extortion, theft of their scarce resources or kidnapped by criminal gangs to subject women to prostitution and men as hired killers

or drug traffickers, if they are not killed on the road. From countries such as El Salvador, humanitarian caravans are being organized to travel through Mexico looking for relatives who have disappeared on the way to Mexico's border with the United States.

Between 2014 and 2017 at the south of Europe, more than 16,000 men, women and children died while seeking to cross the Mediterranean. On average, about 1 in 1,000 people trying to cross. In 2018 more than one in 50 people! Since January 2018, with the tightening of the closure of the maritime borders, 1,100 migrants have died by drowning. And at the same time the drama worsens upstream, in the desert or on the Libyan coast, and downstream, in the Alpine passes or in Calais.

These deaths are all crimes caused by racist policies towards migrants. And it is not only Salvini who has banned their arrival on the Italian coast. All European governments singing the same tune.

In Brussels, on 29 June, the leaders of the European Union unified by tightening their policy, obstructing the action humanitarian associations' boats and seeking to externalize the detention camps outside Europe, in North Africa or they Middle East: they assume the use of migrants as "scapegoats" for their crisis.

An ideological offensive articulated with reactionary policies

Mass media and mainstream politicians argue that the problems of hundreds of millions of people in Europe and North America - economic and employment difficulties, individual and social security, environmental living conditions - have a single obvious cause - the migrants that come from the global south. They ignore in so doing the vast movements of migrants between the countries of the global south, two thirds of overall migration. The numbers arriving in the North - representing there between 0.5 and 1.5 per cent of the population - could easily be assimilated. Compare this with Lebanon, for example, which with a population of around five million (including hundreds of thousands of Palestinians) has taken in more than a million Syrian refugees alone.

They argue that if wages are going down and unemployment up, this is explained away by the competitive pressures of migrants coming unregulated and illegally to the North. If there is not enough social housing at affordable prices, this is supposedly due to the demographic pressure of migrants in cities where they live in unacceptable conditions, lowering the living standards to which "our civilisation" is used. If crime is on the increase or if the feeling of insecurity and fear of terrorism is rising, then it is obviously the fault of migrants, particularly those coming from Arab countries or those with a large Islamic population.

There are many other examples of this type of argument. Everything else disappears into thin air once the "migrant emergency" is mentioned:

- the economic crisis that has already lasted ten years;
- the big increase in profits while wages have declined as a share of national income;
- the role of the multinationals - particularly those that are mainly American-, European- or Chinese-owned - in plundering the resources of the South (Africa above all);
- the crippling repayments of the (often illegitimate) foreign debt and the structural adjustment and austerity programmes imposed by the major international financial institutions;
- the environmental crisis and climate disasters caused by the level of consumption in the North and the unsustainable model of capitalist development now present in every corner of the planet;
- the continuing endemic armed conflicts in the South (particularly the Middle East and central Asia) where intervention by imperialist and regional powers is wreaking havoc and there is no shortage of arms, most of them produced by the countries which close their borders to migrants and refugees.

All these processes - engendered by the capitalist system itself - are in reality the principal reason, both for the social crisis in the whole world, and for the current wave of migration, but they evaporate in the dominant narrative and there is an ideological poisoning.

The European and US governments have forcefully chosen to close their borders and to control migration from outside their territory. They use willing governments in the South (such as in Turkey, Libya and Morocco) to externalise their borders and provide millions of dollars or euros for them to do the dirty work and deal with the refugees and migrants who might try to enter the European Union.

These policies are often justified as being an "antidote" to the possible growth of racism or by the supposed need to "regulate" migration.

Political and cultural positions which accept more open borders (albeit in a "regulated" way) because "we need them" to do jobs that are otherwise hard to fill from the "national" population, or to pay the pensions of an ageing society do not fundamentally break with the pattern of exploitation of humans.

Exploitation, segregation, racism

As often in the past, migrants suffer a double exploitation, especially in some "exemplary" sectors like agriculture, logistics or social care. Migrants' extreme vulnerability and social marginalisation facilitate their brutal exploitation in the labour market, which maximises the profits of small, medium and big national and multinational companies. Migrants find work through networks involving both entirely unregistered recruitment through illegal gangmasters and hyper-precarious contracts.

This migrant exploitation circuit is not a parallel network to the way in which "native" workers are treated. Indeed, the exploitation of migrants functions precisely because it is closely connected to the structures of general exploitation. The roles of workers (both migrants and "natives") are connected and reciprocally determined.

In this context, borders and immigration laws act as filters - allowing in mostly young and healthy workers, or those with special skills, while ensuring they lack the rights to defend themselves adequately against super-exploitation. They also provide spectacular images of hundreds of people crammed into unsafe boats or scaling high fences that are then interpreted as "avalanches" or "invasions".

Although the neo-liberal project aims to completely dismantle any legal or social regulations favouring working people, the racist hierarchy which structures the labour market means that some minor elementary supportive regulations are still for the

moment maintained for “native” workers. The latter directly or indirectly benefit from the hyper-exploitation of migrants, usually, though not always, without even being aware of it (just as with the gender structuring of the labour market).

Alongside this exploitative structure there is also segregation – such as:

- the “temporary” detention centres (inside and outside the European Union, the USA and Australia);
- the isolated, largely invisible, places where migrants work and live in the countryside with thousands of farm labourers living in appalling conditions;
- the racist segregation of whole neighbourhoods in the cities; marginalised and criminalised.

Within this segregation there is a whole range of legal and social situations which tend to be lumped together under the general term of “migrant”: undocumented workers, asylum seekers, refugees with humanitarian or international protection, immigrants with labour permits, the children and grandchildren of migrants. This makes up a hierarchy of conditions in which the question of their rights is totally eliminated and where they are divided between those who have some “privileges” (documents for example) and those who do not.

The reality of the social, material and cultural conditions of migrants in the countries of the North has also seen a growth in racism, xenophobia and Islamophobia. In recent years these extremely dangerous phenomena have taken on specific political forms that today threaten to become socially hegemonic and inform the policies of governments within the G7 (already in the USA and Italy, increasingly in France, Germany and Britain). Here we are talking about distinct organisations that have all been incorrectly dubbed as “populist”. However, they do have a common trait – they seek popular support by developing a narrative according to which migrants are the consequence of a policy pursued by a “global political/economic elite” with disastrous consequences for the “native” populations who are paying

the “cost”.

These organisations are often close to neo-fascism, with attacks on individual migrants and entire communities – the cyclical re-emergence of anti-Roma campaigns is an example.

Faced with this situation, those governments who define themselves as liberal cannot and will not really do anything to make it better. They are incapable of responding with policies of open borders or guarantees of peoples’ rights. These governments are responsible for destroying the welfare state and are the main allies of the multinationals and the financial centres that are the main causes of the economic crisis. They have not put in place any real projects to welcome or provide asylum for those wishing to come to Europe or the USA.

Anti-capitalist alternative and social and political solidarity with migrants

The only effective response is to refuse to consider migration as a “problem”, but to meet the social needs of millions of women and men, migrants and “natives”. We demand that the richest countries are host countries, as are the other countries of the world. The organisations and activists of the Fourth International seek to play an important role in building such a response. In many cases they are already involved in the front line of the anti-fascist, anti-racist battles, and in support of migrants. This work should be focused around the following fundamental points:

â€¢ We demand the right to migrate: freedom of movement and settlement. As internationalists we believe it is a fundamental right of every person to be able to live with dignity and enjoy all the political and social rights of the country where they reside. At the same time, migration must be a freely chosen option. However, millions of people are forced to migrate to escape misery, poverty, war, environmental disasters, the lack of prospects and so on. They should all have full rights, including, but not limited to, the right to asylum for those fleeing war and persecution. We reject the division between so-called “economic” migrants and refugees.

This is the priority in every country – especially those where there is greatest repression of migrants – and all left organisations should fight for the granting of full rights to all migrants, with particular attention to those, such as women, racialised people, LGBTI individuals, Muslims and minors, suffering from other forms of discrimination and oppression.

â€¢ We seek to build anti-racist and anti-fascist movements, not only as part of a cultural battle, but also as a political mobilisation against the agents of both institutional and social racism. The cultural and political aspects of this struggle are inseparable. In order to counter discriminatory and racist ideology, work on the cultural and educational levels is vital. But it is also crucial to take up the social struggles to regain rights and power for working people making visible in practice the connection between racism and the workings of capitalism.

â€¢ We support migrants’ self-organisation and struggles, starting from their specificity and particular demands, but looking to make the necessary links to questions of class, gender and racist discrimination and showing how this is a single interconnected process.

â€¢ We take on board the experiences of mutualism between the exploited and discriminated and their common struggles – either through building social and trade union struggles including workers of every type or through collective projects such as self-managed housing schemes, labour cooperatives, solidarity associations and informal mutual economic and social aid groups.

â€¢ As internationalists we consider that freely chosen migration and the mixing of populations is of positive benefit to societies. Building links between popular and social movements in the countries from which migrants come and those where they settle is a vital part of developing movements of resistance to capitalism and indicating the possibilities of a new world based on solidarity and mutual aid.

Rice Becomes Less Nutritious If There's More Carbon Dioxide in the Air

24 July 2018, by **T.V. Padma**

Rice could produce fewer proteins, vitamins and minerals essential for humans in response to rising carbon dioxide concentrations that are implicated in global warming, new research assessments from 10 countries that consume the most rice has shown.

The findings not only confirm previously reported declines in protein, iron and zinc levels but also offer additional information on consistent declines in vitamins B1, B2, B5, and B9 and – conversely – an increase in vitamin E in rice produced under higher carbon dioxide conditions.

And they add to the general concern over global warming impacting food and nutritional security. Up to one billion people are already deemed “food insecure”, the report observes. For example, estimates show an overall decline of 20-40% in harvests of staple cereals such as rice and corn in tropical and sub-tropical regions by 2100. [5]

Reduction in vitamins

Rice supplies approximately a quarter of all global calories, and is the staple source of calories and nutrition for low- and lower-middle-income Asian countries. [6]

As of 2013, approximately 600 million individuals across Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam depend on rice for more than half of their dietary energy and protein. [7]

The scientists’ evaluation spread over multiple years, locations and widely-grown rice varieties, at both current (ambient) carbon dioxide levels and

under the levels anticipated in 2100 (568-590 micromoles per mol). They assessed how rice’s nutritional components changed with carbon dioxide levels. The scientists also assessed the socioeconomic impact of these changes for the 10 highest rice-consuming countries in terms of the GDP per capita.

The results showed that cultivated rice varieties grown under field conditions of higher anticipated carbon dioxide levels showed a “significant” decline, averaging a 10.3% fall in proteins, and similarly “significant” reductions in iron and zinc at 8% and 5%, resp.

The scientists also found significant reduction in vitamins B1 (thiamine) at 17%, B2 (riboflavin) at 16.6%, B5 (pantothenic acid) at 12.7% and B9 (folate) at 30.3%. This is the first time we have such quantitative patterns to work with.

“The nutritional data reported here for elevated carbon dioxide confirm that deficits in protein, zinc, and iron may occur even among genetically diverse rice lines grown in different countries,” the authors write in their paper.

Dependence on one crop

“Nine major micronutrients are already missing in the rice and wheat we eat today” in India, according to Rajeswari Raina, a professor at Shiv Nadar University and former principal scientist at the National Institute for Science, Technology and Development Studies, New Delhi. “The carbon dioxide-induced changes will be more widespread.”

Add to that the fact that most rice-

eating regions in India except in the coastal areas are traditionally protein-starved, and poor women who eat less rice, proteins and fewer vegetables will be the worst-hit in India, Raina told The Wire.

Policymakers have historically responded to such problem as less nutritious cereals through fortification programmes. However, Raina believes India should “bring back the range of its other cereals – maize, millets and minor cereals” instead. They are hardier and can withstand dry conditions and water deficits better. Such a move would also introduce a measure of diversity instead of relying on one crop.

Several food policy experts have recommended similar changes in food production to make up for nutritional deficiencies. For example, a 2017 paper observed that “volume-focused production policies should be complemented by stronger efforts to secure nutrition rich production, i.e. evaluating and selecting crop varieties, fish and livestock based on their nutritional content.”

This requires that we develop new ways to measure the nutritional yields of crops and production systems.

The new study does note that one can’t assume that dietary patterns will remain unchanged in the future. As economies improve, people start diversifying to protein from fish, dairy and meat, and adopt more western-style foods.

In Japan, rice accounted for 62% of the total food energy consumption in 1959. By 1976, it had fallen to 40%. [8] In the last few years, the fraction has been hovering around 20%. In South Korea, the amount of rice consumed per person has almost halved since 1975. [9]

Mitigating strategies

In 2015, the Planetary Health Alliance had analysed the effects of elevated carbon dioxide levels on six crops: rice, wheat, maize, soybean, sorghum and field peas. [10] Its director Samuel Myers, a scientist at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Massachusetts, clarified to The Wire that the effect (of shifting nutritional content) “is not due to global warming” and that “it is a direct effect of elevated carbon dioxide on crop nutrients, independent of climate.”

More carbon dioxide in the air also drives global warming. [11]

For Myers, the latest findings are important because they corroborate his team’s previous findings – that rice cultivars grown at higher carbon dioxide concentrations, expected to kick in in the next 50-75 years, have lower amounts of zinc, iron and protein. “It is very valuable to have this validation of our earlier findings using similar techniques,” he said.

The new study additionally provides new data on vitamins B and E, and adds “to our understanding of the nutritional impacts of rising carbon

dioxide.”

He also said it’s important that India and other rice-consuming countries like it monitor nutrient intake, redouble efforts to increase dietary diversity and ensure that people are consuming adequate amounts of zinc, iron and protein.

Several strategies beyond diversifying nutritious diets include breeding crops higher in these nutrients, changes in subsidy patterns to encourage diets toward nutrient rich foods, fortifying of foods with important nutrients, and, “of course, at the most fundamental level, redoubling our efforts to reduce global carbon dioxide emissions.”

AMLO, Mexico’s New President, Promises End to Corruption, Makes Peace with Capitalist Class

23 July 2018, by **Dan La Botz**

For the last 90 years, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) held the presidency and ruled the country, with the exception of the period from 2000 to 2012 when the conservative National Action Party (PAN) controlled the nation’s highest office. The PRI permitted Coca Cola executive Vicente Fox of the PAN to claim his victory 2000, and allowed Felipe Calderón of the PAN to become president in 2006. With the PRI and the PAN (or as leftists sometimes call it the “PRIAN”) cooperating in the deepening of the neoliberal model, the rule seemed to be that the left would never be permitted to win a presidential election.

Twice before leftists candidates almost surely won the national presidential election only to have their victory snatched from them by the fraud committed by the very mafia that AMLO rails against. The first occasion was in 1988 when Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas should have been recognized as the victor and then

again in 2006 when AMLO himself was cheated of victory. This time leading in the polls by 30 percent for weeks before the election, fraud would have been too incredible to be believed. In a country where candidates in the last several elections have usually won with between 35% and 40% percent of the vote, AMLO won a landslide with 53% of the votes cast, 30% more than his nearest competitor in an election in which an extraordinarily high 60 percent of the country’s 89 million eligible voters cast ballots. He carried all but one state. He has a powerful mandate, his coalition having won pluralities in both houses of the legislature.

AMLO began his political career in the 1970s in the PRI but left it a decade later to join the new opposition party of the left founded by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD). AMLO made his national reputation as head of the Federal District (one can say mayor of Mexico City) where he combined

cooperation with the banks and construction companies to build infrastructure and renovate the historic center while at the same time providing pensions for senior citizens. Troubling, however, was López Obrador’s labor policy. While mayor of Mexico City, López Obrador permitted the Labor Board to continue to deal with phony unions and their corrupt lawyers and union officials, while turning a deaf ear to the demands of independent unions, union reformers and rank-and-file workers. Many of the city’s 200,000 public employees found it impossible to have their independent labor unions legally recognized. Workers at the time said: whatever we have won we got by going to the streets “the López Obrador government didn’t give us anything. Still, he left office with an incredible 85 percent approval rating.

Since the 1990s AMLO has been an indefatigable campaigner, first as a leader of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), whose presidential

candidate he was twice, but which he abandoned because of its factionalism and corruption. After leaving the PRD in 2012, he founded the Movement of National Regeneration (MORENA), which became a political party in 2014. First as a leader of the PRD and then as the head of MORENA, he traveled throughout the country for years speaking, organizing, and assailing what he called the ruling mafia. A charismatic leader, he has dominated MORENA, selecting its leaders and setting its agenda, and always preparing single-mindedly for his next campaign.

Whenever he ran for president, the PRI, the PAN, and the media rebaited AMLO, suggesting he was like Hugo Chávez or Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela a politician who would impose a socialist system that would bring economic chaos and violent conflict to Mexico. The message frightened off the wealthy and much of the middle class, though AMLO built a solid social base of about one-third of the electorate among the country's poorer people, its working class, its schoolteachers, and leftwing intellectuals. AMLO also worked through his three presidential campaigns to try to win the confidence of the business class, but without success "until now. This year Mexico's capitalists, seeing the impossibility of either José Antonio Meade of the PRI or Ricardo Anaya of the PAN winning the election, and facing a fait accompli with AMLO's election, have decided they can live with him. And AMLO has made it clear that he will get along with them.

AMLO and Big Business

When he began his political career in the PRD, AMLO often sounded like he wanted to revive the economic nationalism that began with President Lázaro Cárdenas in the 1930s. He talked about defending the national oil company PEMEX from privatization, about repudiating the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and called for a more equal distribution of wealth. It was a program that won him the support of both small business people and sections of the working

class. Over time, however, as on three occasions he sought to become president, he moved to the right on all of those questions, so that today there seems to be little left of the economic nationalist approach.

AMLO's "National Project: 2018-2024," a political program written with the assistance of hundreds of academics and other experts, is simultaneously elaborate and vague. [12] The overriding principle is a call for partnership between the government and the private sector to carry out economic development, with an emphasis on the building of infrastructure: railroads, highways, and rural roads. This was his model as mayor of Mexico City and it is his model today: partnership with capital accompanied by improvements in the lives of ordinary people. He has not sketched out a design for a socialist or even for a very progressive economy, but rather for a prosperous capitalism that will expand to incorporate those who have not been previously included, particularly the urban and the rural poor.

In a recent speech, AMLO stated again, as he has so often, that the country's principal problem was corruption. Famous social thinkers such as Karl Marx, he said, have argued that the fortunes of the wealthy are made through the exploitation of labor and the accumulation of capital, but he continued, this does not hold in Mexico. In Mexico fortunes are made through corruption, not exploitation. [13] "We're not against businessmen," said Lopez Obrador at a mass rally in the National Auditorium during his campaign. "We're against corrupt politicians." [14] Whether or not AMLO actually believes this theory, it is a conception that allows him to form a political alliance with the country's bankers and corporations, since he does not hold them as a class responsible for the country's ills. And the bourgeoisie has gotten the message, if only belatedly.

While some corporations had sent letters to their employees warning them not to vote for AMLO because he would destroy the economy and cost them their jobs, now that he is

elected, as Bloomberg News writes, "It's All Peace and Love Between AMLO and Mexico's Business Elite." Upon his election, AMLO immediately held a meeting with Business Coordinating Council (CCE), telling the media afterwards, "We trust the business sector and they've expressed their confidence in the new government that will transform the country." Executives from the nation's biggest mining corporation, Grupo Mexico, to its baking companies, such as Bimbo, issued statements expressing their desire to work together with the new president, some in an idealistic tone. Daniel Servitje, chairman at Grupo Bimbo SAB, issued a statement saying, "It's time to leave behind the division created by the campaigns and join together to forge a country based on solidarity, justice and an efficient rule of law." [15]

AMLO and the CCE went even further, signing an agreement to create a US\$5 billion national apprenticeship program. Announcing the new program, AMLO said that it would be the first step to insure that young Mexicans have both education and employment. "They are going to be contracted as apprentices, so that they have work. The employers are going to act as their tutors. The government is going to transfer to the corporations the state's resources in order to be able to pay the wages to these young people. Some 2.6 million young people are going to participate," he explained.

These employers, who will act as tutors, are the same ones who have for decades cooperated with the government's gangsterized labor unions to prevent the organization of independent labor unions by firing workers. These employer-tutors are the same employers who have kept wages low, ignored health and safety issues, and evaded paying their taxes. The plan made no mention of the labor unions, neither of the government's gangster unions nor of the few independent unions. "We're leaving [the meeting] very enthused and with energy to do what can be done to make Mexico more inclusive, more prosperous, and really reaching its potential," said Claudio X. González, chief administrator of Kimberly Clark de México. And well they should be

excited with a five billion dollar government gift to hire more low-wage workers. [16]

AMLO's government, which controls the Mexican Petroleum Company or PEMEX, will soon be renegotiating contracts involving hundreds of billions of dollars with 73 national and 20 international oil companies, including Exxon, Chevron, Total BP, Shell and many others. [17] While AMLO's government may make some modest demands in the new contracts, it is unlikely that there will be any profound changes. He promised during his campaign that the government would carry out no confiscations, no expropriations, and no nationalizations. He made similar promises to the bankers and other industrialists. "We will support banks and we won't confiscate assets," he said. "There won't be expropriations or nationalizations." [18]

Certainly, at the beginning of his presidency, he will not be in a position to push very hard against international capital, even if he were so inclined.

Just as he is attempting to make peace with the Mexican bourgeoisie, so too AMLO has held out an olive branch to U.S. President Donald J. Trump. Trump's continued rhetorical attacks on Mexico and Mexican immigrants played little role in this election, which was all about Mexico. All of the candidates condemned Trump's racism and his demand for the building a border wall and for Mexico to pay for it. Still Mexico's position as an economy entirely integrated into and largely dependent upon American capital means that any Mexican government must reach a *modus vivendi* with the Colossus of the North. American banks and corporations and the politicians they control have the power to make or break AMLO's government, as AMLO is well aware.

Following his election, AMLO and Trump spoke on the telephone. AMLO told Televisa, "We are conscious of the need to maintain good relations with the United States. We have a border of more than 3,000 kilometers, more than 12 million Mexicans live in the United States. It is our main economic-commercial partner. We are

not going to fight. We are always going to seek for there to be an agreement ... We are going to extend our frank hand to seek a relation of friendship, I repeat, of cooperation with the United States." And Trump responded in the same vein, "I think the relationship will be a very good one. We talked about trade, we talked about NAFTA, we talked about a separate deal, just Mexico and the United States." Of course, no one believes anything Trump says, and AMLO's diplomatic remarks must be understood as a simple statement of geopolitical reality. One can expect some tense moments in the future over the questions of economics, migration, and respect for Mexico's national sovereignty. Whether or not AMLO's government will be able to stand up to the United States is one of many open questions.

A Cabinet Mostly of Academics

Previous modern Mexican presidents, the great majority of them from the PRI and a couple from the PAN, always took office at the head of a vast entourage of experienced party leaders who had worked their way up the ladder of patronage and privilege. The top leaders had served as governors, senators, and cabinet ministers in previous administrations; often in those positions they had carried out the fraud and extortion and sometimes the murders necessary in a political system like Mexico's. They entered the top echelons of government their hands covered with blood, but their pockets stuffed with money, and prepared to continue their work at an even higher level.

Lopez Obrador has few such people in his cabinet. [19] The seventeen people he has chosen "eight of them women" are predominantly academics, some few with experience as administrators or practical politicians. Unlike cabinet members in recent governments, they did not attend the Harvard Business School or the Yale Law School; nine of them are graduates of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). [20] Some are admirable choices, such as Luisa MarÃa Alcalde, a remarkably

talented young woman whose father, the labor lawyer Arturo Alcalde, fights for Mexico's few independent labor unions and whose mother, Bertha Luján, headed one of those unions, the Authentic Labor Front (FAT).

Still, it seems unlikely that most of these well-meaning academics with little governmental experience will be either successful or long endure in the positions to which they have been appointed, which will come under tremendous political pressure. Most of these people did not rise to their positions as the leaders of labor unions or social movements that have had to fight to make their way in the world. What will they do when faced with the blandishments or the bludgeoning of the American corporations or with the bribes and threats of the drug cartels? Some are made of sterner stuff, though not necessarily better stuff, such as Marcelo Luis Ebrard Casaubón, another mayor of Mexico City with a long political career, and Esteban Moctezuma Barragán, who previously served in the cabinet of PRI President Ernesto Zedillo and will become the Secretary of Education. One might look to him to become the Secretary of the Interior "the political fixer" in the near future.

AMLO and his cabinet will be challenged to meet their promises both to capital and to labor. While not always a champion of labor unions, AMLO did over the last few years become a supporter of the National Coordinating Committee of the Mexican Teachers Union (CNTE), which has led the fight both for union independence and in defense of teachers' rights and economic demands. He also included Napoleón Gómez Urrutia, the head of the Mexican Miners Union, among MORENA's candidates for the legislature. Gómez Urrutia has spent more than a decade in exile in Canada, fearing imprisonment or perhaps death if he returned to Mexico to lead the union he heads. The question will be whether AMLO can maintain his alliance with capital while he simultaneously asserts control over the labor and social movements in order to use them to advance his modest agenda of increased political democracy and social reform.

Finally, there is the question of the cartels. The Mexican drug cartels run a business approximately the equal of Mexico's other major economic sectors such as petroleum, manufacturing, tourism, and remittances from workers abroad (a declining sector recently). Without a doubt, the drug cartels have in many areas taken over the police forces, many of which were already criminal gangs in their own right. They have penetrated parts of the Mexican military, and they have also at times had access to the highest levels of the Mexican government. The cartels control billions of dollars, have tens of thousands of employees, are as well armed as the police and nearly as well armed as the army, and they have influence in both private business and government.

During the 1970s and into the 1980s it seemed that the PRI government must

have made some agreement with the cartels, which permitted them to operate under certain conditions. During the 1990s the cartels fragmented and went to war with each other, and then in 2006 PAN President Calderón launched a war on the cartels, leading to hundreds of thousands of deaths and disappearances. AMLO has promised to end the drug violence and suggested he would do so by improving the lives of ordinary Mexicans so that they would not be attracted to working for the cartels. While that proposal has a progressive ring, it seems completely unrealistic. It will take either a secret deal with the cartels, as one suspects they had in the past, or enormous state violence to suppress the drug dealers, and if the latter, there will be unforeseeable consequences, as there were for Calderón's drug war.

The struggle now will be between AMLO, the moderately reformist politician, the Mexican capitalist class, and the country's working people. One should not rule out the possibility that the electoral victory will raise the hopes of working people and put pressures on AMLO to deliver more than he intends. Over the last two decades Mexico's working people "electrical workers, miners, teachers, and many others" have demonstrated on many occasions their capacity not only to struggle but also to stand up to tremendous repression. Perhaps the same desire for change and the same hope for a better Mexico that led them to vote for AMLO will now inspire the Mexican working people to assert themselves politically and attempt to set their own course.

7 July 2018

Source [Solidarity](#).

Syria: The Social Origins of the Uprising

22 July 2018, by **Joseph Daher**

More than seven years after the beginning of the popular uprising in Syria, which increasingly turned into an international war, the causes of this eruption are often forgotten. When they are discussed, the vast majority of authors reduce the uprising to a struggle against authoritarianism while neglecting its socio-economic roots almost entirely. Yet the way in which the relations of production in contemporary Syria constitute a blockage to the development of the productive forces is in fact a key element in understanding the popular base of the Syrian uprising. The most important component of the movement was economically marginalized Sunni rural workers, along with urban employees and self-employed workers who have borne the brunt of neoliberal policies, particularly since Bashar al-Assad came to power in 2000. The geography of the revolts in Idlib, Dar'a and other middle sized towns as well

as in other rural areas exhibits a pattern_ namely, all were historical strongholds of the Ba'th Party, and benefited from agricultural reforms in the 1960s.

The Acceleration of Neoliberalism under Bashar al-Assad

Syria underwent an accelerated implementation of neoliberal policies in the decade after Bashar al-Assad's took power in 2000, which also represented an instrument with which the new ruler could consolidate his power. Unlike his father, Bashar allowed the World Bank and the IMF to intervene in the process of economic liberalization. In 2005, the "social market economy" was adopted as a new economic strategy at the

Ba'ath Party's 10th Regional Conference. In other words, the private sector rather than the state would become a partner and leader in the process of economic development and in providing employment (Abboud 2015: 55). The aim was to encourage private accumulation principally through the marketization of the economy while the state withdrew from key areas of social welfare provision, aggravating already existing socio-economic problems.

The attraction of foreign investment and Syrian funds held outside of the country by nationals and expatriates, particularly in the service sector, was fundamental to this new economic strategy. Foreign direct investment climbed from \$120 million in 2002 to \$3.5 billion in 2010. Investment inflows drove a boom in trade, housing, banking, construction and tourism (Hinnebush 2012: 100).

The share of the private economy

continued to grow, reaching up to 65 percent of Syrian GDP (over 70 percent according to some estimates) in 2010, while also being the largest employer. Approximately 75 percent of the Syrian labour force worked in the private sector (Achcar 2013: 24).

Neoliberal policies benefitted the Syrian upper class and foreign investors (particularly from the Gulf Monarchies and Turkey) at the expense of the vast majority of Syrians, who were hit by inflation and the rising cost of living. During this period, the regime also significantly reduced taxes on business sector profits for both groups and individuals. These measures were implemented despite the fact that tax evasion was already widespread, reaching 100 billion Syrian pounds in 2009 according to some estimates (Seifan 2013: 109).

The small and medium-sized enterprises which made up more than 99 percent of all businesses in Syria were for the most part negatively affected by marketization and economic liberalization.

The Syrian economy became increasingly rent-based, as the share of productive sectors diminished from 48.1 percent of GDP in 1992 to 40.6 percent in 2010, while the share of wages in the national income was less than 33 percent in 2008-2009, compared to nearly 40.5 percent in 2004 - meaning that profits and rents constituted more than 67 percent of GDP.

These liberalization measures were accompanied by lowering of subsidies, the halting of public sector employment expansion, and the reduction of the state's role in domestic investment. Social security spending was reduced considerably by the cutbacks to the pension system in the 2000s. Health care and education spending did not rise in accordance with population growth. The share of the education and health care sectors as a percentage of GDP expenses was approximately 4 percent and 0.4 percent before 2010. In this context, the regime embarked on the gradual privatization of schools, in particular universities and colleges, and of health care. This process was

accompanied by the reduction of the quality and quantity of public health services, which forced Syrians to turn to the private sector in order to enjoy basic services. Subsidies were also removed on key foods items as well as on gas and other energy sources. Price liberalization meant that products essential to everyday life grew increasingly unaffordable for most low-income families (Abboud 2015: 55).

Responsibility for social services to ease rising inequalities was increasingly shifted to private charities, and therefore bourgeois and religiously conservative layers of Syrian society, especially religious associations.

In agriculture, land privatization took place at the expense of several hundreds of thousands of peasants from the northeast, particularly following the drought between 2007 and 2009 in which one million peasants received international aid and food supplies, driving 300,000 to Damascus, Aleppo and other cities. However, this social catastrophe should not be perceived as the consequence of a mere natural disaster. Even before the drought, Syria lost 40 percent of its agricultural workforce between 2002 and 2008, dropping from 1.4 million to 800,000 workers. The sector's share of employment fell from 32.9 / 30 percent in 2000 to just 14 / 13.2 percent by 2011.

Agricultural liberalization measures took place under Bashar al-Assad from the end of 2000 with the privatizing of state farms in the north after more than four decades of collective ownership. Yet according to researcher Myriam Ababsa, the real beneficiaries of these privatization processes were nevertheless investors and entrepreneurs able to unlawfully rent out former state holdings. Land ownership became increasingly concentrated in a small number of hands. In 2008, 28 percent of farmers utilizing 75 percent of irrigated land, while 49 percent of them had only 10 percent, evidencing the inequalities in this sector.

Neoliberal Policies and Despotic Expansion

Neoliberal policies and deepening processes of privatization created new monopolies in the hands of relatives and other figures associated with Bashar al-Assad and the regime, either through familial ties or public and governmental positions or posts in the military and security service. Rami Makhlouf, Bashar al-Assad's cousin and richest man in Syria, represented the mafia-style process of privatization led by the regime. His vast economic empire included telecommunications, oil and gas, as well as construction, banks, airlines, retail, and more (Seifan 2013: 113). The role of the new businessmen emerging from the state bourgeoisie and high officialdom grew prominent in Syrian economic life, increasingly taking up positions occupied by the old and traditional bourgeoisie.

The regime thus expanded its predatory activities from control over "rents derived from the state" to a position that permitted it to dominate "private rents" without even a modicum of transparency. These new incomes also enabled ruling elites to establish a network of associates whose loyalty was purchased with market shares and protection.

The Socio-Economic Consequences of Syria's Neoliberal Project

Bashar al-Assad's political rule and economic policies led to an unprecedented impoverishment of society while wealth inequalities continued to increase, despite GDP growing at an average rate of 4.3 percent per year from 2000 to 2010 in real terms, but benefiting only a small strata of economic elites. GDP more than doubled, passing from \$28.8 billion in 2005 to around \$60 billion in 2010.

In 2003-2004, the poorest 20 percent of the population accounted for only 7 percent of total expenditure, while the wealthiest 20 percent were responsible for 45 percent of total expenditure. In 2007, the percentage of Syrians living below the poverty line was 33 percent, representing approximately seven million people, while 30 percent of them were just above this level.

The labour force participation rate for people aged 15 years and above actually declined from 52.3 percent in 2001 to around 42.7 and 43.5 percent in 2010. This was a direct result of the regime's failed neo-liberal policies, which proved unable to absorb potential labour market entrants, especially young graduates. The Syrian economy created only 400,000 net jobs between 2001 and 2010, at an annual growth rate of 0.9 percent, which resulted in a decline of the employment rate from 47 percent in 2001 to 39 percent in 2010. The diminution in the labour force participation rate took place in both rural and urban areas, but was sharper in the countryside.

Women suffered massively from this development, as the labour force participation rate of women aged 15 and above decreased from between 21 and 20.4 to 13.2 / 12.7 percent between 2001 and 2010 - one of the lowest in the world. The male participation rate also diminished from 81 to 72.2 percent during the same period.

Economic liberalization also had consequences on the labour market. Prior to the uprising, the informal sector was a significant contributor to the Syrian economy. It was calculated to contribute about 30 percent of employment and about 30-40 percent of GDP, according to estimates in the 10th Five-Year Plan, suggesting that the informal sector was at least as productive as the formal sector. It is worth noting that more than 50 percent of informal sector workers were between the ages of 15 and 29, revealing the decreasing opportunities available for Syrian youth during liberalization.

Poor neighbourhoods around the cities actually expanded considerably, while

the urban real estate speculation unleashed by the influx of Gulf capital together with an end to rent controls drove the cost of housing beyond the means of middle strata (Hinnebush 2012: 102). This pushed many Syrians into marginal areas of cities where they were often forced to live in illegal housing. This in turn led to a housing crisis - a shortage of around 1.5 million formal dwellings according to the Syrian Economic Center in 2007 (cited in Goulden 2011: 188-190), with sections of the population becoming homeless or living in informal areas (Hinnebush 2012: 102). For example, between 1981 and 1994 the informal sector met 65 percent of new housing needs in Damascus and 50 percent for the country as a whole (Goulden 2011: 188).

Estimates of what proportion of the population lived in informal housing vary, usually fluctuating between 30 to 40 percent. They may have been as high as 50 percent (Goulden 2011: 188). In Aleppo, 29 informal settlements (out of a total of 114 neighbourhoods registered by the municipality) occupied about 45 percent of the city's inhabited area and were home to an estimated total population of 2.5 million (Ahmad 2012: 8). In addition to often being poorly constructed and therefore dangerous to live in, these neighbourhoods lacked medical services and had few public health facilities (Goulden 2011: 201).

The proportion of poor was higher in rural areas (62 percent) than in urban areas (38 percent), while over half (54.2 percent) of all unemployment was located in rural areas.

There has been a continuous impoverishment of Syria's rural areas since the 1980s, while the droughts beginning 2006 accelerated the rural exodus. This situation was exacerbated by an annual population growth rate of around 2.5 percent that particularly affected small to mid-sized towns in rural areas, in which the population has often multiplied by five to ten times since the 1980s. Public services provided by the state in these towns did not increase, in fact they often even shrank as a result of neo-liberal policies, leading to a deterioration of living conditions for

the local population (Baczko, Dorronsoro and Quesnay 2016: 46-47).

Conclusion

Bashar al-Assad's rise to power in 2000 considerably strengthened the patrimonial nature of the state, characterized by the growing weight of crony capitalists within the regime's inner circle. Its accelerated neoliberal policies led to an increasing shift in the original social base of the regime which originally consisted of peasants, government employees and some sections of the bourgeoisie, to a regime coalition crony capitalists at its heart - the rent-seeking alliance of political brokers (led by Assad's mother's family) and the regime-supporting bourgeoisie and upper-middle classes.

Large sections of those left behind by liberalization, particularly in the villages and medium-sized cities, have been at the forefront of the uprising. The absence of democracy and the growing impoverishment of broad segments of Syrian society, against the backdrop of corruption and growing social inequality, prepared the ground for the popular insurrection, which was simply waiting for the appropriate spark. Initial protesters in the country were inspired by the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, and saw an opportunity to launch a similar movement in Syria following the events in Dar'a.

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Source [Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung](#).

The Roots of Trump's Immigration Barbarity

21 July 2018, by **Daniel Denvir**

The photos seemed to speak for themselves, perfectly capturing the heartbreaking brutality of the Trump administration's immigration crackdown. In one, two girls, likely Central American, detained at a US Customs and Border Protection center in Nogales, Arizona, sleep face down on the floor of a cage.

Jon Favreau, a former Obama speechwriter and host of the liberal "Pod Save America" podcast, tweeted: "Look at these pictures. This is happening right now, and the only debate that matters is how we force our government to get these kids back to their families as fast as humanly possible."

It turned out, however, that the photos were from 2014. Favreau's boss, President Barack Obama, was engaged in his own harsh crackdown on Central American asylum seekers — an error Trump was unsurprisingly quick to point out on Twitter: "Democrats mistakenly tweet 2014 pictures from Obama's term showing children from the Border in steel cages. They thought it was recent pictures in order to make us look bad, but backfires. Dems must agree to Wall and new Border Protection for good of country...Bipartisan Bill!"

What neither Favreau nor Trump likely grasped was how perfectly the imbroglia encapsulated the confusion

and amnesia that pervade mainstream debate over Trump's immigration policies.

On the one hand, Favreau's error is a hopeful one: liberals, politicians and ordinary Americans alike, are outraged at Trump's unbridled racism and cruelty, rallying to the cause of DREAMers threatened with losing their legal authorization to remain in the United States, mobilizing at airports in defense of those targeted by the Muslim ban, and pushing their elected officials to resist deportations through state and local sanctuary measures.

But most every horrific measure taken by Trump has a policy precedent in similar, if less breathtakingly inhumane, actions taken by his establishment predecessors — predecessors who, alongside the nativist right and their mouthpieces on Fox News and talk radio, helped move the conservative Overton Window on immigration so far to the right that by November 2016 it perfectly framed Donald Trump.

The images and stories that have captured headlines in recent days depict a barbarically cruel anti-immigrant agenda from Trump, rightfully moving many to grief and anger and perhaps to action. But if we want to stop Trump's deportation machine, we have to confront the key role Democrats played alongside

establishment Republicans in creating it. It's the only way to halt the spiral of anti-immigrant cruelty that brought us to the horrific images of family separation we see today.

Obama's Deterrent

Favreau did tweet an admission of his error. But in doing so he made another, more substantial one. "These awful pictures are from 2014, when the government's challenge was reconnecting unaccompanied minors who showed up at the border with family or a safe sponsor," wrote Favreau. "Today, in 2018, the government is CREATING unaccompanied minors by tearing them away from family at the border."

That's a partial and highly misleading description of Obama immigration policy circa 2014. The photo in question was likely of unaccompanied minors apprehended at the border who would later be released to relatives. But as the Arizona Republic noted, "they are still children in cages."

Favreau's biggest mistake, however, was obscuring the bigger picture of what Obama was doing at the time: an influx of Central American asylum-seekers fleeing brutal gang violence (which is itself rooted firmly in US government policy) sought asylum in the United States, so he put these families into detention en masse to send a tough message to would-be

migrants down south and anti-immigrant voters at home.

The Obama administration opened a facility to incarcerate asylum-seekers fleeing for their lives in southeastern New Mexico, far from where most lawyers who could represent them in asylum proceedings live, as Wil S. Hylton described in a February 2015 New York Times Magazine story. And so volunteer lawyers rushed to the small town of Artesia. What they found when they arrived were “young women and children huddled together. Many were gaunt and malnourished, with dark circles under their eyes.” “Kids vomiting all over the place.” “A big outbreak of fevers.” “Pneumonia, scabies, lice.” A school that often did not seem to be open.

Such detentions would serve, the Obama administration hoped, as a deterrent.

“It will now be more likely that you will be detained and sent back,” Department of Homeland Security secretary Jeh Johnson forebodingly warned. Johnson was “standing on a dirt road lined with cabins in a barren compound enclosed by fencing,” celebrating the opening of a massive detention facility for women and their children in Dilley, Texas. It was run by the for-profit Corrections Corporation of America. (The company has since changed its name to the more antiseptic CoreCivic, which pledges to “Better the Public Good.”)

Johnson didn’t call Mexicans “rapists” or suggest that what the United States really needed was more Norwegians. But the message was clear: regardless of your right to asylum under US and international law, the US government will lock you up in degrading and harmful conditions and then send you back home to your possible death if you dare request their protection.

The same day Johnson visited the detention center in Artesia, according to one of Hylton’s sources, ICE deported seventy-nine people back to the US-tilled killing fields of El Salvador. Ten youth were later reported to have been killed.

Today, it was reported that Trump would soon sign an executive order

ending family separation. His method? Resurrecting Obama’s policy of detaining families together, which was ultimately blocked in federal court.

Journalists still have trouble making sense of Obama’s actions. On Saturday, the New York Times took pains to explain that officials like Johnson and domestic policy advisor Cecilia Muñoz had “struggles with illegal immigration,” which is what led them to incarcerate asylum-seeking families. “The steps led to just the kind of brutal images that Mr. Obama’s advisers feared: hundreds of young children, many dirty and some in tears, who were being held with their families in makeshift detention facilities.” The images were bad, which made Obama look bad. But there was lots of heart-wrenching, liberal soul-searching, and so Obama wasn’t so bad.

It’s a strong contrast to the palpable sense of liberal outrage at Trump’s policies. But that outrage is a very good thing, even if it muddies the historical record of Obama and others’ misdeeds. Trump has hastened a welcome polarization over immigration that has been underway since the Bush administration: liberals who once shared conservatives’ antipathy toward undocumented immigrants have become increasingly sympathetic and solidaristic as immigration becomes a partisan issue. Polarization and partisanship around immigration is good — the old consensus was horrific.

But liberal rhetoric too often elides the uncomfortably mainstream roots of Trump’s crackdowns and thus obscures the concrete solutions that we should demand.

The Nativist Cycle

Many liberals appear to think that we had a relatively humane immigration enforcement system before Trump took office. In fact, Presidents Clinton, Bush, and Obama thoroughly militarized the border (including constructing hundreds of miles of a wall), nearly quintupled the size of the Border Patrol, and constructed a mercilessly smooth system linking the mass incarceration to a terrifyingly

gargantuan deportation pipeline.

Perhaps the most bizarre thing about the debate over Trump’s immigration policies, which has centered on the Dreamers and the insistence on funding for his “big, fat, beautiful wall,” is how it has recapitulated the basic immigration policy framework under his two most recent predecessors. Trump’s demand has been this: legal status for DREAMers must be accompanied by the elimination of the diversity visa lottery, sharp limitations on the priority given to reunifying families in awarding visas for legal immigration, and, of course, \$25 billion for his wall, since Mexico apparently doesn’t want to pay for it.

Many Democrats have rejected this, which is good. But it all obscures an important historical irony: combining legalization measures with deportation and border enforcement crackdowns (along with a larger supply of second-class guest workers for profiteering businesses) is precisely the mainstream, bipartisan establishment framework for immigration “reform” that guided a) repeated and failed legislation under Bush and Obama and b) executive enforcement actions under Bush and Obama.

After Trump took office, apprehensions of unauthorized border crossers sharply declined, leading the president to eagerly take credit: his tough talk had accomplished what his soft-spoken predecessors could or would not. But the celebration was premature. The number of crossings, as measured by apprehensions, soon began to rise again, despite Trump’s best efforts. It’s part of a longstanding pattern: immigration crackdowns mollify nativists in the short term but ultimately fail to accomplish their stated objective, leading to further calls for even harsher crackdowns.

And so Trump was confronted with the same reality that met prior presidents since before President Clinton asserted, in 1995, “We won’t tolerate immigration by people whose first act is to break the law as they enter our country.”

Border militarization and deportation

crackdowns are a performance aimed at satisfying anti-immigrant voters and can have only a limited impact on changing migration patterns on the ground. Many politicians assume that tougher policies along the border deter immigration, but they mostly don't. And so new, tougher scripts are written up and acted out, to the same effect, again and again. This is what led Trump to the family separation campaign.

Immigration continues, immigrants continue to suffer expulsion and death in the Sonoran Desert, and a hardcore nativist voting bloc is conditioned to expect and demand even more draconian policies. One shudders to think what kind of savagery Trump's administration will come up with next. Crackdowns Past and Present

But this historical dynamic eludes most journalists, and so much reporting on the family separation policy has been confused.

In reality, what Trump is doing is directing federal prosecutors to charge every possible migrant who crosses between official ports of entry with illegally entering the country. And people charged with illegal entry or reentry would have always been separated from their children, because they are transferred to federal criminal custody.

The plan was family separation by way of maximally applying existing tools: all immigrants caught crossing without authorization between ports of entry "and not just some or many, as under past administrations" would be prosecuted for the federal misdemeanor of illegal entry.

In federal courts, prosecutions of immigrants charged with illegally reentering the country rose steadily under Presidents Clinton and Bush, then skyrocketed under Obama. Prosecutions for illegally entering the country rose as well. By 2016, people convicted of immigration-related offenses made up roughly 9 percent of the federal prison population, or 15,702 inmates.

Trump's, then, is not the first crackdown. In 2005, the Bush administration launched Operation

Streamline as part of its "enforcement with consequences" approach to target a much broader swath of migrants. Since then, federal law enforcement have used magistrate judges to oversee "cattle calls": mass guilty pleas from groups as large as dozens of defendants at once, at times prosecuted not by assistant US attorneys but by immigration officials who may not even be licensed to practice law.

Just as immigration law became increasingly indistinguishable from criminal law, the former has suffered from similarly weak due-process protections as the latter, as harsh potential sentences were used to coerce defendants into guilty pleas. The court system was converted into a massive, prosecutor-directed assembly line to prison and deportation. As of 2016, according to the Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse, more than half of all federal prosecutions were for these two migration crimes of entry and re-entry.

It's still too early to measure the full scope of Trump's policies, because data for illegal entry and reentry charges is not yet available for May or June. But prosecutions have been on the rise over Trump's time in office, according to data from the Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse. In April, the number of prosecutions for illegal entry stood at 4,521, up from 2,080 in January 2017.

Yet in December 2012, under Obama, the number prosecuted reached a high of 6,701. Under Bush, they reached an even higher point, of 7,137, in September 2008. The number of prosecutions frequently topped 5,000 during Bush's final year of office, and vacillated throughout Obama's two terms.

Prosecutions for illegal reentry have been relatively stable under Trump, reaching 2,916 in April of this year, just somewhat higher than the 2,198 in January 2017. Those numbers were considerably below the highpoint of 3,671 reached under Obama in April 2013, and somewhat above the highpoint of 2,206 reached in October 2008 during Bush's final months in office.

How many children are being separated? 2,342 children were separated from 2,206 parents or guardians at the Mexican border between May 5 and June 9 "but CBP claims that they could not provide me with data going back to prior months and years. For now, precisely how Trump's cruel policy compares to his predecessors' is difficult to determine, though people working on the ground report a major increase in separations.

At least on a policy level, family separation is incidental to the policy of prosecuting every unauthorized crosser for committing a federal crime: if you're charged with a federal crime, you're remanded from the immigration officials to a federal lockup. In part, as Roque Planas writes at HuffPost, that's because a strategy that was explicitly aimed at using detention as a means to deter migration might not pass legal muster. This is partly why Obama's detention program was ultimately shut down by federal judges.

Trump's solution is to launder their deterrence policy through a criminal justice system that can normalize most any horror.

Indeed, when Attorney General Jeff Sessions defends family separation by saying, "every time somebody...gets prosecuted in America for a crime, American citizens, and they go to jail, they're separated from their children," he's not wrong. Though he's right, of course, for the wrong reasons: Sessions believes that the system of mass incarceration is good.

A Bureau of Justice Statistics study estimated that in 2004, 1,596,100 minor children had a parent incarcerated in state prison at the time that parent was admitted; 282,600 children had parents locked up in federal prisons. Family separation, including the widespread separation of poor mothers (particularly poor mothers of color) by child protection services, is a core feature of what the American carceral system does. Indeed, incarcerated women are often shackled while giving birth, and then have their babies taken from them by child protective services twenty-four hours

later.

The systems of mass incarceration and mass immigrant enforcement have for decades become increasingly intertwined and normalized – including, critically, through Obama's rollout of the Secure Communities program, which made local police the front door to the federal deportation pipeline. With Trump's latest policies, many are discovering that our norms are reprehensible.

Inhumane, Brutal, and Far Too Normal

So what precisely has changed at the border? According to Dara Lind, Vox's immigration reporter, the most consequential change is the widespread prosecution of asylum-seekers crossing between ports of entry for illegal entry. That is notably and newly cruel. Meanwhile, asylum-seekers who present themselves at

ports of entry are sometimes being stopped from setting foot on US soil, and even, in some cases, being separated from their children.

These are inhumane policies. But they are being carried out by way of longstanding political and legal norms of anti-immigrant cruelty.

The point here is not to wag a finger at liberal hypocrisy or ignorance. Rather, we need to understand this history to make concrete proposals that can help solve the problem. We should repeal laws criminalizing illegal entry and reentry. Short of that, we should insist that Congress pass a law that bars the prosecution of asylum-seekers for illegal entry. And we can and should demand that the law recognize, contrary to Attorney General Sessions's recent decision, that people can claim asylum when they are running from violence perpetrated by non-state actors like gangs or domestic partners.

Correctly analyzing Trump's child

separation campaign is emblematic of a larger analytical and rhetorical needle that the Left struggles to thread: emphasizing that Trump's awful policies are often far too normal and rooted in longstanding bipartisan establishment norms, while also recognizing and condemning the fact that he is taking those norms to dangerous, new extremes. Normal policies look worse when a brazenly racist monster like Trump does them.

But Trump is also blazing new trails in cruelty, and the spotlight on that cruelty offers a unique chance to stop it. The Left and immigrant rights movement should welcome the fact that border walls, deportation raids, and jailed children that might have been ignored or welcomed if put in place under Clinton, Bush, or Obama are finally being exposed for the monstrosities that they are. But we can't let establishment Democrats pretend like they're leading the resistance. They helped create the problem.

Source [Jacobin](#).

Notes for a balance sheet of ten years of reforms

20 July 2018, by **Ariel Dacal Díaz**

During this decade, two important variables have been clarified:

- 1) what changes would be undertaken in the economic and social order; and
- 2) what would be the conception of socialism put into practice.

These references allow us to place the analysis on the reforms not in the ether of hypotheses, but in their concrete results, emphasizing the structural and conceptual changes, the contradictions and the complexities that they imply, as well as their perspectives.

While it is true that any modification of a part of the system affects it in its

entirety, another important variable remains to be clarified: the political and legal framework of the relationship between old and new socio-economic actors. These adjustments, which were to be part of a constitutional reform process, would establish a new social contract in Cuba.

In February 2008, in taking the position of President of the Councils of State and Ministers, Raúl Castro presented what can be considered as the "main lines" of the "updates" that would be undertaken on the island:

• Ratify that the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) is the guarantor of the

unity of the nation and the heir of the historical leadership of the revolution. He added the condition that "if the people are firmly united around a single party, this party must be more democratic than any other, and with it the society as a whole."

• Develop the process of debate within society, because "the massive support for the revolution asks us to question ourselves about what we are doing to improve it (...) There is no reason to fear differences in a society such as ours. (...) From the profound exchange of divergent opinions are born the best solutions, if this exchange is channelled through serious proposals and with a sense of

responsibility."

â€¢ Make government management more efficient. What is necessary is "a more compact and functional structure, with fewer bodies in the central administration of the state and a better distribution of the functions they perform."

â€¢ Strengthen the economy as an "indispensable premise" for progress in any other area of society. "Productive work is the only source of wealth in society." We have to "plan well" without spending more than we have (...) in order to find the mechanisms and the means to eliminate all obstacles to the development of the productive forces and to exploit the important potential that resides in saving and in the good organization of work.

â€¢ To satisfy, as a priority, "the basic needs of the population, both material and spiritual, starting with the sustained strengthening of the national economy and its productive base."

Two five-year terms later, these lines were concretized thus:

â€¢ Reorganization of the processes of production, distribution, exchange and consumption. This includes the extension of the property management system and the diversification of economic subjects: socialist property of the whole people, cooperative property, mixed ownership, private property, property of political organizations, and of mass, social and other organizations of civil society. The transition from a policy of full employment to an expansion of the labour market. The diminution of the presence of the state in the sphere of distribution. The norm was to move from subsidizing products to helping people. The policy of full employment was abandoned. The role of the market in the distribution of goods and services, in employment and in daily life has been expanded on the basis of personal and family income.

â€¢ Definition of strategic sectors for development:

1. Socialist government that is effective and efficient and social

integration;

2. Productive transformation and international insertion;

3. Infrastructure;

4. Human potential, science, technology and innovation;

5. Natural resources and the environment;

6. Human development, equity and social justice (Documents of the Seventh Congress of the PCC, 2017).

â€¢ Modification of mechanisms that are based on vulnerability, with a solid basis in fiscal policies. Efficient use of resources, oriented towards macroeconomic and financial stability.

â€¢ Adjustment of the functioning of the central administration of the state: more decentralization, clarity and stability in the functions of government; Strengthening the role of municipalities; better public information on government management. Election for all public positions of responsibility limited to two terms.

â€¢ Definition of the strategic axes of the national development plan:

1. Government, defence and internal security;

2. Environment and natural resources;

3. Sociocultural;

4. Territorial;

5. Demography;

6. Infrastructure;

7. Foreign trade;

8. Monetary, financial and fiscal;

9. Productive, technological and human potential (Documents of the Seventh Congress).

â€¢ Definition of the role of the socialist state as "the guarantor of equality and freedom, independence, sovereignty, popular participation and control, the development of the country" and which should also guarantee "the exercise and

protection of economic, social, cultural, civic, political, individual and collective rights and duties (Documents of the Seventh Congress).

â€¢ Confirmation of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) as the only politico-partisan instance that is part of the model. Its permanent bodies meet periodically. During this period two congresses have been held, as well as the corresponding plenary sessions of its Central Committee and, for the first time, a national conference was convened. The policy adopted is aimed at the gradual separation of the administrative functions assumed by this organisation and the concentration of its work in the political/ideological field.

â€¢ Modification of the productive structure: state management dominates with 70 per cent. "Working on one's own account" (employees, employers and self-employed) has increased, amounting to 567,982 people (12 per cent of the labour force). The 420 approved non-agricultural cooperatives have 112,000 partners and associates. 1,917,000 hectares of land have been granted to 222,000 natural persons. There are more than 250 companies related to foreign capital (companies with 100 per cent foreign capital, joint ventures and international economic association contracts).

II. The various adjustments in the policies and regulations of new forms of ownership and management have hampered the stability and development of the new structural/productive map - which generates uncertainty among the emerging economic actors. Moreover, measures of consolidation, expansion and promotion have been slow and no timetable has been established.

In addition to reaffirming the logic of a highly centralized and bureaucratic state order, the "Model..." seems to be based on the cohabitation of classes; it is conceptually reduced to coexistence in the dominant framework of the social ownership of the means of production. Such an understanding does not take into account the complexities and class contradictions that are manifested between different

economic actors. It is an economist vision that forgets, both in conceptual analysis and in political practice, conflicts between capital and labour, employers and employees (private or state), citizens and producers.

In this context two phenomena are underlying, despite the decentralisation of the management of state-owned enterprises:

1. In the enterprises, there is a verticalist and salary-based logic; managers are concentrating greater decision-making power in the productive processes. The initiative and creativity required of workers, as owners of the means of production, are reduced to technical questions and not to organizational or strategic issues within the productive units (Martín, 2015);

2. In the relations of the enterprise with the outside world, the authoritarian and centralizing management of enterprises by the state is materialized in inadequate and inefficient regulations (Torres, 2015).

The democratization of the relations of production does not appear as a tendency of this "model...". Its fundamental approach and its normative political practice do not accord a central place to work (human beings directly producing goods and services) - which is what the socialist imperative demands in order to socialize production and power. Therefore, it does not promote a cooperative, complementary and solidarity-based subjectivity, linked to these political/productive processes.

This tendency is underlined by the fact that cooperatives face greater limits to be approved, which reinforces their exclusively experimental character. The "model..." does not mention co-management and self-management as pillars of socialization, nor the various forms of popular and solidarity-based economy, which could however be concretisations of social ownership in the community spaces for the production of goods and services.

The "update" does not only concern the economic model, but also social relations and their subjective, individual and collective re-

dimensioning. In this regard, psychosocial investigations reveal that employer-employee subordinate relationships are perceived in many cases as exploitation, in which authority, intelligence and leadership are assigned to the employer while obedience and submission are assigned to the employee. Within the framework of these subjective norms, there are few desires for partnership with state institutions, for the development of cooperative processes or for actions in favour of social responsibility. On the other hand, it is more at the individual and family level that the respondents feel that they are participating in the transformations. (Pañellas, 2015)

Another aspect of the reforms should alert us: although it is indispensable to guarantee the economic sustainability of the Cuban social project and necessary to put an end to the weak harmonisation of social policy with the economy, in practice social policy tends to be subordinate to the economy.

As a manifestation of this logic, the problem of inequalities and social exclusion is not dealt with rigorously. The words inequality and poverty are no longer used: we talk about populations that are at risk or vulnerable, of disadvantaged groups, of assisted or protected poverty, of social disadvantage (Valdés, 2013 and Zabala, 2013). The non-recognition of this situation prevents the deployment of social policies as well as the economic transformations that would combat existing poverty and misery.

For example, the Gini index, which measures the inequality between 0 and 1, is enlarged at its lowest level: from 0.24 in 1980 to 0.38 in 2000. For 2015, it was estimated at 0.40. Similarly, the feminization, racialization and territorial character of inequality and poverty have increased (Espina, 2015).

Recent research reveals that "the social elevator" exists for young white men with higher qualifications and of intellectual social origin. On the other side of the coin are women, non-whites of worker and peasant origin, poorly educated, indicating the generational transmission of

inequality (Espina, 2015). It should be noted that there are 33 per cent of women in the "self-employed" sector (Pérez, 2017) and that most of them are not owners, but wage workers, with average incomes lower than men.

The pillars of such a situation are, in the micro-social space, the lack or insufficiency of assets and their generational reproduction. At the macro level, there is the inability of economic mechanisms to generate sources of work with adequate remuneration, the weakening of the structural mechanisms of social inclusion, dependent on the fact of having a job, such as benefits and social security.

All this is reflected in the expansion of the "self-employed" sector and of micro-enterprises, without adequate public support and incentives for disadvantaged sectors (preferential microcredits, markets, training, legal and technical advice). This can generate the so-called informal, precarious employment that just makes it possible to survive and increases poverty levels (Espina, 2015). This insufficiency contrasts with the fact that the resources that could be used to promote initiatives or projects remain immobilized - for example the savings of the population that are deposited in the banks (Díaz, 2015) - and with the limitations placed on the deployment of projects of international cooperation.

In practice, the deficit of private and state sources of financing (subsidies or state aid) is only very insufficiently compensated for by family, friends and Cubans residing abroad. The transfer of money to Cuba is estimated at about 3 billion dollars a year, of which about 50 per cent is used as capital by the non-state sector (Rodríguez, 2017).

Another nuance of the same question is that credit policies are not aimed at empowering the individuals, groups and communities affected, which would involve taking advantage of the potential of the community and civil society to face up to this reality. It is worth mentioning the deployment of forms of social and solidarity-based economy, participatory budgets and direct access to the resources of

international cooperation.

In this scenario, although the average wage in the public sector has increased, it still does not meet the basic needs. While its average is 740 CUP (Cuban pesos) – and 824 in the entrepreneurial sector (Rodríguez, 2017) – the amount of wages required to meet these needs is estimated at more than 2,000 CUP [Monreal, June 23, 2017]. The distribution of this average is uneven: Since 60 per cent of wages are below the national average, about 38 per cent are between 824 and 2,000 and only 1.7 per cent exceeds the latter figure (Rodríguez, 2017). Similarly, the average pension has risen, but faced with rising prices it does not cover basic food needs.

In the case of “self-employed” workers incomes are six times the average state wage and the gap is much greater depending on the professions in this sector (Mesa-Lago, 2017). Both among the “self-employed” and in co-operatives, there is a closer link between income and work, which stimulates productivity growth.

It should be added that the high prices were to be compensated in 2017 with a budget subsidy of 3,740,000 CUP for rationed products, while social expenditure amounted to 36,554,000 CUP. This expenditure includes the costs of health services, education, social security and assistance, as well as subsidized tariffs for electricity, gas, water, telephone and public transport (Rodríguez, 2017).

The health care system is maintained, thanks to the principle of universal and free treatment. Some indicators continue to progress (infant mortality is 4.3 for 1,000 births, the number of inhabitants for a dentist has been reduced by 35 per cent, vaccination has been increased for seven out of eleven vaccines). At the same time, access, the number of facilities, staff and the quality of services have decreased. The number of hospitals has decreased by 32 per cent and that of polyclinics by 8 per cent: all rural hospitals and rural and urban health centres were closed in 2011 (Mesa-Lago, 2017). This is happening while the aging population requires an increase in services, which are already

so costly.

The educational system, which has also retained its universal and free character, has seen a decrease of 39 per cent in enrolment, and the teaching staff has been reduced by 13 per cent – especially in rural areas and for agricultural workers (Mesa-Lago, 2017). We can also observe areas where the quality of the available education is declining.

To remedy the situation, salaries have been increased in the sector, it has been made possible for retired teachers to be taken on again and the conditions for hiring and teaching have been revised. The current revision includes a “third improvement” of the education system, which is essentially aimed at bringing the curricula, texts and methodological guidelines up to date; as well as the organization of the educational project in each school according to its context, greater autonomy in the running of the educational centres and their relationship with family and community environments.

Although it is reaffirmed that the state guarantees free health and education services, the possibility has been opened up to determine centrally, in certain circumstances “the services for payment which can be offered to those who request them for reasons which do not correspond to essential or basic needs” (Documents of the Seventh Congress). This ambivalence opens up de facto the door to the commoditisation of these services, to the potential widening of the already increasing inequalities and undermines one of the main pillars of the legitimacy of Cuban socialism.

The expansion of the market and private enterprise has an impact on inequality. The same goes for state salaries and pensions that have “fallen behind” in relation to the levels achieved in other more dynamic domains: the wages of private enterprise, the incomes of “self-employed” workers and cooperatives, the remittances of emigrants and other “inflows” (legal and illegal).

Some analyses suggest that in order to move forward in a discussion on

inequality, the primary distribution of value, which occurs in the production process and which ratifies various forms of income, should be analysed, wages in particular (Monreal, June 13, 2017). The minimum wage depends mainly on its equivalence with the cost of the “basic basket”. It expresses the cost of “reproduction of labour”. Therefore, it should not be directly dependent on the level of productivity that exists at the social level or in defined sectors where workers are employed. It should not be violated by bureaucratic whims (Monreal, 23 June 2017).

The analysis of wages that is used today remains focused on the effects and not on the cause. The controversies between “increasing wages to increase productivity” and “increasing productivity to increase wages” are crumbs of the same bread. In both cases, they start from social forces external to workers, who manage the means of production (the bureaucrats) or are the owners (the capitalists). Both reproduce themselves, with marked differences, by reducing the worker to sell his or her labour power and thus alienating their participation in all the social relations of production.

It is often obvious, in the criticism of the state’s wage policy, that the private sector (irrespective of the higher incomes it provides today) reproduces the old logic that the capitalists increase their power by appropriating a certain amount of unpaid labour from workers. The capitalist strives to reduce wages and prolong the working day, while the worker constantly pushes in the opposite direction. Even though this tension is regulated by law – the effect of the general political action of workers – the distribution of social wealth between capitalists and workers is increasingly uneven (the empirical observation of such reports emerging in Cuba confirms this).

In the debates, the proposals and the search for solutions to the wage problem in Cuba, we do not expect the wage system to be a relationship that limits the creativity, freedom and rights of the direct producers of goods and services. Similarly, it creates material conditions and social forms

for its reproduction. As a result, the ongoing struggle for wage increases is only a palliative. For this reason, exhorts Marx, the conservative lemma of a "fair wage for a fair day's work" must be replaced by the revolutionary slogan: "abolition of wages" (Marx).

This is one more reason for deep exploration of cooperative, solidarity-based and mutualist forms of production, where labour is not subject to the wage conceptions of the bureaucracy or of capital. Where it establishes its own mechanisms for an equitable distribution of wealth, in other words profits... always on condition of a new social relationship of production where labour imposes its centrality.

In general the traits, tendencies and tensions described above occur on the basis of economic results that are insufficient to achieve the take-off, development and durability of the "model..." Which adds more tension to the process.

For 2016, according to official data, the main source of economic income is tourism, which contributes 3 billion dollars a year. This sector can make a greater indirect contribution to the economy because of its "fallout" in terms of interactions (still far from its potential) and direct income for Cuban families. On the other hand, tourism has serious social and environmental consequences, since it requires the importation of food, beverages, fuel and luxury products in order to satisfy more than four million visitors.

All other fundamental economic sectors tend to be in deficit. Nickel production has been reduced and the sugar industry has decreased to 1,500,000 tonnes (400,000 less than expected). The sale of petroleum products fell by 68.9 per cent and imports of Venezuelan oil by 4.4 per cent. Electrical power production fell by 6 per cent. Total exports fell by 16.3 per cent. Exports of services (doctors and teachers) decreased by 11 per cent. On the other hand, imports of foodstuffs amounted to 1,688,000 million dollars, while those of goods fell by 3.3 per cent. In this scenario, the country paid 5,299,000 dollars of its foreign debt in order to continue to have credit (Almeyra,

2017).

The context of international credit is complex and there seems to be no way to move forward without dealing with this complexity. Although conditions have improved relatively over the last five years, from the restructuring of external debt, some authors underline as elements of this situation: the country is not a member of any relevant international financial organization, neither concessional nor compensatory; the deepening of the sanctions of the United States, and the sad history of Cuban credit, with several debt moratoriums. All this implies that the costs of issuing the debt are very high, to which it must be added that there are not many partners with whom to work. In this complexity it is necessary to include the perception that the debt puts the country in the hands of its creditors, without viable alternatives, who may try to push Cuba towards the adoption of measures that we have tried to avoid up to now (Torres, 2017).

It cannot be ignored that in the international financial concert, the major institutions do not have as a priority aid to development, but only the expansion and protection of financial capital, and this is not at all compatible with projects of sovereignty that try to protect the economy so that it can be at the service of the needs for development of the population.

In this tense scenario, foreign investment grew in 2016 to about 1,300,000 dollars, far from the annual growth required, between 2,000,000 and 2,500,000 dollars. The 2017 national economy plan anticipates that foreign enterprises will assume only 6.5 per cent of investment.

The slowness in approving new projects has hampered access to short-term resources and the expansion of production capacity to ensure an increased dynamism of the economy in the years to come. This is due to bureaucratic inefficiency, linked to the distortions of the national banking and financial system, as well as to the monetary duality (Terrero, 2017).

Some analysts suggest we should not

only take into account large projects, which involve the disbursement of large sums, but that small and medium-sized enterprises should be considered, as well as the strengthening of the capacity to carry out the country's investments in order to attract foreign capital (Rodríguez, 2017). As an alternative, the authorisation of a limited amount of investment on the provincial and municipal levels could be taken into account.

The truth is that foreign investment has a paradoxical character. On the one hand, it is perhaps the constituent element of the model of development on which we can act more effectively in the short term. And at the same time it carries the risks that international capital represents for any national project based on popular dignity in general and that of workers in particular. Undoubtedly, this is one of the greatest demands for political creativity in defence of sovereignty. Let us recall that, behind the sinuous slogan of "more stimulation to investment", there hides the deregulation of capital which, in the most extreme cases, conditions the economic policies of developing countries.

III. When we try to conduct a thorough review of the reform process, the greatest uncertainties are to be found in the policy/regulatory area. While it is true that the "updating" documents have had more or less significant levels of consultation with different sectors and social institutions, these moments of democracy do not seem to herald the formation of structures of political dialogue with the social and economic actors in the country, who are more and more diverse.

The guidelines set out in relation to the political order do not go very far: to study how to reduce the number of members of the National Assembly of People's Power without sacrificing the representativeness of the people, to analyse the usefulness of a permanent and professional body that would direct the electoral processes, and to carry out the programme of Perfecting the Organs of People's Power approved by the leadership of the party (Penán, 2017).

The idea of a party that is "more democratic" in its role as a guide to the nation has not had any significant materialization. Proposals to increase, diversify and clarify the state's dialogue with society do not produce any tangible results. Nor is there any progress in readjusting the PCC's relationship with the legally constituted mass organizations, nor with the Cuban population in all its diversity.

However, and this is a significant part of the context, state and party bodies have lost their monopoly over questions and answers. On the contrary, the "density" of civil society has increased, as evidenced by the emergence of associative networks that defend various issues, autonomous and capable of influencing society and public agendas: religious communities, the LGBT movement, the movement for Black rights, various feminist collectives, alternative communication platforms, socio-cultural and productive community work, among others.

These groups of actors represent a broad ideological and critical gamut, which does not imply a break with "the revolutionary", but gives it meaning again. Many of these groups are largely overcoming the mistrust of traditional official sectors and gaining legitimacy and access to the public sphere (González, 2015).

IV. In the face of this reality, it is necessary to promote the redefinition of a new social pact, defining in particular the future modalities for the organisation of a permanent dialogue and strengthening social inclusion in the processes of definition, decision and control of public policy.

This road is already open and its continuation can be inferred from the "update" documents, but it is imperative to accelerate its construction. That is, to enlarge the normative processes that give it body and content. To this end, a revision of the conditions of "popular control" and "socialist civil society" mentioned in the reform documents would be necessary.

The more the "model update"

progresses, the more adjustments become necessary. The law must serve everyone. The reforms open spaces for new actors who are not totally free of the regulated rights and duties that have enabled their creation, their recognition, the clarification of their functions and their organization, as at the same time economic, social and political actors.

In the productive sector, it would be desirable to adjust a transparent, predictable and non-discretionary legal framework that facilitates the development of the entrepreneurial world (Torres, 2015), state and non-state. It would be necessary to regulate non-state economic actors by law. They lack specific models in order to adapt so as to develop their activity and thus contribute to their recognition and their regulation. For example, small and medium-sized enterprises, whether as a natural person or a collective. And that does not only concern private enterprises, since state enterprises would equally benefit from adopting varied organizational and associative forms (Cobo, 2016).

The term "working on one's own account" must be reconceptualized for its normative adjustment. It concerns both persons who carry out their work individually, others who invest their own or common capital and employ labour, as well as those whose incomes are more a rent than the result of their work.

Some employers operate as small and medium-sized enterprises, so the status of the contractor must be recognized and legislated for. In the same way, we must take into account the distinction between employers and employees, which must transcend the trade-union sphere, since the two do not occupy the same place, particularly in the private sector. Taking into account these peculiarities, it would be advisable to revise the Labour and Social Security Code.

As regards the necessary social pact with the new and old actors of civil society, we must consider the readjustment of the law on associations, the reform of the electoral law, the creation of a law of

worship, a law on citizenship, a municipal law and a law on communication. Let us add the updating of economic, social, cultural, civic-political, individual and collective rights and duties, as well as the legal regulations that organize and ensure their implementation.

Almost as the culmination of these ten years, the elaboration, debate and final presentation of the "Update" documents concluded: Conceptualization, Development Plan and guidelines. Taken as a whole, this is a doctrinal corpus, a policy of broad-spectrum proposals. It is an integrative package that will make it possible, in the medium and short term, to have a frame of reference for debates, suggestions and adjustments. A programmatic instrument that we can have recourse to in the long and complex process towards a better country for all.

One of the aims of the fundamental content is economic development and the increase in the standard of living, based on prosperity, social justice and fairness and in harmony with the environment. The recognition of the equality of rights and duties of all citizens, and in particular of workers, in all forms of management and ownership, is envisaged. Rights and duties that should be effective in terms of inclusion, democratic participation in decision-making processes in economic, political and social life, and dealing with all forms of discrimination detrimental to human dignity (Documents of the Seventh Congress). All these contents are a potential basis for the social creation of politics.

Ten years have passed since Raúl Castro convened a broad debate on the country's problems and their possible solutions. As a result, we have a country that has been transformed, even though we must not forget the complexities, the contradictions and the tensions. The truth is that the approach according to which nothing in Cuba has fundamentally changed is untenable. But it is equally true that these years have left many things that need to be unravelled.

A wide range of options has been

opened, but even when presented with similar terms, they do not point towards the same horizon. In the productive sector, the priorities formulated by at least three tendencies are well known:

1. Higher prevalence of state enterprises with increasing productive and distributive efficiency;
- 2.
3. Expansion of private property, in various forms, with the opening up to the labour market in order to increase production and income;
- 4.
5. Priority for social, community and collective forms of production, with a focus on the cooperative, which directly links producers to income resulting from productivity.
- 6.

Faced with a project of social, economic and political justice, as faces of sovereignty, independence and national dignity, three minimum keys would be needed to promote what is most encouraging and contain the dangers that these years have left:

Re-politicize society. We can choose to be a conscious and active subject. We are all the context, so we need to change what is implied by the question "Where is Cuba going?" into the citizen's certainty "where I want to contribute that it goes".

Popular control. Increase popular participation as a political means to eliminate the crippling power of the bureaucracy and curb the predatory voracity of capital.

Autonomy and collective creativity. Accumulate experiences in the socializing management of property in the hands of those who produce, in an indispensable connection with the permanent democratisation of all the domains of daily life, public and private.

Havana, 11 December 2017

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The BRICS, global governance, accumulation, class struggle and resource extractivism

19 July 2018, by **Patrick Bond**

Two leading critics of imperialism – John Smith and David Harvey – have recently fought bitterly at the [Review of African Political Economy website](#) over how to interpret geographically-shifting processes of super-exploitation.

The risk is that they obscure crucial features of their joint wrath: the unjust accumulation processes and geopolitics that enrich the wealthy and despoil the world environment. Another leading Marxist, Claudio Katz, has recently reminded of one such feature that deserves far more attention: Rau Mauro Marini's 1960s-70s theory of subimperialism, which fuses imperial and semi-peripheral agendas of power and accumulation with internal processes of super-exploitation.

The concept of subimperialism can resolve some of the Smith-Harvey disputes. Smith's book *Imperialism in the 21st Century* has as its foundation this formula:

"the imperialist division of the world into oppressed and oppressor nations has shaped the global working class, central to which is the violent

suppression of international labour mobility. Just as the infamous pass-laws epitomised apartheid in South Africa, so do immigration controls form the lynch-pin of an apartheid-like global economic system that systematically denies citizenship and basic human rights to the workers of the South and which, as in apartheid-era South Africa, is a necessary condition for their super-exploitation." [21]

This is a start but a rounded Marxist-feminist-ecological-race-conscious critique of imperialism needs a stronger foundation. Smith's problems begin with the South Africa metaphor and extend to the unconvincing binary of oppressed and oppressor nations, whose main shortcoming is that it underplays national ruling classes aspiring to shift from the former to the latter.

The analysis also fails to incorporate aspects of 'deglobalisation' that are increasingly apparent in this conjuncture (even before the Trump trade war fully breaks out and current financial market mini-crashes lead to another generalised meltdown). Neglect of multilateral power relations

and geopolitical bloc formation also characterises the partly-sterile, partly-inspiring debate that Smith strikes up with Harvey in his 2016 book *Imperialism in the Twenty-First Century*, in *Monthly Review Online* in 2017 and in the *Review of African Political Economy* in January-March 2018. [22]

The missing links in contributions from both Smith and Harvey relate to processes of subimperial accumulation and class struggle, especially at a time that so-called global governance (multilateralism) has successfully assimilated the potential challenge by the main bloc of semi-peripheral countries: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (the BRICS).

To be sure, this category was at least briefly deployed by Harvey (in his 2003 book *The New Imperialism*):

"The opening up of global markets in both commodities and capital created openings for other states to insert themselves into the global economy, first as absorbers but then as producers of surplus capitals. They then became competitors on the world stage. What might be called

“subimperialisms’ arose ... Each developing centre of capital accumulation sought out systematic spatio-temporal fixes for its own surplus capital by defining territorial spheres of influence.” [23]

This is the most vital component: the displacement of over-accumulated capital into geographically-dispersed sites, especially the BRICS, and the re-deployment of this capital into *even more super-exploitative sites of surplus extraction*, as Marini had projected, including the extractive industries of Africa – although not without debilitating contradictions that must be raised forthrightly. Hence a slightly renovated system for global management of these contradictions has also emerged, even if downplayed by Smith and Harvey in this recent debate. [24]

In short, the power structures of global neoliberalism seamlessly drew in the BRICS over the past decade, especially in relation to world finance (during the 2010-15 International Monetary Fund reform era), trade (at the World Trade Organisation in 2015) and climate policies (at the United Nations from 2009-15). The multilateral “reforms’ promoted by subimperial powers extend their own corporations’ accumulation and displace their own class, social and ecological backlashes – again albeit with profound contradictions. And there are few places where these kinds of processes are more obvious than here in South Africa.

Apartheid’s complex geography of super-exploitation

First, any South African metaphor needs more nuance than the typical white-black super-exploitation narrative. The apartheid system super-exploited workers, not merely by denying citizenship and basic human rights at the point of production.

There were also profound geographical relationships: urban segregation (the “Group Areas Act”

regulating residency); national and regional scales of migrancy regulated by the Pass Laws and Southern African military-enforced political power over labour supplies; and South Africa’s role in the global division of labour and geopolitics. [25] These all allowed the supply of black bodies to serve not only transnational corporations, but also locally-grounded processes of capital accumulation (e.g. the Oppenheimer and Rupert family fortunes), class formation, racism, gendered power relations and ecological stress. [26]

Smith’s point here, correct but incomplete, is that apartheid supplied labour power below the cost of reproduction across what is normally a worker’s life-cycle: the childhood rearing of workers is in a typical advanced capitalist country subsidised by day-care centres and schools; their illnesses and injuries are covered by medical aid systems whether public or private; and their retirement expenses are the result of savings, pensions and social security, all supported by employer programmes or taxation of corporations. During apartheid’s prime, none of these aspects of social reproduction were provided to black workers. That left women in the homelands to look after retired workers, sick workers and pre-workers – children – aside from the few schools run by religious missions. As a result, corporations paid much lower taxes and benefits. Indeed they enjoyed super-profits, amongst the world’s highest, until the system began to experience severe stresses during the 1970s. [27]

Smith uses the apartheid metaphor properly at a rudimentary level, insofar as the migrant relationship witnessed tens of millions of black male workers moving (11 out of 12 months each year) to the white-controlled and spatially-delineated cities, mines and plantations, as “temporary sojourners’ on the stolen land. But he might have pointed out that payment for their labour power below the cost of its reproduction was subsidised by the oppression of women displaced to rural areas by apartheid and regional colonialism, with consequent stresses to local ecologies – often to the point of breakdown and the formal

destruction of the once self-sufficient peasantry. (In the Marxist literatures on South Africa’s “articulations of modes production” [28] and its “uneven and combined development”, [29] this geographical aspect of super-exploitation is a central theme, although in both literatures more could still be done to draw out the gendered and environmental aspects. [30])

What Smith does not consider properly either in this case or globally, was the obvious *political relationship* between the Pretoria regime and its patrimonial allies. This relationship assured a broader systemic reproduction of cheap labour in both the internal Bantustans [31] and the neighbouring colonial and later neo-colonial regimes which facilitated this super-exploitative labour relationship until 1994. To write of apartheid simply as a racialised capital-labour relationship, without these gendered aspects, or the ecological stress associated with Bantustan overcrowding, or the overarching state apparatus that arranged and maintained super-exploitation, is to leave out the bulk of the story. Also, in the process, such neglect implicitly negates a major part of the anti-apartheid resistance movement.

Today, South Africa’s rejuvenated (post-1994) modes of super-exploitation deserve similar attention. Strong signals about new varieties of super-exploitation, including within a usurious micro-credit system, were sent in August 2012 at Marikana, a two-hour drive northwest of Johannesburg. There, three dozen migrant mineworkers were shot dead and scores more seriously wounded, many crippled for life one afternoon; they were amongst four thousand engaged in a wildcat strike against Lonmin platinum corporation, demanding US \$1000/month for rock-drilling. They were treated by police as “dastardly criminals” at the explicit (emailed) request of Cyril Ramaphosa, who was the London firm’s main local owner. [32] In 2014 he became Deputy President and in February 2018 replaced Zuma as president in a palace coup, 15 months before Zuma’s retirement date.

Bearing this in mind, Smith’s book

makes only a half-hearted effort to scale up the useful apartheid metaphor to the present mode of imperialism. To scale up more convincingly requires, in my view, extension of Harvey's conceptual apparatus to the level of subimperial power relations that are so well personified by Ramaphosa. Like the old Bantustan tribal warlords which the Pretoria regime escalated to power, there is now a global-scale buffer elite emerging which the imperial powers generally find useful in terms of legitimation, financial subsidisation and deputy-sheriff duty – even when anti-imperial rhetoric becomes an irritant, e.g. as under Zuma's 2009-18 rule.

From local to global apartheid - adding the BRICS as subimperial â€˜Bantustan elites'

Smith utilises the (very convincing) analysis of mining scholar-activist Andrew Higginbottom in which South African apartheid super-exploitation is considered in theoretical terms, [33] and from there he reminds us of powerful aspects of Samir Amin's Africa-centric dependency theory and Ruy Mauro Marini's Brazilian-based analysis. Both stress super-exploitation, but both do much more:

- Amin has always been concerned with the overall geopolitical balance of forces at global scale – not just in terms of South-to-North value transfers – and he regularly takes special care to work out how neoliberal global governance has emerged to accompany Washington's neoconservative military prowess. [34]

- Marini focused on the elaboration of subimperial power wielded by states that are incorporated into the Western system as regional agents of imperialism, in which, Smith agrees, "dependent economies like Brazil seek to compensate for the drain of wealth to the imperialist centres by developing their own exploitative

relationships with even more underdeveloped and peripheral neighboring economies." [35]

Smith is correct to remind of these writers' (and others') commitment to a "dependency thesis" based on "the reality of the extreme rates of exploitation in Bangladeshi garment factories, Chinese production lines, South African platinum mines, and Brazilian coffee farms." But aside from the tokenistic nod to Marini – followed immediately by a confession, "not discussed here" – at only one point in the book does Smith consider the ownership and accumulation processes associated with these sites of subimperial surplus value extraction. Sadly though, it comes in a dismissive footnote after he attacks Ellen Wood for:

- reducing imperialism to interstate rivalry between great powers before extinguishing it entirely: The "new imperialism [is] no longer ... a relationship between imperial masters and colonial subjects but a complex interaction between more or less sovereign states." Alex Callinicos has the same idea: "The global hierarchy of economic and political power that is a fundamental consequence of the uneven and combined development inherent in capitalist imperialism was not dissolved, but was rather complicated by the emergence of new centres of capital accumulation," producing what he calls subimperialisms, a broad category that includes Vietnam, Greece, Turkey, India, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, and South

Africa. [36]

Yet Wood's and Callinicos' descriptions of power relations are perfectly reasonable, coming at a time of heightened multilateral neoliberal imperialism, as the Clinton-Bush-Obama neoliberal-neocon era gathered strength and assimilated its opponents. That assimilation process is critical. The main site for it is the global governance process in relation to a variety of political, economic, social and environmental problems. It would be impossible to talk about post-War imperialism without its multilateral economic grounding in the 1944 Bretton Woods System. Indeed, Smith is entirely conscious of the many complicated ways that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, World Trade Organisation (WTO) and United Nations agencies still today manage global imperial power relations to the benefit of major corporations.

So why are such arrangements so difficult to conceptualise in the 21st century, at a time Xi Jinping earnestly promotes corporate globalisation against the Trump spectre of retreat from liberalised trade, global climate management and other uses of the U.S. State Department's soft-power arsenal? A profound shortcoming of *Imperialism in the 21st Century* is Smith's inability to grapple with 21st century global governance institutions, especially the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the G20 and G8 (until 2014, and now G7 without Putin's Russia). Had he considered these, Smith might have found his way beyond the old-fashioned binary of oppressed and oppressor nations.

For example, the BRICS bloc's role in imperialist multilateralism requires careful treatment, yet the bloc gets not one mention by Smith. For context, recall how in 2014 Barack Obama revealed to *The Economist* his agenda for incorporating China into imperialism's pseudo-multilateral system.

The Economist: "... that is the key issue, whether China ends up inside that [global governance] system or challenging it. That's the really big

issue of our times, I think.”

Mr Obama: “It is. And I think it’s important for the United States and Europe to continue to welcome China as a full partner in these international norms. It’s important for us to recognise that there are going to be times where there are tensions and conflicts. But I think those are manageable. And it’s my belief that as China shifts its economy away from simply being the low-cost manufacturer of the world to wanting to move up the value chain, then suddenly issues like protecting intellectual property become more relevant to their companies, not just to US companies.” [37]

Though Smith ignores the BRICS as either a unit of analysis or marker of ascendant economic power, the bloc’s assimilation into imperialism has amplified unfair and inequitable world order processes, especially when pursuing global finance, trade and climate governance:

- The IMF’s 2010-15 board restructuring left four of the BRICS much more powerful (e.g. China by 37 percent) but most African countries with a much lower voting share (e.g. Nigeria’s fell by 41 percent and South Africa’s by 21 percent). BRICS directors thrice (in 2011, 2015 and 2016) agreed with Western counterparts to endorse leadership by IMF managing director Christine Lagarde, even though she was prosecuted - and in 2016 declared guilty of negligence - in a ~400 million criminal corruption case dating to her years as French finance minister. Moreover, the BRICS ~84 billion Contingent Reserve Arrangement strengthens the IMF by compelling borrowers to first get an IMF loan before accessing 70 percent of their quota contributions during times of financial emergencies, while leaders of the BRICS New Development Bank - which has no civil society oversight - brag of co-financing and staff sharing arrangements with the World Bank. [38]

- The 2015 Nairobi World Trade Organisation summit essentially ended agricultural subsidies and hence food sovereignty thanks to crucial alliances

made with Washington and Brussels negotiators, from Brasilia and New Delhi representatives, with China, South Africa and Russia compliant. [39]

- The 2015 UNFCCC Paris Climate Agreement left Africa without any ‘climate debt’ options against the West and BRICS, since legal claims for signatories’ liability are prohibited. As was prefigured by four of the BRICS’ role (with Obama) in the 2009 Copenhagen Accord, the Paris commitments to emissions cuts are too small and in any case non-binding. Military, maritime and air transport emissions are not covered, while carbon markets are endorsed. Thus climate catastrophe is inevitable, mainly to the benefit of a residual profit stream for high-carbon industries in the rich and middle-income countries. [40]

BRICS elites were vital allies of the West in each recent site of global malgovernance, serving power much the way South Africa’s Bantustan leaders did during apartheid. However, the short-term victories such as at the IMF, WTO and UNFCCC that today benefit their neoliberal, pollution-intensive corporations and parastatal agencies come at a difficult time, given deglobalisation processes: the relative decline in trade (even pre-Trump), foreign direct investment (FDI), and cross-border finance measured in relation to GDP.

Likewise, the commodity super-cycle’s 2011 peak and then the crash of world minerals and petroleum prices in 2015 not only ended Africa Rising rhetoric. Just as importantly, since there fewer profits to be had from high prices, many transnational corporations made up for this by increasing the volume of extraction so as to seek a greater mass not rate of profit.

BRICS corporates exemplify super-exploitation

BRICS firms became some of the most super-exploitative corporations engaged in accumulation not only on

their home turf but also in Africa. To illustrate the extraction of surpluses, from 2000 to 2014 the value of Africa-BRICS trade rose from US \$28 billion to US \$377 billion, before falling in 2015 by 21 percent due to the commodity price crash. [41] The bilateral investment treaties that facilitate these transfers from Africa to the BRICS are just as notoriously one-sided as those with Western powers, according to the main scholar of this problem, Ana Garcia. [42]

To take the example of Mozambique, Carlos Castel-Branco shows how its rulers aimed for “maximisation of inflows of foreign capital - FDI or commercial loans - without political conditionality” (much of which came from the BRICS as well as Portugal) in a super-exploitative context: “the reproduction of a labour system in which the workforce is remunerated at below its social cost of subsistence and families have to bear the responsibility for maintaining (especially feeding) the wage-earning workers by complementing their wages,” a common phenomenon across the continent. [43]

While there may occasionally be an exception, [44] consider a few of the most egregious examples involving the BRICS, [45]

- Brazil’s major subimperial construction firm Odebrecht admitted paying bribes of US \$51 million to officials in Angola and Mozambique (but the actual amounts are likely to be much higher), and both Odebrecht and the world’s second-largest mining company, Rio-based Vale, have faced regular protests over mass displacement at construction projects and coal-mining operations in Tete, Mozambique, as has the Brazilian government (dating to Workers Party rule) over its ProSavana corporate-agriculture land-grab. [46]

- Russia’s Rosatom nuclear reactor deals across Africa - in South Africa, Egypt, Ghana, Nigeria and Zambia - are increasingly dubious, especially after the only country with an existing nuclear reactor, South Africa, witnessed an intense debate due in part to widespread corruption at the implementing agency (Eskom). As a result of growing fiscal crisis, the

Rosatom deal appears to have fallen away. But Rosatom [47]

- Indian companies in Africa have been especially exploitative, led by Vedanta chief executive Anil Agarwal - caught bragging to investors of having bought the continent's largest copper mine for just US \$25 million after fibbing to Zambian president Levy Mwanawasa and each year returning US \$500 million to US \$1 billion in revenues. ArcelorMittal's Lakshmi Mittal's major African steel operation, South Africa's former state-owned ISCOR, was accused by even Pretoria's trade minister of milking the operations. Jindal's super-exploitative arrangements in Mozambique and South Africa are regularly criticised. But the most egregious state and private sector mode of accumulation by Indian capital in Africa must be the combination of the Gupta brothers and (state-owned) Bank of Baroda, whose corruption of South Africa's ruling political elite led first to massive looting of the public sector (and illicit financial flows via Bank of Baroda) and then the fall of Jacob Zuma and allied politicians, as well as other South African and international firms caught up in the Gupta web (including western corporations Bell Pottinger, KPMG, McKinsey and SAP). [48]

- Chinese firms - both state-owned and private - have been accused of major financial, human rights, labour and environmental abuses in Africa, perhaps most spectacularly in the case of Sam Pa whose operations included mining diamonds in eastern Zimbabwe. In 2016, even President Robert Mugabe alleged that of US \$15 billion in revenues, only US \$2 billion were accounted for, in mines mainly controlled by the local military and Chinese companies. (In late 2017, coup leader Constantino Chiwenga travelled to Beijing and received permission from the Chinese military to proceed with Mugabe's overthrow). In South Africa, the China South Rail Corporation played a major role in the Gupta corruption ring, in relation to multi-billion dollar locomotive and ship-loading crane contracts with the parastatal railroad Transnet. [49]

- South African businesses have a record of looting the rest of the

continent dating to Cecil Rhodes' (19th century) British South Africa Company, the Oppenheimer mining empire, and more recently current President Ramaphosa's pre-2012 chairing of Africa's largest cell-phone company, MTN. The latter was exposed - along with two other companies he led, Lonmin and Shanduka - in 2014-17 for having offshore accounts in Bermuda and Mauritius used to illicitly remove funds from Africa. South Africa's corporate elites regularly rank as the most corrupt on earth in the biannual PwC Economic Crimes survey, with one recent report showing that "eight out of ten senior managers commit economic crime." [50]

Once profits are gained in this process, they are systematically removed through accounting techniques as misinvoicing and other tax dodges. Illicit financial flows that accompany FDI, Smith observes, are Net Resource Transfers (NRT) "from poor countries to imperialist countries in 2012 exceeded US \$3 trillion." Specifically, the NRTs from Africa "to imperialist countries (or tax havens licensed by them) between 1980 to 2012 totalled \$792 billion" (about US \$25 billion annually). [51]

But the sleight of hand here is the ability of *local* elites - not just Western or BRICS corporations - to accumulate offshore in places like Mauritius (the African continent's leading hot money centre). This part of the outflow is not a function of 'imperialism' but local greed and higher profits gained by an unpatriotic bourgeoisie who can hold funds offshore (even idle), instead of investing in African economies whose currencies are often rapidly declining in value. [52] South Africa's peaked at R6.3/US \$ in 2011 but fell to R17.9/US \$ in 2016 before recovering to the R12/US \$ range recently.

Naturally the City of London, Wall Street and Zurich are crucial sites for parking illicit flows. But so too are the BRICS. The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa estimated that US \$319 billion was transferred illicitly from Africa during the commodity super-cycle, from 2001 to 2010. The United States was the leading single destination at US \$50 billion; but China, India, and Russia

were responsible for US \$59 billion (Brazil is not recorded in the top 17 and South Africa is not included). [53]

One of Smith's rebuttals is that China is also a victim of illicit financial outflows, not just a villain. This is true, for capital flight is one reason China's peak US \$4 trillion in foreign reserves in 2013 fell to US \$3.3 trillion by 2016, at a pace rising to a record US \$120 billion/month outflow by the end of 2015. Beijing's imposition of tighter exchange controls in mid-2015 and early 2016 slowed the process. But with the ambitious One Belt, One Road (OBOR) Initiative to move westward, there will be many more projects in which surplus capital will identify spatial fixes outside China.

Global Financial Integrity measured annual illicit financial flows from China at an average US \$140 billion from 2003-14. The point, however, is that these flows are not necessarily transfers from 'China' to the 'imperialist' countries, although Western firms no doubt transfer as much as possible to the home countries (usually through R&D royalties and licenses). The illicit flows measured by *Global Financial Integrity* are, in part, Chinese elites' own strategies for accumulation.

Unfortunately, both Smith and Harvey ignore another vital outflow of poorer countries' wealth, in the form of non-renewable resources whose extractive value - termed "natural capital" - is not compensated for by reinvestment. The volume of the losses to Africa here far outstrips the financial outflows, and a great deal goes to firms from the BRICS. This category includes the net value of extracting minerals, oil, gas and other non-renewable resources which, from 1995-2015 were measured by the World Bank in *The Changing Wealth of Nations 2018* at more than US \$100 billion annually from Sub-Saharan Africa. [54] (This figure does not include North Africa nor the diamond and platinum accounts due to regional definitions for the former and measurement difficulties for the latter). The net outflow is above and beyond the increased Gross National Income and direct investment generated in the extraction process, and far outstrips all the other financial mechanisms

through which Africa's wealth is drained.

Indeed, in relation to depletion of non-renewable resources, one corrective to the Smith-Harvey debate comes from Amin's latest book, *Modern Imperialism, Monopoly Finance Capital, and Marx's Law of Value*, in which both super-exploitation and environmental appropriations are restated by Amin as the two core processes within world capitalism. As he argues,

- "capitalist accumulation is founded on the destruction of the bases of all wealth: human beings and their natural environment. It took a wait lasting a century and a half until our environmentalists rediscovered that reality, now become blindingly clear. It is true that historical Marxisms had largely passed an eraser over the analyses advanced by Marx on this subject and taken the point of view of the bourgeoisie - equated to an atemporal 'rational' point of view - in regard to the exploitation of natural resources." [55]

Capitalist rationality is to exploit without reference to the depletion of labour and resources over time. That China and India are now the most important purchasers of Africa's raw materials requires a rethinking of the ways super-exploitation of labour and environmental destruction are being amplified by capitalism's widening out from the historic European, US and Japanese core.

Altogether, these processes generate a form of subimperial accumulation that is implicit in Harvey's rebuttal to Smith, when he recognises "complex spatial, interterritorial and place-specific forms of production, realisation and distribution." The

extraction of resources from Africa is undertaken by such firms, Harvey continues,

"even as the final product finds its way to Europe or the United States. Chinese thirst for minerals and agricultural commodities (soy beans in particular) means that Chinese firms are also at the centre of an extractivism that is wrecking the landscape all around the world... A cursory look at land grabs all across Africa shows Chinese companies and wealth funds are way ahead of everyone else in their acquisitions. The two largest mineral companies operating in Zambia's copper belt are Indian and Chinese." [56]

Perhaps it is Smith's old-fashioned binary North-South line of argument that prevents him mentioning - much less comprehending - the BRICS' amplification of both super-exploitation and ecological crises, especially those relating to Africa, or the even larger net natural capital losses. Still, to his credit, Smith's book acknowledges other crucial aspects of imperialism briefly discussed next: overaccumulation crisis, financialisation and remilitarisation. [57] Nevertheless, without exploring these aspects of imperialist political economy and geopolitics in a way that incorporates subimperialism, the potential for Smith to engage Harvey's overall concern about uneven geographical development is truncated.

Imperial-subimperial relations in an era of deglobalisation, over-accumulation, financialisation and remilitarisation

Crucially, the ebb and flow of capital across the world is not merely one of spatial extension, but also contraction - including the subimperial corporations that are active in Africa.

From 2008-16, global trade/GDP declined from 61 percent to 58 percent. But China's trade/GDP rate fell from 53 percent to 36 percent; India's from 53 percent to 40 percent; South Africa's from 73 percent to 60 percent; Russia's from 53 percent to 45 percent; and Brazil's from 28 percent to 25 percent. [58] In the first two BRICS, the crash was a function of rebalancing through higher domestic consumption rather than export-led growth. Declining trade shares for South Africa, Russia and Brazil reflect peaking commodity prices just before the global financial meltdown that year, followed by subsequent recessions.

Behind this is an overall crisis of over-accumulated capital, to a large extent due to excessive expansion of capitalist relations in China, beyond its workers' and the world's capacity to consume the output. A 2017 International Monetary Fund report confirmed China's overcapacity levels had reached more than 30 percent in coal, non-ferrous metals, cement and chemicals by 2015 (in each, China is responsible for 45-60 percent of the world market). [59]

The subsequent shrinkage was the central reason for the massive crash of raw materials prices in 2015. *The Guardian's* Larry Elliott summarised IMF concerns over "methods used to keep the economy expanding rapidly: an increase in government spending to fund infrastructure programmes and a willingness to allow state-controlled banks to lend more for speculative property developments." [60] Another technique - expansion of financial markets to mop up the capacity - also became dangerous, with Chinese banks' high-risk ratio rising from 4 percent in 2010 to more than 12 percent since early 2015.

Financialisation is one symptom of global overproduction, in China and many other sites. Even though cross-border financial assets have fallen from 58 percent of world GDP in 2008 to 38 percent in 2016, the fast-rising domestic flows into high-risk (high-return) emerging markets and notwithstanding soaring overall indebtedness. In 2017, the Institute of International Finance announced that global debt reached US \$217 trillion

(327 percent of world GDP), up from US \$86 trillion (246 percent of GDP) in 2002 and US \$149 billion (276 percent) in 2007. Since 2012, emerging markets led by China have been responsible for all the addition to net debt. [61]

The next recession - which in mid-2017 HSBC, Citigroup and Morgan Stanley economists acknowledged is imminent due to vastly over-priced stock markets and unprecedented corporate indebtedness - will also confirm how optimists have become over-exposed locally, even as they lose appetite for global markets. [62] The early-2018 gyrations in world stock markets, including losses of US \$4 trillion in a matter of days, signal that nothing was done after the 2008 meltdown to halt the bursting of financial bubbles.

Moreover, deglobalisation is now fully underway, as it was in prior eras such as the 1880s and 1930s. [63] For example, annual FDI was US \$1.56 trillion in 2011, fell to US \$1.23 trillion in 2014, rose to US \$1.75 trillion in 2015, and then dipped to US \$1.52 trillion in 2016, a decline as a share of GDP from 3.5 percent in 2008 to 1.7 percent in 2016. According to the UN Conference on Trade and Development, the attraction of Africa was waning from the US \$66 billion peak inflow in 2008 to a 2016 level of US \$59 billion. [64]

Although a late-stage recovery appeared underway in early 2018, there is no hope of a decisive upturn on the horizon, despite hype surrounding China's mega-infrastructure projects. OBOR is touted for restoring some market demand for construction-related commodities. However, at a deeper structural level, China suffers from the apparent exhaustion of prior sources of profitability. The OBOR appears as a potential US \$1 trillion mirage, and one that may in the process even crack the BRICS, in the event the Kashmir OBOR routing continues to cause extreme alienation between Xi Jinping and Narendra Modi.

Another challenge to China comes from within: the ebbing of super-exploitative opportunities because of rising wages. Smith is incredulous: "It

is true that ultra-low wages in southern nations are being used as a club against workers in imperialist nations, but it is preposterous to suggest that the North-South gulf in wages and living standards has been substantially eroded." [65] But global income studies and the "elephant curve" distribution by Branco Milanovic reveal a rise of these workers' wages compared to the stagnant labour aristocracies of the North. [66]

In this context, the status of subimperialism is fluid, especially within the deeply-divided BRICS. This will be evident in July 2018 when the bloc meets in Johannesburg. The South African host is no longer the faux anti-imperialist Zuma, pushed out in a February 2018 coup by Ramaphosa in spite of begging to stay six more months so as to chair the BRICS, which he believes is his major legacy. For years Zuma complained that he was "poisoned" by Western agents - working through his fourth wife in mid-2014 - due to his support for the BRICS (he was indeed poisoned and then recovered in Russia, but it is not yet certain why this occurred). [67]

The Brazilian leader Michel Temer will soon be replaced as president, in a society with rampant elite self-delegitimation once the most popular candidate, Lula da Silva, was framed on bogus corruption charges, jailed and prevented from running in the October 2018 election. From India, Modi has openly embraced the Trump regime. The Chinese and Russian leaderships are remarkably stable: Xi's lifetime premiership was awarded in early 2018, just prior to a Russian electoral landslide won by Putin (after his main opponent was prohibited from contesting) which appears to extend his 18th year in power for many more.

In this context, at least, Smith makes valid political points about the class character of Chinese expansionism:

- "Imperialism is inscribed in the DNA of capitalism, and if China has embarked on the capitalist road, then it

has also embarked on the imperialist road...

Chinese state capitalism (for want of a better term) shows signs of developing a strategic challenge to Japanese, European and North American dominance in key industries... Class-conscious workers must maintain independence from both sides in this looming conflict ... [by] opposing Chinese capitalist expansion and the Chinese Communist Party's attempts to forge an alliance with reactionary capitalist regimes in Myanmar, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and other countries." [68]

The rise of subimperial powers and their domination of hinterlands is taking place decidedly *within* and not *against* imperialism, and not just in terms of those multilateral processes discussed above. The world is much more dangerous since the BRICS took their present form in 2010: in Syria and the Gulf States, Ukraine, the Korean Peninsula and the South China Sea.

Even the Chinese-Indian border is rife with confrontations: mid-2017 fighting between the two giants at an obscure border post in Bhutan nearly derailing the BRICS annual meeting, and Modi's boycott of the OBOR summit in May 2017 was due to Beijing's mega-project trespassing on what New Delhi considers its own Kashmir land now held by Pakistan. For Xi it is the crucial turf linking western China to the Arabian Sea's Gwadar port. There is no resolution in sight. [69]

Acting as a geopolitical bloc, the BRICS' public security interventions have occurred strictly within the context of the G20: first, to prevent Barack Obama from bombing Syria using pressure at the larger group's September 2013 summit in St Petersburg, and then six months later

in Amsterdam, supporting the Russian invasion (or “liberation”) of Crimea once the West made threats to expel Moscow from the G20 – just as the U.S. and Europe had thrown Putin out of the G8, now G7. However, when Trump came to last July’s G20 summit in Hamburg, the BRICS leaders were extremely polite notwithstanding widespread calls to introduce anti-US sanctions (e.g. carbon taxes) due to Trump’s withdrawal from global climate commitments just a month earlier.

Fortunately for Southern Africa, remilitarisation is not a major factor in geopolitics today, in part because the apartheid regime gave way to a democracy in 1994 and ended destabilisation policies. More than two million people were killed by white regimes and their proxies in frontline anti-colonial and anti-apartheid struggles during the 1970s-80s. More millions died in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) during the early 2000s’ period of extreme resource extraction, a process that continues at low levels.

The two recent armed interventions by Pretoria in the region were to join United Nations peacekeeping troops in the DRC (2013-present) and aid the beleaguered authoritarian regime in the Central African Republic (2006-13). Both are considered political-military failures insofar as violence continues in both sites. In the latter’s capital city Bangui, more than a dozen South African troops were killed in 2013 defending the Johannesburg firms pursuing lucrative contracts, just days before a BRICS “Gateway to Africa” summit in Durban. [70]

Marini, Katz, Amin, Prashad and Chibber on subimperialism in the political conjuncture

With Smith and Harvey engaged in a fierce debate, what have other leading Southern contributors said of these

matters? Claudio Katz simultaneously reminded in March 2018 of Marini’s best-known contribution to Marxist theory, namely the theory of subimperialism:

- “The simple centre-periphery polarity is less sufficient than in the past in understanding globalisation. Value chains have enhanced the relative weight of the semi-peripheral countries. Multinational firms no longer prioritise the occupation of national markets to take advantage of subsidies and customs barriers. They hierarchise another type of external investments. In certain cases they ensure the capture of natural resources determined by the geology and climate of each place. In other situations, they take advantage of the existence of large contingents of a cheap and disciplined work force. These two variants – appropriation of natural wealth and exploitation of employees – define the strategies of transnational corporations and the location of each economy in the global order... This relegated positioning is corroborated even in those economies that managed to forge their own multinational companies (India, Brazil, South Korea). They entered a field that was monopolised by the centre, without modifying

their secondary status in globalised production.” [71]

Adds Samir Amin,

“The ongoing offensive of United States/Europe/Japan collective imperialism against all the peoples of the South walks on two legs: the economic leg – globalised neoliberalism forced as the exclusive possible economic policy; and the political leg – continuous interventions including preemptive wars against those who reject imperialist interventions. In response, some countries of the South, such as the BRICS, at best walk on only one leg: they reject the geopolitics of imperialism but accept economic neoliberalism.” [72]

The militarist agenda of imperialism is now being somewhat more effectively balanced by the likes of China’s navy and Russia’s missile systems, both capable of engaging in debilitating strikes that would evade U.S. prevention. But even while rejecting imperialism’s geopolitics, it is the BRICS’ assimilation into neoliberal multilateral politics that stands out even more.

And even though Vijay Prashad does not believe the BRICS can “counter the military dominance of the U.S. and NATO,” and indeed even though “Overwhelming military power translates into political power,” and even though “BRICS have few means, at this time, to challenge that power,” Prashad does agree that the BRICS have accepted economic neoliberalism:

- “The BRICS bloc – given the nature of its ruling classes (and particularly with the right now in ascendancy in Brazil and in India) – has no ideological alternative to imperialism. The domestic policies adopted by the BRICS states can be described as *neoliberal with southern characteristics* – with a

focus on sales of commodities, low wages to workers along with the recycled surplus turned over as credit to the North, even as the livelihood of their own citizens is jeopardised, and even as they have developed new markets in other, often more vulnerable, countries which were once part of the Third World bloc... In fact, the new institutions of the BRICS will be yoked to the IMF and the dollar - not willing to create a new platform for trade and development apart from the Northern order. Eagerness for Western markets continues to dominate the growth agenda of the BRICS states. The immense needs of their own populations do not drive their policy

orientations." [73]

Vivek Chibber also sees BRICS elites as assimilationist, in a recent South African interview: "the world is moving toward a more multi-centred political set of alignments. Economically, right now what we are seeing happening is the convergence of ruling classes in the global south and the global north into a common committee of global capitalist interests. That it seems to me is a new phenomenon." [74]

Such features of global capitalism go some way towards resolving the contradictions Smith and Harvey raise in their accounts. Most importantly, by more clearly naming the BRICS threat as an *amplifier* of imperialism, not an alternative bloc, a critique of the subimperial location will pave the way for a better understanding by the world's anti-capitalist forces, so that no further confusion need spread about the potentials for allying with BRICS elites (or for that matter, for world elites agreeing to a Kautsky-style global new deal). Although in many cases there is an 'anti-corruption' veneer, the democratic space for progressive politics is closing in most of the BRICS, alongside intensified economic

exploitation and worsening environmental conditions.

The first weeks of 2018 witnessed the arrest of Brazil's popular former President Lula da Silva as he appeared likely to win the October election; the failure of Putin to allow credible electoral competition; growing state-sponsored fascism within India; the ending of term limits in China at the same time as worsening surveillance and repression; and a popular regime change in South Africa that was immediately followed by intense budgetary austerity and an attack on workers' right to strike.

In the last week of July 2018, when the BRICS bloc heads of state meet in Johannesburg's Sandton business district, the counter-summit of radical activists and intellectuals gathering under the banner of 'brics-from-below' will take forward critiques of both local/regional super-exploitation, ecological threats, democratic deficits and the global process which creates BRICS subimperialism. Marxist theorists should consider how recognition of these processes can be done in both practice and through a broader theory of imperialism.

Source : [Pambazuka](#).

The Haitian people revolt, demonstrators control almost all the country

18 July 2018

The third death was of a security guard of a former political candidate who was stopped at a barricade. The guard left his vehicle and shot in the air apparently to try to disperse the crowd. A reporter for Associated Press saw the crowd capture the man and attack him while the vehicle was leaving. Protesters had set fire to tires and mounted barricades to block the main streets of Port-au-Prince and the northern city of Cap-Haïtien.

Our correspondent Henry Boisrolin says:

I tell you in summary that the situation in Haiti is still boiling and that the crisis has deepened very seriously. For some days now, an insurrectional state has existed in almost all the regions of the country. The roads are cut, there are fires, barricades and violent clashes in different places. This situation is the result of an accumulation of conflicts,

discontents and clashes of all kinds that have been developing for years, in the face of the anti-popular policies and plundering carried out by the puppet government of the current illegitimate president Jovenel Moïse.

The latest trigger has been the government's announcement of a brutal increase in the price of fuel (it should be said that the main fuels used by the people to cook are coal and kerosene, because there is no gas

supply, except for the well-to-do classes and the dominant elite). This increase had been announced previously, and the popular organizations had warned that if it was carried out, a popular insurrection would be unleashed. This is what is happening now.

The current insurrectional state has surpassed the possibilities of containment on the part of the repressive forces. The magnitude of the explosion is monumental, not even during the fall of Duvalier's dictatorship was there an uprising of this type.

The National Police has not moved against the protestors and has made this known through a press release. This "rare" decision indicates that President Jovenel does not have control over his main force of repression. There is also no presence

of the MINUJUSTH (UN) police in the streets. So far, the government has not issued any official statement.

The fundamental element to understand is that the state of uprising of the masses completely transcends the fuel price increase. This has been the "straw that broke the camel's back". The popular outcry expressed in the barricades and in the streets demands the resignation of the president and the fall of the government.

Hundreds of thousands of protesters are in the streets, building barricades, setting fire to service stations, car dealerships, premises, homes and so on and there are calls to occupy the centre of the capital, where the palace of government is located.

There are no means of transport, all

markets are closed, the media (radios, channels and so on) are not broadcasting information because journalists cannot get to their production centres, although in some cases the omission of information is intentional. However, popular media communicators are trying to recompose the information chain in some way.

It is important to note that for the moment, no political force is commanding the actions, but rather that they are developing in an uncoordinated way. The organizations are trying to articulate to give this uprising a clearer political direction and avoid the situation ending in generalized uncontrolled violence.

8 July 2018

Source: *Resumen Latinoamericano* republished by [AndNoticias](#).

Revolts against price rises bring down government

18 July 2018, by **Régine Vinon**

The government announced the measure at the time of the Belgium-Brazil World Cup football match, hoping without doubt that attentions would be mainly occupied in supporting Brazil, a very popular team in Haiti. However, this was not enough: as soon as the decision became known, thousands of residents took to the streets to shout their anger. Protesters attacked the country's signs of wealth, banks or luxury hotels. The supermarkets were stormed, and demonstrators took away staple products. The city of Port-au-Prince was blockaded, and the explosion also affected provincial towns, in the north, on the central plateau, and in the south. Everywhere, the poor population let its anger explode.

The next day, Saturday, 7 July, the government issued a decree

cancelling that of the previous day and also the price increases. This did not prevent the riots from continuing for a few days, until the resignation of the government on Saturday, 14 July.

IMF and bosses manoeuvre

The agreement signed on 25 February with the IMF is supposedly a serious attempt to promote economic growth and reduce poverty! In return for financial "help", the IMF, as usual, requires measures to reduce deficits, and therefore a reduction in subsidies. With the immediate result of increases in the price of transport, as well as food transported from the countryside to the cities.

Haiti is considered one of the poorest

countries on the planet. It has 58% of its population living below the poverty line, according to UN figures. Inflation is already rampant, above 13%, and unemployment is massive, which explains these violent reactions.

This is not the first time the population has shown its anger and expressed its demands: in September 2017, the capital was hit by a transport strike following an increase in taxes on several products, including petrol. In the spring of this year, in May and June, thousands of textile workers, working on a cheap subcontract for Western firms, repeatedly demonstrated to claim a minimum wage of 1000 gourdes (15 euros) per day. The minimum wage has been fixed since July 2017 at 350 gourdes (8.50 euros) and does not allow a decent standard of living. "We are paid on Saturday, on Monday we

start to go into debt,” said a protester. Despite repeated promises at each social explosion, the government has

not raised the minimum wage, encouraged by the Haitian bosses. A government that had already promised a few months ago social benefits in

relation to transport, health insurance cards and social housing. Promises which have not been fulfilled.

‘A Better Past is Still Possible’. Interview with Boris Buden

16 July 2018

Neda Genova: There is a dominant discourse in Bulgaria which often mobilises an anti-communist rhetoric as an explanatory matrix for almost all of the deficits of the current (hyper)capitalist regime: the privation and violence of the present are interpreted as a result of an insufficiently radical break with the country’s communist past. Thus, issues like corruption, for instance, are paradoxically seen as a part of a communist ‘mentality’ or ‘heritage’, rather than as a constitutive feature of capitalism. Can you comment on that?

Boris Buden: Yes, for me this is a very interesting question. It is a question of a certain miracle, I would say: it is the miracle that communism has actually survived in the guise of anti-communism, as a target of anti-communism. And this is the only way it has survived. So, we see that the anti-communism needs a communism even if communism no longer exists. This is a classical situation for an ideological condition, to be compared really with the Stalinist system.

The moment when the collectivisation and generally the new soviet-system in the 30s didn’t produce the expected results, when it started to fail, it started to become clear that the ideas didn’t result in a better praxis, in more production, in more freedom, etc, etc. Then there were two options: either to say openly that the system has failed (or it is failing) or to find a culprit, someone who can be blamed for its failures. And this is the Stalinist mechanism of production of the

enemies. They were exterminated and the extermination, the processes and the whole terror had the purpose of covering, justifying the failures of the system. Because they were presented as the cause of the failure of the system.

Now, we see that something similar is happening with post-communism. Not only the end of totalitarian dictatorship was promised in the beginning...There was the expectation that democracy and capitalism would be able to bring growth and an improvement on all levels of human life. Nobody believed that social welfare should be dismantled. People believed naively that they can preserve their social systems and have freedom, a functioning market economy, and being integrated into the world. But this is not possible.

And not only that - it has become clear that there is no capitalism without crisis. And crises produce time and again their own victims. So now the system needs communism as still being the reason for its failures. Or justification. And it finds them in the remnants of the past: not yet erased, not sufficiently cleaned space of bad communist collectivist habits, false expectations that someone else and not the market will solve the problems of the people...

Today, the communist past is blamed for everything. This is why the system needs communism as its enemy, because what is at stake is the crisis of legitimization of the whole post-communist historical project. Which was a project that promised something

but couldn’t keep its promises.

Although there are differences amongst the post-communist countries, I think this is a common feature. I come from Croatia where still, nowadays, you have the feeling that the struggle against communism is even more active, more important than 25 years ago. This is possible only because these post-communist societies have accepted the logic of the belatedness. They have accepted the general ideological concept of the post-communist term. As I wrote in the book [75], it is presented in the Habermas’ concept of the ‘catching-up’ revolution, *nachholende Revolution*, with the idea that communism has cut off Eastern societies from normal historical development (which was possible in the West) and now, after the fall of this totalitarian obstacle, these societies are in the condition of historical belatedness. More concretely, they are in a condition of a belated modernity and from this position they have to catch up with the missed historical development, which means to catch up with the West. This creates a weird temporal difference, a temporal gap, which is typical for the way in which for instance in the time of classical colonialism, the metropolis and the colonial empire treated the colonial space. This is also how the knowledge production of the non-Western ‘other’ was structured. Just to remind you that in the concept of anthropology, the idea that the ‘other’ of Europe, of the West, is not only somewhere else but also in another time. Which means that the object of anthropological knowledge

never shares the same time with the subject of the knowledge. The subject of knowledge is always on time, while the object of his/her research is in another, historically belated time. This is also discussed in Johannes Fabian's famous book 'Time and the Other'. And this has been preserved, it has been repeated in the post-communist space.

Interestingly, without providing any sort of resistance, the societies (which also means the intellectuals and the cultural subjects of the East) accepted this logic of 'catching up' development. They accepted the logic of transition, in a kind of self-colonisation. They accepted the ideological concept of post-communist transition - that's nothing else but this 'catching up'. I think it is interesting that this logic has also completely unified and in this sense also erased the experience of the historical communism. Which is divided. It is different from society to society, from situation to situation. Yugoslav communism was different from Bulgarian, from the Soviet, and it has different phases, etc. The whole space was retroactively unified under the signifier of totalitarianism. It is supposed that all of us, coming from the East, share one single historical experience, the experience of totalitarianism, and this is what differentiates us from the West. It unifies the whole space from Budapest to Vladivostok as a space, which under totalitarian pressure and terror was cut off from historical normality.

On the other hand, the fact that anti-communism intensifies itself now is a symptom of the crisis of this post-communist narrative and its whole logic. I think that the systems are rapidly losing historical legitimisation and there is a sort of panic, which could lead to different solutions. It could lead to what we have been witnessing in Poland, Croatia and Hungary - a right-wing nationalist mobilisation with a revival of the idea of national sovereignty within the European Union. So this has to be connected - the aggressive anti-communism now, a quarter century after the fall of communism, with the right-wing mobilisation.

N.G.: I definitely agree with this

latter point - we have many examples of similar processes in Bulgaria too. One part of this talk about 'communist heritage' and 'mentality' has something to do with what you are writing about in the book - namely, how a translation of social and political issues in the language of culture can become a depoliticising force.

B.B.: I would even say it is an epistemological problem of our relation to the past today. It tells something about a historical inability to critically reflect upon the past, to create something, which could be called 'historical experience'. You know, after communism ended, the societies would have been expected to have some sort of experience of the past, an experience that could have been connected to the horizon of the future; to the question 'what have we learned for the future?'. But what we have been witnessing is, again, an erasure of the past: instead of a historical experience of communism, we have different forms of memory cultures that deal with the past. And memory cultures function through the logic of cultural difference. The past is not simply a historical past, the past is perceived as a different culture and it is this cultural difference that creates the temporal dimension of the past. It's not that there is a past so that we can look into it, but we recognise past as past only through cultural difference. And this obsession is not typical only of the Eastern countries; it is a crisis of history in general. And of historiography. Today there is what Pierre Nora calls 'the age of commemoration' - cultural memory has replaced what used to be historiography in terms of knowledge, in terms of dealing with the past. David Lowenthal, an expert on the notion of 'cultural heritage' also writes about this in his very interesting book 'The Past is a Foreign Country'.

In my book, I also analyse more than one museum of communism. *Museums of communism*: these simplified narratives in which the past is posed from a 'post-traumatic' perspective, but also as a cultural artefact. It is a pile of cultural artefacts, memorabilia, etc... So that in fact communism still exists either in a museum, as an object

of memory culture, or as a universal perpetrator, still alive, preventing the future from finally coming. So these are the two faces of communism.

Another point is that if this communist past is presented in that way, in fact it is not worth remembering it. It is something, which should have been better forgotten, it is of no value whatsoever. The past exists only in the form of this cultural representation but there is no historical experience. And historical experience is something that can be articulated only actively, practically and by engaging with the reality in which you live. Then the past tells you something - if you, so to say, *ask* the present about the future, *then* you remember the past. Then it is not simply a cultural issue. So, I would say that these forms of remembering the communist past are rather forms of oblivion.

It's an oblivion that prevents us from connecting to the past, to see the continuities. The *continuities* are today much more interesting than the differences. The continuities of oppression, for instance. The continuities of failures, especially in former Yugoslavia. It is extremely interesting, because in former Yugoslavia there was a market socialism, there were market conditions. The country *was* already integrated within the capitalist world market; it was part of the problems. To put it very concretely: when they speak today of the failures of Yugoslav communism, meaning the crisis, the rapid fall of living standards and so forth, they say 'this is communism'. But *in fact*, this past reminds us much more of what is happening now in Greece.

This was the crucial moment in former Yugoslavia - from the 1950s onwards the country was integrated within the world capitalism of the time, which means that it was a member of capitalist financial institutions like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund... it was also taking loans and *dealing* - that's a big part of it! In the beginning of the 1980s there was a debt crisis in former Yugoslavia and the IMF came and introduced austerity measures. Extreme austerity measures. It was not the Central Committee of the Yugoslav Communist

Party that would use the state to freeze the wages, no – it was the instrument of the world financial capitalism that used classical state means (i.e. freezing the wages of the workers) to realise its interests. So in the next 10 years the living standard in former Yugoslavia fell by 40%. Yugoslavia even managed to repay the debt, but it was too late. What I am saying is that this experience is something that can directly connect you to your present – to the situation in Greece, to the situation in Southern Europe, the so-called P.I.G.S.-countries. You can recognise the continuity of oppression, of exploitation, of the power of global capitalism... *Continuity* and not this difference. Now, you say ‘well, it was the failure of communism’ – and not the active colonial politics of the capitalist exploitation!

This is why we need the ‘legacy’ that is still ‘alive’ – in order to say that ‘well, it is mentality’, ‘it is the expectations of people that the state should help them’. ‘These are the old beliefs but we should know that there is no state and only the market can help...’. Anyway, the point is that this ideologically generated oblivion serves precisely our cutting off from historical experience, it serves the destruction of historical experience... making it impossible to see our current situation in a certain historical genealogy, and in the continuity. To recognise that the struggle should have been continued! The belief that 1989 is the end of the struggle is wrong. This is precisely what the existing system needs. It needs the masses who believe that the struggle has been won once and forever already in the 1990s and we now need only to work hard and accept austerity, and everything will be better.

N.G.: This feeds into my next question and is related to critique and the notion of the political. I believe that in your book *Zone des Åbergangs [Zone of Transition]* you develop two models of how this experience of the political can take place. On the one hand, you write that it arises in the moment in which one realises that there is no societal ground... But on the other hand, there is also another

moment, which is perhaps a discussed more briefly in the book. There you write about rage and anger in the face of the already existing.

B.B.: One is Laclau and the other one is Virno. The point is, my major point in the book is that the post-communist condition has been often presented as post-utopian. The idea is that communism was a utopia, which failed and that now, after the fall of communism, we live in the reality as it really is, we live in a post-utopian society. My point in the book is: no, the utopia has never ended! It only has left society as the medium of its realisation. It is social utopia that has ended. Now utopia is still alive but it has become culture. Culture is its new medium of articulation – with identities, with memory. Instead of societies in a welfare state, we have national cultural identities in a neoliberal state. So utopia has left society and found its new medium in culture that is no longer turned towards the future, but rather towards the past. But the past is *the* dimension in which identity actually exists. The temporal home of identity is the cultural past. Identity is actually nothing than forms of articulation of the cultural past. Benjamin would say cultural ‘history’. Besides, of course, all acts of identification, which could be struggles for recognition, etc. But the societies and the nations are shaped like museums of identities. Their cultures, educational systems, what kids learn about identifying with their nations... The whole logic is obsessed with the past, which is the proper dimension of identity.

My point is that we should understand this post-communist turn as a turn away from society, as an act of the destruction of society. You know, Margaret Thatcher’s famous sentence ‘There is no such thing as a society.’ She was telling this not as a sociologist whose proper research has found out that society no longer exists, but as a politician. A politician whose politics was nothing but a performative destruction of society, starting with the first clashes of 1979 and the beginning of the 1980s with trade unions. This was at the very core of the neoliberal politics of the Tories: not only to dismantle the social

welfare state, but to destroy society as an idea. When she says that there is no such thing as society, there are only individuals and families, this is precisely how you make politics today. You need an individual, a so-called free and equal individual whose figure dominates the whole space of economic production of what used to be called a ‘bourgeois society’. It is no longer an abstract concept of the political state but has saturated the whole sphere of society. You know, the sphere of inequality, the sphere of exploitation, the sphere of hierarchies, of class difference... We no longer think there is a society. Problems like criminality or poverty are no longer social problems, they are problems of our individual failures, and they are totally psychologised. They are without social meaning.

And then, when I say ‘utopia’, this now is the utopia of memory, of this idea that, as Pierre Nora would say, since we have no visions about the future, we collect and preserve everything that is around us in the hope that it will be needed for our identity in the future because we no longer know where we are going. We should do everything to know at least where we are coming from. This is an obsession with memory and memory culture. While people used to think that a better world could be possible in the future, now it’s all about a better past. This also explains the success of historical revisionism. It is such a new phenomenon, for instance in Croatia. The nation, the educational system and the society have created a historical consciousness in which it seems as though the other side has won the Second World War – which means the fascist side.

So in this struggle for a different past all memorabilia of the parties in the anti-fascist war were literally destroyed. More than 3000 monuments were destroyed. All names were symbolically changed, so that – to put it as a paradox – it seems as though Hitler was a victim of communist totalitarianism. You know, this is the logic of the ‘two totalitarianisms’: these nations present themselves as victims of two equal totalitarianisms – communist and fascist – and now they enjoy freedom. Of course, they rewrite their

histories. There is a huge attempt in all these societies to rewrite their histories in order to create a better past. 'A better past is still possible', you know, because there is no vision of any better future.

Coming back to using this concept of Virno... While in the time of industrial modernity there was still a social state, people believed in a society, in living in a community and their existential structure was corresponding to a life in a community, they were able to clearly differentiate between inside and outside their societies. It was the time of the classical old Fear. This was a social fear – fear of being excluded from the society, but also the awareness that society is something that can protect you. So the idea of society has been 'protection'; fear is always a call for protection. But what is called the 'multitude' today is in a post-social situation. There is no longer fear but anguish. This is quite complicated; it's a Heideggerian differentiation. Anguish is a new fear, one beyond the feeling of belonging or not belonging to a particular community or a society. This is a general anguish of living in the world without or beyond social protection, beyond society. And this is what characterises today's existential feelings of a multitude. The multitude is a form of life in the post-social condition.

N.G.: Do you think that the recent discussions about the rise of (right-wing) populisms signal a possible return of the figure of 'the people'?

B.B.: You know, people like Wolfgang Streek would speak very critically about the notion of populism. What is at stake is much more something which he calls 'a new cultural divide' between the elites (all sorts of elites, not only political but very much international ones), on the one side, and on the other – the masses who are left behind. The masses in the post-industrial wastelands of today's even Western capitalism, masses who have no chance, no future, they are the former working class. This is the so-called 'Rust Belt' in the United States. Those are the ones who are addressed in a populist way by right-

wing politicians from Marie Le Pen to Donald Trump. This populism for Streek reflects a belief that there is something bad in mobilising the masses. There's a belief that the masses can be activated only in a right-wing way. They used to differentiate between left and right wing populism, but the point is that this is a concept of the elite with which the elites claim their absolute superiority and also their necessity. Because only the elites can deal with the problems of the reality today. And if the masses are asked, then we have either left or right extremism, or at least this is what they call populism. But the problem is the gap. And the problem also is that the elites today no longer differentiate politically amongst themselves.

This is what Peter Mair calls 'the end of party democracy' – the processes in the last 30-40 years have shown that the differences between political parties among the elite slowly disappear, but the gap between the elite and the masses is widening. It is difficult to differentiate between Social democrats and Christian democrats because they both have a similar ideological agenda when it comes to international politics and economy – a liberal agenda. On the other side, people no longer vote. The number of people who actively participate in parliamentary elections, the number of voters is diminishing... Take the example of the last presidential election in France, which resulted in what is presented as the great victory of Macron in France. But the turnout was the lowest in France's modern history with 42% of the people voting, which means that the majority of the electorate no longer believes that active participation in parliamentary democracy can change anything. This is the problem and this is something that Peter Mair and [Wolfgang] Streek openly say – we are facing the end of parliamentary democracy as we knew it. And this is not only in the West but also in the former post-communist East, where with for instance Victor Orban we have new concepts like 'illiberal democracy' and a certain neo- and post-fascist movements and options, for instance in Croatia or Serbia...

N.G.: And in Bulgaria we have the

National Front, which is now in the government. To come back to the question of critique: how to reclaim and politicise this cultured past, how to work with the continuities you are talking about. The necessity of critique of the present seems bigger than ever and yet every time when we, for instance with the magazine I'm co-editing in Bulgaria, attempt to articulate a critique of the current neoliberal regime, we are being dismissed as archaisms from the communist past. One of the issues we try to talk about is the issue of labour rights, for instance – in the past months and years there are more and more cases of workers' deaths and severe exploitation. And yet it is almost impossible to talk about labour or class as it is seen as this old-fashioned talk...

B.B.: Yes, absolutely. As if a minimal protection of workers' rights would mean a communist call to recreate GULAG! Yes, but I think that the crisis is also a crisis of the language of emancipation, I would say. People believe that they are actually emancipated and they believe in the famous TINA – 'There Is No Alternative'. And the traditional left, liberal, social-democratic parties agreed to TINA, they also never mentioned any sort of alternative to the existing system. So, this is further deepening the gap between the masses and the elites. Using a language in which emancipation obviously can no longer be articulated. The quest for freedom can no longer be articulated.

This is what I call a 'revernacularisation' of the masses. You know, 'vernacular' were the languages before they were elevated into the national languages, it was the time when knowledge, politics, the juridical right were all speaking Latin. And the masses were speaking their vernaculars, useful only for everyday life but no discourse of power, no discourse of important decisions was articulated in vernacular, only in Latin. Today we have a similar situation in which the discourse of power, but also the discourse of emancipation, has become a new form of Latin and the masses no longer

understand it. So the critique, using this Latin, using also the language of those emancipatory theories – there are plenty of those, plenty of perfect analyses of today’s crisis – they no longer reach the masses, they don’t understand them. The so-called hoi polloi don’t understand this language of clever theory. So, as in the Middle Ages some critical intellectuals started to use vernaculars – like Descartes or Dante, who was the first – to think, to dare to think in vernaculars, the critique should at least start to learn these new vernaculars so as to be able to address the masses. This for me is the new challenge.

N.G.: To me it is a bit difficult to claim that the masses don’t understand. It already reasserts the idea that they are not capable of understanding. Whereas it might be possible that there are already forms of critique voiced out in a vernacular language...

B.B.: I don’t think so. This is also our problem as theorists. You know, we have enough epistemological power – the left, for instance. It is very clever and uses concepts of very high cognitive value; they have a great explanatory function but have no effects on reality. On the other side, we see how the so-called populist language effectively reaches and addresses the masses. But we believe

in a new system of ‘diglossia’: on the one side we have the international language – I am not saying it’s English, I’m just saying the international language of the elites, of knowledge, of power, of politics, of critique, of left critique, – and on another side, these masses speaking their vernaculars, not understanding this language.

So this is the challenge for the critique, I am repeating: how to learn these vernaculars and address the masses, who are left behind. They are left behind in the past, in terms of having no future. They are what’s called ‘surplus population’ in a post-industrial world. It is an illusion to expect that we will open up new industries and they will again find jobs.

Let me put it this way – there is a gap, which is not simply social. It is also deeply linguistic, a gap of articulation. It used to be a gap between theory and praxis, but today it is a gap between the language of the elites (which is actually the English of international elites) and local, always local and particular masses who are left behind.

N.G.: Maybe it is a bit of a challenge to not let this linguistic gap become cultural difference?

B.B.: It is cultural – as far as it is linguistic, it is also cultural. Wolfgang Streeck uses the notion of a ‘new cultural divide’ and he speaks explicitly of the ‘raw language of the masses’ – it is raw and not civilised. This is precisely how the vernaculars were understood by the elites who spoke Latin in the Middle Ages – the raw language of the masses, which is of no use for concepts, for ideas, for political noble visions, etc... And it is not the language of power.

N.G.: So you are bringing up this old question of the role of the intellectual... Are you saying that their role should be to work with the masses of the oppressed people?

B.B.: Yes, but I don’t think that this critique can be articulated simply by changing our minds as critical subjects. It is not about changing our minds. It is about practically engaging with these masses and this reality. The continuity with the past, learning the genealogy of the present crisis won’t be told and recreated by intellectual and theoretical concepts but only by the activated masses in the struggle. And the question is how to be part, how to think while participating in this struggle.

[LeftEast](#)

Democracy and Ecological Crisis

15 July 2018, by **Nancy Holmstrom**

This reality should shape the way we think about politics and how we do politics. Democracy is often said to be both the means and the end of *socialism*. Capitalist societies are peculiar class societies in that, especially the United States, they are said to be democratic. So what do we mean by “democracy” and by “socialism?”

The root meaning of “democracy” is rule by the people – which entails that it admits of degrees according to two

measures: first, how inclusive is the category of “the people” and second, what the people get to decide. By the first measure – usually the only one considered – our democracy has clearly expanded. In those capitalist societies that are politically democratic, (not all, of course) everyone, at least all citizens, gets to vote, but this hardly happened from the beginning, by “nature” as supporters of capitalism seem to believe; indeed it has been a long

heroic struggle. At the beginning only a tiny percentage of the population had the vote; property qualifications for male voters were not removed throughout the U S until the middle of the nineteenth century, while women won the right to vote less than one hundred years ago. African Americans were effectively denied the right to vote in the southern states until the Civil Rights movement won the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and they still face struggles over felon

disenfranchisement and voter ID.

Even at its most inclusive, however, the formal equality of democracy in capitalism is undermined by economic inequality; those with more economic power simply have more influence over political decisions. Extreme inequality, the influence of money in elections, and the peculiar institution of the electoral college further limit US political democracy.

Even more important, however, is the second measure of degrees of democracy, viz, that the range of issues on which voters have power is extremely limited. Both before and after capitalism (in the Soviet-style systems) political and economic power were fused. With capitalism, however, the “economic” and the “political” became separate for the first time, and real social power rests in the economy. As Ellen Meiksins Wood argued, this made political democracy both more possible but also less important. The most crucial decisions affecting us all: what to produce (gas-guzzling and driverless private cars or buses and trains), how to produce (fossil fuels or renewables), and the all-important question of how much to produce are not up for a vote; they are not made by the majority of citizens, but by capitalists who are unelected. A full-scale economic democracy is simply incompatible with capitalism.

Small countries, more subject to global capitalist powers, have even less ability to govern themselves. Pushed to austerity and anti-ecological decisions, democratically elected governments are fragile, as people get frustrated and can turn to authoritarian leaders. European countries have now in the same situation through the domination of the European Union.

Aristotle defined democracy very clearly as a constitution in which “the free-born and poor control the government – being at the same a majority,” whereas in an oligarchy “the rich and better-born control the government – being at the same time a minority.” By these definitions, we live in an oligarchy not a democracy, despite the vote..... And how could it be otherwise given the extremes of inequality? Noam Chomsky has a nice

acronym to describe our system of political democratic institutions within an oligarchy – he calls them RECDs (really existing capitalist democracies).

Despite these criticisms, however, I think it is very important not to reject totally the limited institutions of political democracy we have, or disparage the concept of democracy, as some on the Left are wont to do. That we can meet here and make these critiques, publish them and organize to change things is crucial. The absence of these democratic controls on China’s development is one of the chief contributors to the ecological disaster their development is creating. Freedom of speech and association are essential to building the experience and capacities of working people necessary for democracy of a deeper kind. In our RECDs, we can not only talk, but organize around concrete issues that challenge vested interests like fossil fuel corporations. Sometimes we even win, as did the struggle to ban fracking in NY State – but, as NY now transports fracked gas from PA, the struggle goes on. The campaign to Divest NYC pension funds from fossil fuel corporations also won but we now need to ensure that the freed-up pension funds be invested in environmentally sustainable alternatives. Moreover, that any loss of jobs be compensated by living wage jobs. Eco-socialists need to push all our options – while supporting all struggles around concrete environmental issues, we have to press the philosophical idea that the Earth belongs to all of us, or rather to no one – we are only its beneficiaries and its stewards for future generations.

More important than specific wins, we should struggle to put these decisions under popular democratic control, thereby deepening democracy. Open public discussions are essential, with mechanisms in place that allow people to indicate what they want, but along with institutions that enable them to have *control*, not just consultation, over the representatives they choose to carry out their decisions. Participatory budgeting is an example of this, though very limited so far. Another good example, surprising

because it comes from the US, is the public regulation of utilities. Though they are private, their profits and investments are capped, they’re forced to subsidize the poor, and to fund environmental projects. Every aspect of their work is open to the public. More people should know about this and think about how to replicate it.

Critics would say it’s utopian to imagine that “every cook can govern.” But consider the near-catastrophe at Three Mile Island. The nuclear reactors were built and operated by private corporations without adequate information or any control by the people affected. In interviews with people in the community after the near-meltdown one woman said that if they had just explained the possible consequences of relying on nuclear reactors to get cheap energy, she would have preferred to hang her clothes out to dry. Explaining the implications of different options is the role of experts. Ordinary people can then evaluate those options according to their values and decide what to do. If the community’s values had been in place, they would not have come to near-catastrophe.

For an exciting experiment along these lines see the article on Barcelona in Socialist Register 2018 [76] about a new kind of party that came out of social movements fighting the economic crisis. It â€”“crowd-sourced” its code of ethics and uses new “digital-technological means of developing democratic experiments at the local and regional scale.” Of course, they are still operating within a capitalist system that limits what they can do, but they give us ideas for bottom-up democratic and creative alternatives to capitalism.

As Marx envisioned it, a post-capitalist society is one in which “the associated producers rationally regulat[e] their interchange with Nature, bringing it under their common control... and achieving this with the least expenditure of energy and under conditions most favorable to, and worthy of their human nature.” Beyond this, lay “the true realm of freedom, ...[concluding] the shortening of the work day is its basic

prerequisite.”

But this vision of a socialist society where the means of production are owned in common and democratically planned is far from universal on the left today. Such a vision requires public institutions at various levels of society in addition to non-governmental institutions. And state institutions are necessary in the transition. Many people today are distrustful of the state for good reasons and focus instead on what they call horizontal movements and on non-state institutions. While this reflects a healthy democratic impulse, and such movements and institutions are crucial to building a better world, this focus is insufficient. We need governments, under democratic control, to effect the massive regulation we need to control producers who are destroying the environment. Putting demands on existing governments is an important way to build and unify a movement of diverse groups: workers, farmers, environmental groups and consumers, all of whom would benefit from sustainable industries. And under capitalism, who but the government can provide jobs, or income, to workers who will be displaced when destructive industries are shut down?

Consider the workers and their labor unions that support the building of gas pipelines because they want the jobs. Many of the proposed pipelines go close to rivers and are highly likely to pollute the water and the land, as well as increasing global warming. Obviously this is highly irrational from a social point of view, but the workers are caught between the proverbial rock and a hard place. Within capitalism it is just very difficult for individuals to carry out rational life plans. Even corporations face structural constraints from the market system. In the 1990s, the CEO of British Petroleum adopted the slogan Beyond Petroleum and invested in solar energy. But 99% of their investments remained in fossil fuels and that percentage is increasing. So the decisions impacting us all must be taken out of the hands of corporations.

Others today focus on democratic ownership and control at the level of enterprises, but within a market

system. This seems attractive but it has serious limitations. Some markets could exist in a society in which the crucial questions were decided democratically. *However, the crucial question regarding markets is the relative power of the market within the society in which the enterprises exist.* This is true both when worker-owned enterprises are put forward as a model of socialism - and even more so when we are speaking of cooperatives within capitalism but as leading to socialism. The largest and most successful cooperative in the world is Mondragon, often put forward as a model for socialists and a key strategic element of the struggle for socialism. A closer look should give one pause as the article on Mondragon in Socialist Register 2018 shows. [77]

Most importantly, even if we are talking of worker-owned enterprises in a post-capitalist, socialist society, as long as socialism is conceived as *basically a market system*, then it cannot resolve the multiple ecological crises we are facing. Worker-owned enterprises are constrained by the same political and economic forces of the market to continue producing the same stuff in the same way. Even many prominent environmental thinkers, Bill McKibben, e.g., seem to accept the logic of capitalist reproduction; they call for reliance on renewable energy sources rather than fossil fuels, but fail to mention that we need also to reduce growth. Even if we switched to cleaner greener cars, if we continue to produce ever more cars, the resources and materials for building, maintaining and transporting them would cause more pollution than we have at present. We need to contain our production and consumption within the limits of our finite planet, which means stepping outside the competitive market system. Thus, *whatever markets there are in socialism have to be brought under the control of institutions of rational democratic planning.*

At what level should the planning be done? That all depends... A focus on the local is very important; I always buy local when I can, and there are many inspiring examples of economic planning on the local level like the participatory budgeting developed in

Brazil and extended in Barcelona or the agro-ecological practices of la Via Campesina. Many experts stress the importance of keeping the planning small because local knowledge is bound to be more reliable than far away experts' and people can develop trust and abide voluntarily by rules they themselves develop to protect natural resources. Due to lack of knowledge and cooperation, regulation by central governments has often led not to conservation but to destruction of natural resources. This advice is very important to keep in mind.

However, we must also recognize that many things simply cannot be accomplished in towns, or cities or regions or even countries. We need national clean air regulations or else states will compete for business by lowering environmental standards, and the same is true on an international level. Marx said in *The German Ideology* that socialism in one country was impossible. How much clearer that should be today! Climate problems do not respect national borders. The whole planet shares the air; particularly bad air pollution in California a few years ago was traced to Asia. Deforestation in Latin America affects our air in North America and contributes to melting the polar ice caps. Dirty water in China leads to contaminated soil that leads to contaminated food that is then exported around the world. This is why climate scientists call for planet-wide curbs on emissions and ocean scientists say we need a Five-Year plan to save the oceans “plundered by over-fishing.” Nor do the human and political problems engendered by climate problems stay within national borders. Consider unemployment due to depleted resources, wars over scarce resources and the millions of refugees fleeing across the globe as a result. (Many of these social catastrophes particularly victimize women.)

Thus socialism would need more institutions of international governance, that is, planning and regulation, such as a United Nations of socialist societies, as well as local, regional and national institutions. The issue is not primarily whether planning is local, regional, national or

even international, I contend, but what kinds of institutions enable rational democratic control from below and effectively address our environmental crisis. Our urgent task in this period is to create a global

network of these grassroots institutions.

Originally presented at the panel "Democracy: Liberal, Radical, Socialist" at the 2018 Left Forum, co-

sponsored by RLS-NYC and Socialist Register. [78] [79]

June 12, 2018

[newpolitics](#)

Walkouts teach U.S. labor a new grammar for struggle

12 July 2018, by **Lois Weiner**

For most of the far-Right, the West Virginia, Oklahoma, Kentucky, Arizona, and North Carolina walkouts showed greedy public employees exploiting their job security to get pay and benefits better than hard-working taxpayers have. However, teachers won wide popular support, even from Republicans, forcing the media-savvier elements of the Right to alter their tone.

The American Enterprise Institute (AEI) posted a blog with a sympathetic tone pushing the same stance. "While teachers are justly frustrated by take-home pay, their total compensation is typically a lot higher than many teachers realize. That's because teacher retirement and health-care systems are much more expensive than those of the taxpayers who pay for them — whether those taxpayers work in the private or public sector." Shedding crocodile tears for teachers who are underpaid and retirees without adequate pensions, AEI rejects the idea more school funding would help. What's needed is tweaking neoliberalism's (failed) policy of "merit" pay.

As I explain later, policies that link teacher pay to their "performance," judged by students' scores on standardized tests, underlies much teacher anger. The AEI authors, who write for people in education, adopts the bouncy, cheerleader-like prose to argue the real challenge is "how to pay terrific and invaluable teachers more appropriately." Teachers now understand these policies force them

to compete against one another for elusive bonuses which replace funding pay schedules for everyone that are based on years of experience and education. [80]

From the start in West Virginia, local coverage of the state walkouts was impressively accurate. Reporters interviewed teachers, school workers, and parents, hearing from them how and why their movement had gained momentum, noting they were protesting salaries, health care, pensions, but also the need for increased school funding for school supplies and improvements to dilapidated facilities. In contrast, national media were clueless about how the walkouts had been organized, relying on interviews and press releases from union officers and politicians. Few reports explained that in these "right to work states" both the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA), the two national teachers unions, had state affiliates with a tiny number of dues-paying members and state union officials did not speak for the protestors. Though the AFT President showed up for a few publicity opportunities, in all of these states the AFT affiliate is far smaller than the NEA and is essentially irrelevant politically in teacher union politics.

One singular aspect of the walkouts is that they were organized from below, outside of (and despite) attempted control by state union officials. Though teachers and other school

workers who were local union activists were often leaders, they were part of the movement, not its masters. The many activists with whom I communicated in the course of the "education Spring" all concurred that if the unions had been doing what they should have, the Facebook-based movements wouldn't have been needed. Though participants were understandably uncomfortable expressing their dissatisfaction with the unions in public during the walkouts, in private conversations teachers were quite explicit that their unions were "irrelevant," "out of touch," and "useless." Teachers in Oklahoma and Kentucky told me they had never been approached to join a union until the Professional Organization of Educators signed them up. They learned once the agitation for the walkouts began and this "union" responded to the calls for action with the same arguments as the far Right teacher-bashers that this was a front group for the billionaires who controlled the state legislature.

Coverage in liberal media and some Left publications tried to make these walkouts fit the mold of "bread and butter" labor struggles. While accounts were accurate in noting that reduced state funding was the immediate root of low teacher pay, a unifying demand in the walkouts, the stories ignored other, equally important sources of teachers' frustration and anger, profound changes in schools and teaching because of bipartisan reforms in the past ten years and the unions'

acquiescence to them. The walkouts have brought to the surface widespread frustration and anger about policies that teachers see making their jobs and fulfillment of the reasons they chose to teach almost impossible.

Despite the flood of stories in popular and Left publications, most analysis has missed key lessons of these walkouts, including how gender and race influenced the movement, why these walkouts exemplified workers' self-organization, and how collective bargaining both restrains and protects class struggle, issues I discuss in more detail elsewhere. [81] When these elements are included, the walkouts suggest a new grammar for labor struggle that can challenge the Right's legal and political attacks on unions everywhere, the South included.

Teacher self-organization replaces unions missing in action

West Virginia began the wave of state-wide walkouts, inspiring similar campaigns in Oklahoma, Kentucky, and Arizona. Teachers in Denver closed schools in Jefferson County for a day to mass in their state capitol, and North Carolina teachers held a one-day protest in which 25,000 people participated. While there were major similarities, the movements also differed in significant ways because of geography, history, demographics, and the state's balance of political forces.

My knowledge of the walkouts is drawn from published reports as well as my on-going involvement with activists as an adviser and supporter, on the Facebook pages, in phone calls with organizers, and video conferences with protestors. The movements followed the same pattern: A handful of teachers and other school employees, including some union activists, frustrated about their unions (in)action, created a Facebook group limited to people who were teachers and school employees in the state. Often an auxiliary group or page was

established to provide information and support, but decisions about strategy in votes conducted in surveys were restricted to the closed Facebook pages, to those risking their jobs in taking action. Participants shared information, strategy, and voted.

No distinction was made on the Facebook page between those who were or were not union members, although many joined the unions in the course of the walkouts. Discussions became more political by the hour; remorseful, angry posts by people who had voted for the governors who subsequently ridiculed and insulted them were common. A post questioning where the money would come from to fund salary increases might be answered with a suggestion to use the lottery, followed shortly by an activist knowledgeable about the Right's control of tax policy with more information about a progressive alternative, generally in the form of a link to a website. Many participants self-identified as Republicans and as conservatives. Many identified religious faith, assumed to be Christianity, as a powerful support, and in West Virginia thousands joined in prayer each day at a designated time, asking for guidance and strength.

The reason I refer to these actions as "walkouts" is that the organizers adopted a strategy that avoided the language of striking although the protests took a form that relied on unity and solidarity no less than in a strike. Teachers phoned in to their schools saying they would not be present, using personal days or sick days *en masse* to force schools and districts to close, until all or much of the state's school districts announced they would be closed. Superintendents, who are almost always former teachers, were often sympathetic to the walkouts. In West Virginia, school workers other than teachers were included in the movement from the start, using what one activist called "wall to wall" organizing. Detroit teachers closed their schools in May 2016, a school system under state control, using the "sick out," which, like using personal days to close schools, avoids, at least temporarily, some of the legal problems of a walkout in a state that

outlaws teachers' strikes.

National media, including a labor reporter who represents himself as a savvy insider, consistently assumed that state union officials spoke for the movements, missing a dynamic that made the "education Spring" so special in U.S. labor: those whom union officials say they represent were actually in control much of the time, reversing the typical hierarchy of union officials telling members/workers what to do. In West Virginia union officials tried - and failed - to broker a deal with the government without checking in with the Facebook organization. The movement was sufficiently well-organized and unified that it held strong in rejecting the settlement, forcing union officials to back down after they announced - and the New York Times reported - the walkout had been ended.

In Oklahoma and Kentucky the movements were more fragmented, less well-organized, and the teachers and school workers leading the Facebook groups less politically experienced. Officers of the Oklahoma and Kentucky NEA affiliates made backroom deals to end the walkouts, claiming to have polled members. But as the postings on the Facebook pages showed, the vast majority of walkout participants had no opportunity to weigh-in on the settlement, either on the Facebook page or in the union poll. The reaction to the substance of the settlements was, at best, very mixed. However the anger at union officials' usurpation of what was almost unanimously agreed was protestors' right to decide how and when to return to work was expressed quite strongly. Those who were the most active felt the most blindsided and betrayed by the unions' actions. Though deeply disappointed with the settlements, which relied on regressive taxes and provided relatively little new money, Oklahoma and Kentucky teachers lacked sufficient organization, even in the cities where they were strongest, to continue the walkouts without union help. "How could we have missed that the union would do this?" one anguished Oklahoma activist asked me.

In Arizona activists developed a collaborative relationship with the NEA affiliate, which “played nice,” as one leader told me. A small AFT local, on the other hand, played a “rogue” role, calling for walkouts separate from the unified “Red for Ed” movement so as to claim leadership of the movement. Activists in all the states mentored one another, and in Arizona leaders referred to what had occurred in the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) 2012 strike. They developed a consensus that the walkout was the first round in building a movement that had initiated what would be an on-going struggle that involved political education, electoral action, and building a stronger, responsive union by recruiting and engaging teachers who had lost their fear of standing up and being heard. Unlike in the other states, in North Carolina the May 16 state-wide protest in the capitol planned well beforehand in a process initiated by Organize 2020, a state-wide reform caucus in the NEA affiliate.

One tension in all the states was balancing direct action with the hope that electoral activity would bring solutions. As teachers massed in the state capitols in the tens of thousands, their protests suggested a possibility of a re-enactment of what had occurred in Madison, Wisconsin. In Madison teachers and other public employees occupied the state legislature in response to the legislation that revoked the right of public employees to bargain collectively. Their occupation ended when union officials persuaded them to leave the building, to adopt what proved to be an unsuccessful electoral strategy, recall of the governor, Scott Walker.

In Kentucky one contingent of teachers and education activists were alert to the possibility of an occupation and packed bags with clean underwear. This possibility of a “Madison – with a different ending,” the shorthand I used in my discussions with walkout leaders, explains why national media clung to the myth that union officials spoke for teachers and the corollary, that workers can’t achieve their goals through direct action but must instead rely on the ballot box. In her press conference

announcing that the Oklahoma Education Association (OEA) had agreed to support legislation (which the movement had previously rejected), the OEA president said the union “had achieved all it could with a walkout” and would “shift their efforts to supporting candidates in the fall elections who favor increased education spending.” Yet the biggest pieces of legislation passed before the walkout, not during it, so the movement’s strength had not yet been tested. No press questioned how or why the electoral strategy would succeed in Oklahoma or Kentucky when the traditionally liberal and labor-friendly state of Wisconsin had failed to recall Walker, allowing the GOP to destroy collective bargaining for public employees. [82]

The walkouts enjoyed huge popular support, from conservative Republicans to socialists. A new generation radicalized by the Sanders campaign, especially members of Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), made their presence felt by organizing support. Progressive watchdog groups were also important allies in identifying legislation that needed to be stopped – or should be passed – in each state. Save Our Schools Kentucky, an education advocacy group that has strong connections with progressive and “good-government” organizations in the state, did much of the planning that the NEA affiliate did not, serving as an auxiliary to the Facebook group of teachers and other school employees, led by a charismatic school worker.

Liberalism’s Rip van Winkle slumber and partial awakening

Liberals have (mostly) been awakened from their neoliberal somnolence, discovering that reforms supported enthusiastically by both parties, masked in the rhetoric of creating educational opportunity, were aimed at destroying public education. Still, an exchange in Dissent about what was progressive in neoliberalism

reveals that even socialists are not yet clear about the real aims and meaning of the neoliberal project. [83] Their confusion seems to me related to a fearfulness about confronting head-on the role of the Democratic Party and therefore aligning with popular movements, often people fighting on issues of social oppression, that are pushing for a fundamental political break from both parties and the political status quo.

There should be no doubt on the Left about the need to reject all of the bipartisan reforms that have been imposed on U.S. schools. As I explain elsewhere, the project’s key elements include privatizing the education sector; eliminating democratic oversight of schools; and making teaching a revolving door of low-paid, minimally educated teachers who will teach to tests over which students, parents, and teachers have no voice. In all of the states having walkouts, teachers were aghast that state legislators moved to allow anyone with a B.A. to teach, removing requirements for teaching credentials, because of a “teacher shortage” artificially induced by low pay and poor working conditions in schools. In fact, U.S. state legislatures have been carrying out policies the World Bank has demanded from the global South for decades, destroying teaching as a career. [84] Though teachers understood that the “shortage” could be solved by funding schools and increasing salaries, even they missed how elimination of certification requirements connects to testing and privatization, pillars of the neoliberal project.

In a lavishly funded global propaganda campaign orchestrated by powerful elites, teachers have been attacked for a huge range of social and educational problems over which they have no control. As many comments on the Facebook pages showed, frustration and anger that fueled the explosiveness of the walkouts was due in good part to policies and rhetoric that assume “teacher quality” is all that matters in student learning and can be measured accurately by students’ scores on standardized tests. Oklahoma’s “teacher of the year,” one of the fifty teachers given this award and invited to meet privately with

Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, told DeVos her “choice policies,” meaning charter schools and private schools receiving vouchers, were draining traditional public schools of resources in his state. When DeVos suggested students were fleeing low-performing schools, the Oklahoma music teacher, who had voted for Trump, responded that government policies “taking all the kids that can afford to get out and leaving the kids who can’t behind” is what “created the bad schools.” The Montana and California teachers of the year expressed dismay after the meeting at DeVos’ comments opposing teacher strikes. “She basically said that teachers should be teaching and we should be able to solve our problems not at the expense of children ... For her to say at the ‘expense of children’ was a very profound moment and one I’ll remember forever because that is so far from what is happening.” [85]

Teacher anger at being held responsible for student learning while facing policies that undercut their ability to do their jobs is clearly not limited to the “red states.” An array of conditions, not just reduced funding, created the perfect storm for direct action that spread so quickly. Some teachers were inspired by student protests over gun violence, but for many years courageous teachers and parents have been allies in the “opt out” of testing movement to stop standardized testing. The Bad Ass Teachers (BATS), organized on social media, banded together in “red states” and “blue” to fight the attacks on teachers’ dignity as workers because teachers unions have not adequately defended the profession. Nationally, funding of teachers’ salaries mostly comes from local districts, supplemented by state revenues, but much of teachers’ work is directly controlled by state law. Although federal mandates have squeezed the states - with little resistance from Democrats - states still have leeway in deciding who can teach, what is taught and how. States generally fund teachers’ pensions and health benefits, either entirely or to a considerable extent. Therefore every state is susceptible to state-wide mobilizations by teachers, though the presence or absence of collective bargaining rights is certainly a factor

in explaining the walkouts.

Collective bargaining legislation that was passed in the 1960s and 1970s is a mixed bag. It gave teachers unions stability and the strength to negotiate improved wages and benefits for members, but the legal framework also created a highly circumscribed scope of bargaining, ceding to school boards and administration the right to decide most issues that affect teachers’ work and students’ learning. Even under the best of circumstances, when they have public support for increased school funding, with the best unions, teachers have a very difficult time using collective bargaining to make significant changes in their work. Improving schools is complex, as even elements of the far Right that want a fully privatized public school system now acknowledge, because privatization has failed to boost students’ test scores. Teacher unions generally focus on what officials see as most winnable “bread and butter” for reasons both political and practical. In places the unions have collective bargaining, the narrowed scope of bargaining has been worsened by the business union model, which has encouraged member indifference and inactivity when not deepening frustration. Thus business unionism has simultaneously weakened the unions’ capacity to protect teachers’ interests and intensified the constraint of struggle.

The walkouts and teacher unionism’s transformation

The assumption that the state teachers unions in the “red states” spoke for the movement obscured an extremely important political aspect of the walkouts: They were round two in the struggle to transform teacher unionism. Whether knowingly or not, these grassroots movements challenged the premises on which teachers unions have operated for four decades, a fact missing in most reportage and analysis. Even stories correctly noting links between the walkouts’ and the CTU’s path-breaking 2012 strike omitted reference to how the Caucus of Rank

and File Educators (CORE) won CTU leadership by mobilizing union members to fight for a different kind of union, altering the CTU’s priorities, narrative, and operation and in so doing presenting a challenge to the business unionism of both AFT and NEA. [86]

CORE’s successful struggle launched a wave of reform caucuses, which is challenging leadership in urban locals and state-wide, supported by a network associated with Labor Notes. In Los Angeles and Boston (AFT locals), as well as the state of Massachusetts (the NEA affiliate), union activists who identify with CORE’s “social justice” orientation and organizing model have been elected union presidents. In other cities, reform caucuses sometimes share leadership with the older guard. Key “red state” activists have now joined this reform network. They are a new, vibrant ally for the CTU and like-minded reformers, in a group that is supported by Labor Notes. [87]

Gender wasn’t discussed much but it should be because the walkouts showed its powerful potential to reinvigorate and democratize teachers unions. While CORE was able to win the votes of teachers in elementary schools, has organized in their schools, and has had a remarkable program of political education, as is true in most teachers unions, its leadership and base were mostly white and male, high school teachers, with some crucial exceptions, the most powerful being Karen Lewis, CTU’s beloved African American president. What has been game-changing in the “red state” walkouts is the participation and politicization of women, especially female elementary school teachers. The movement’s power was “women power.”

Though female teachers didn’t discuss gender on the Facebook pages, with the exception of a few postings about paternalistic (my word, not theirs) male principals, and most answered gender wasn’t a factor in their participation when the question was first posed, after some reflection they identified a range of gender-related issues, from who did housework and shopping for the family while they were protesting in the state capitol, to

the ways their work and intelligence were devalued in the society. They were ferociously protective of “their kids” (the term elementary school teachers especially use for their students), making sure they had meals when schools were closed. This speaks to their view of teaching as nurturing, traditionally the mother’s role. Their participation is #MeToo brought to teacher unionism, a response to the deterioration and devaluation of teachers’ work. One of the best analyses of any of the walkouts, which captured the union’s attempt to “domesticate” the struggle, explained how gender configured the West Virginia protest. “If the vast majority of women strikers did not regard themselves to be feminists, feminism, to paraphrase a revolutionary, certainly was not disregarding the strike. The strike, the conditions that led to the strike, the way the strike unfolded were all deeply gendered.” [88]

Perhaps the most dangerous omission in the walkout narrative and subsequent analyses is the salience of race and racism, and teacher unionism’s historic failure to engage with systemic racism in education and the society. Pyrrhic strikes in 1960s and 70s that pitted teachers against civil rights activists, perhaps most violently in Newark, NJ and New York City, accelerated the unions’ demise as democratic, militant organizations capable of winning substantial victories for members. [89] That pattern was interrupted when CORE, which had organized against school closings in the Black community, foregrounded the gross inequities the city perpetuated against students of color in its 2012 strike, with its program for the schools “Chicago children deserve.”

The strategic and moral importance of teacher unions fusing a commitment to anti-racism work with their narratives about what’s wrong with public education can’t be overstated. Tulsa and Oklahoma City were strongholds of the walkouts in Oklahoma, yet in both places the local union was unwilling or unable to articulate demands that would speak directly to the aspirations and apprehensions of Black residents, parents, and students, who are

educated in intensely segregated neighborhoods and schools. In Kentucky, the deal the state union brokered allowed the governor to move to take over the Louisville schools. In being “race blind” the movements failed to connect with one of their most powerful potential allies. As a co-thinker involved in supporting the Kentucky teachers astutely observed in our conversation about racism’s invisibility even among socialists, we have a chance “to get race right this time, and if we don’t, it’s over.”

The movements created in the “education Spring” face the challenge of how to discuss and act on systemic racism, reflected in every aspect of school life I can think of, while maintaining unity among teachers. Almost one-quarter of AFT members nationally voted for Trump; one-third did so in the NEA. The national statistics about teacher union members voting for Trump don’t even reflect how teachers in the South, not members of unions, voted. A color-blindness that obscures racism is not only a problem for teachers and teachers unions, but for the Left, including socialists, as shown by omission of analysis of race in reports about the walkouts and an article about the “progressive potential” of the Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SATs) that ignored the origins of standardized testing in Eugenics. [90]

Stating the need for “quality education for all” as do the unions – at their best – avoids confronting the legacy of labor’s and the education establishment’s complicity in accepting government policies that have created and sustained racial segregation in housing, schools, and the labor market. [91] Expecting support in economic struggles without giving it to communities of color and immigrants on social battles is a dangerous illusion for teachers unions. When workers mobilize and see the need to have allies, they become open to topics that are otherwise not welcomed. In conversations with teachers in Oklahoma and Kentucky, I asked if they had support among parents. The White teachers all thought their locals (in large cities) had done a solid job in getting support, but when I asked the African

American teachers to comment, they dissented, saying they had heard community and other teachers express ambivalence about supporting the walkout because the local hadn’t been there for the community. For teachers’ organizations with collective bargaining or without it, winning the trust of parents who feel estranged from schools and often teachers personally, especially White teachers of students of color, requires being physically present in community struggles against racist policies, fighting school closures but also police brutality and deportations.

Organize 2020 is an important model in this and other regards. This state-wide caucus used social media and the excitement of the previous walkouts to build a one-day protest in the state capitol, and in so doing greatly expand its on-the-ground presence state-wide. Its leadership understands the caucus purpose as long-term, building a democratic union based on socially progressive ideals, including an explicit rejection of racism. It has developed alliances with community groups, and when the North Carolina Association of Educators (NCAE), the lethargic, passive state union, refuses to take action members need, the caucus steps in as best it can given its scarce resources and carries out the plan. Though the North Carolina walkout was just one day, Organize 2020 mobilized teachers on the basis of demands that were race-conscious and that addressed tax breaks for the corporations and wealthy. [92] The caucus sees a role for the state’s teachers in rebuilding labor in the state. It brings CORE’s ideas to its work but looks for strategies that fit its situation.

Teacher unionism in a Trump administration

Since the “excellence reforms” in education in the 1990s, when the neoliberal project in the country was begun with the warning the U.S. was a “nation at risk” of falling behind in a global economy, liberals have joined conservatives in embracing strategies to use education as “the one true path

out of poverty,” as Arne Duncan, Obama’s Secretary of Education phrased the ideological assumption driving educational policy. Despite overwhelming evidence that poverty and unemployment are endemic to a global economy in which workers globally are forced to compete for low-wage jobs requiring relatively little education, liberals and the labor establishment have embraced an exclusively economic rationale for public education that has subverted its other social purposes. While the Left has rightly emphasized education’s limited potential to ameliorate poverty and its inability to create jobs, socialists have been less willing to grapple with the complicating reality that schooling can make a difference in terms of individuals’ life prospects. So while “teacher quality” is one of the many factors that affect what students learn and we should be concerned about having well-prepared teachers in our schools, good teaching cannot be accurately measured by students’ standardized test scores, nor created or sustained in environments that undercut teachers’ exercise of their judgement, the hallmarks of the last decade’s reforms. [93]] We need only look at how wealthy elites educate their children - in schools with small classes, with teachers who are paid well and given considerable autonomy working in properly-maintained buildings and schools offering courses of study that include the arts - to see that education counts. The policies that have created “choice,” that is, privatized schooling, have resonated with low-income parents and communities of color because they want their children to have the same opportunity affluent parents demand for their kids, to attend college so as to compete for the diminishing number of good jobs.

However, during the 2016 primaries and election, bipartisan consensus about education being the best way to end poverty and improve the nation’s economy was shattered. Both Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders, campaigning on diametrically opposed premises about capitalism, argued for economic policies to alleviate inequality. In so doing they implicitly rejected education as the “one true path out of poverty.” Education reform as a jobs policy was jettisoned.

Moreover, Trump’s and the GOP’s embrace of policies supporting White supremacy, misogyny, anti-immigrant sentiment, and pseudo-Darwinian ideas about “natural ability” have completely undercut the currency of the Democratic Party’s claims that education reforms it has supported are a viable way to make U.S. society more equal. The rhetoric masking privatization and “choice” as a method of increasing opportunity for racial minorities has been ditched by the GOP, stripping the Democrats of their cover for supporting privatization.

Trump and the GOP have been met with outrage and opposition in the streets, and though the “resistance” has not been able to turn protest into political victories, these movements present an opportunity for teachers unions and a dilemma for existing national leadership. Teachers unions feel pressures from social justice movements to confront the Trump administration, not “sit at the table” as they have in collaborating with previous administrations. The political tightrope NEA and AFT walk was illustrated by an episode shortly after DeVos was approved as Secretary of Education. AFT and NEA mobilized with petitions and phone calls to Congress to block her appointment, raising expectations that the unions would use their power to wage an all-out fight against the GOP and Trump. But when parent and community activists blocked DeVos from entering a Washington DC school, AFT President Weingarten tweeted a reprimand to the protestors for blocking the school, and she invited DeVos to visit schools with her to engage in dialogue. Weingarten also met with Steve Bannon before he was ousted, an encounter reported (uncritically) in The Intercept with Weingarten’s stance that it was an opportunity to understand Bannon’s entreaties to support Trump. [94] So while the AFT and NEA endorse the ideas of “social justice” unionism and provide financial support for Journey for Justice, an alliance that includes well-respected community activists, Weingarten’s meeting with Bannon suggest the AFT leadership’s willingness to desert allies in communities of color should union officials find that expedient [95]. And where the AFT goes, the NEA follows

shortly, regardless of policies its convention endorses.

Though most activists in the “red states” don’t see this - yet - these movements are laying the ground work for a new labor movement in the South. What they need to do now is develop a truly progressive program for tax reform and provision of public services and figure out an electoral strategy that uses mobilizations and controls the politicians it elects. In West Virginia and in Jersey City, where teachers union conducted a one-day strike, health care was a key issue. To undercut the argument that unions, especially those representing public employees, are no different from other special interest groups, out for their own good, teachers have to use their political muscle to win “single payer” healthcare. Fighting for economic demands without embedding them in a social vision for improving working people’s lives is a losing strategy that may win an occasional strike but depletes the reservoir of support that is needed to win the big battles.

One of the greatest contributions of this movement has been to redefine what it means to be a worker. Even the Left has had trouble understanding that teachers’ work, though it is “women’s work,” is real work—that teachers are real workers. In the “turn to the working class” in the 1970s, socialists abandoned their activity in public employee unions with robust reform caucuses in order to influence industrial workers, in steel, auto, communications, transportation. In doing so, they decimated the radical presence in the AFT and NEA. The walkouts have shown the Left its mistake in a turn to the working class that defined work, workers, and class in ways that ignored a huge swath, even then, of the workforce. Teachers are fighting for the dignity of their work and the right to voice about their working conditions. They are defending education as a public good and their students’ rights to have what the wealthy take for granted. This strike wave has demonstrated an intensity and scale of self-activity and organization of workers we have not seen in the US in decades. This movement of people who do “women’s

work,” most of who are women, has confirmed – once again – Marx’s dictum “the emancipation of the

working class must be the act of the working class itself.”

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[New Politics](#)

For Palestinian Feminists, Liberation Has 2 Meanings

11 July 2018, by **Fadi Abu Shammalah, Jen Marlowe**

“I am here because I heard my town call me, and ask me to maintain my honor.” Fifty-seven-year-old Um Khalid Abu Mosa spoke in a strong, gravelly voice as she sat on the desert sand, a white tent protecting her from the blazing sun. “The land,” she says with determination, “is honor and dignity.”

She was near the southern Gaza Strip town of Khuza’a, the heavily fortified barrier with Israel in plain sight and well-armed Israeli soldiers just a few hundred meters away. Abu Mosa’s left arm was wrapped in a sling fashioned from a black-and-white-checkered kuffiyeh, or scarf, and a Palestinian flag. Israeli soldiers had shot her in the shoulder with live ammunition on March 30 as she approached the barrier to plant a Palestinian flag in a mound of earth. The bullet is still lodged in her collarbone. Three weeks later, however, she’s back at the Great Return March, a series of protests organized around five encampments stretching along a unilaterally imposed Israeli buffer zone on the 37-mile barrier between the Gaza Strip and Israel.

The Return March, which has just ended, was unique in recent history in Gaza for a number of reasons. Palestinians there are known for engaging in militant resistance against the Israeli occupation and also for the internal political split in their ranks between two dominant factions, Fatah and Hamas. Yet, in these weeks, the March has been characterized by a popular, predominantly nonviolent mobilization during which Gaza’s fractured political parties have demonstrated a surprising degree of

unity. And perhaps most noteworthy of all, women activists have played a visibly crucial role in the protests on a scale not seen for decades, possibly indicating what the future may look like when it comes to activism in the Gaza Strip.

The Return March began on March 30, or Land Day, commemorating the 1976 killings of six Palestinians inside Israel who had been protesting land confiscations. The March was slated to end on May 15, the 70th anniversary of the Nakba, Arabic for “catastrophe.” The term is used to refer to the 1948 war that led to the creation of Israel and the displacement of approximately 750,000 Palestinians, as well as the depopulation of more than 450 Palestinian towns and villages. Seventy percent of Gaza’s blockaded population is made up of those who fled or were expelled from their lands and villages during the Nakba or their descendants. The vast majority of those participating in the Great Return March, including Abu Mosa, know those native villages only through family lore, yet their yearning to return is visceral.

During the March, 125 Palestinians were killed and a staggering 13,000 wounded. Abu Mosa saw many fellow protesters wounded or killed, especially on May 14, the day the Trump administration opened its new embassy in Jerusalem when the protests escalated and some participants attempted to break through the barrier.

On that day alone, Israeli forces killed 62 Palestinians and injured 2,700

more. “Don’t ask me if someone close to me has been injured or killed,” Abu Mosa says. “All the protesters are my relatives and friends. We became one family.” After the carnage of May 14, the grassroots committee organizing the March decided that the protests had to continue. The killings continued as well. On June 1st, a 21-year-old woman volunteer paramedic was, for instance, shot in the chest and killed.

For Abu Mosa, a schoolteacher and mother of six, the March centers entirely on her dream of returning to her native town of Beer Sheva. And in its wake, she insists that she will go back, “and on my way, I will plant mint and flowers.”

Much like Abu Mosa, 20-year-old Siwar Alza’anen, an activist in an organization called the Palestinian Students Labor Front, is motivated by a deep desire to return to her native village. She is also marching “to send a message to the international community that we are suffering a lot, we are living under pressure, siege, pain, poverty.”

The Great Return March and the first intifada

A small Palestinian flag flutters on the edge of Samira Abdelalim’s desk in Rafah, the southernmost town in the Gaza Strip. Forty-four-year-old Abdelalim serves as the director of the women’s department at the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions. Her steely eyes are

framed with a simple navy-blue headscarf. Abdelalim hopes the Great March of Return will peacefully achieve the right of return to her people's villages, self-determination, and the possibility of living "in peace and freedom"â€"but she's realistic, too. "I know that the occupation will not end in one day," she says, "but by cumulative work."

Iktimal Hamad is on the Supreme National Commission of the Return March, the only woman among the March's 15 lead organizers. Sitting in her Gaza City office, her light brown hair pulled into a tight bun, she speaks about her own double agendaâ€"to end the Israeli occupation, but also to promote equality for women in Gaza. "Women can play a prominent role in the liberation of Palestine, because they are integral to the Palestinian community," she tells us.

Abdelalim leads the March's women's committee in Rafah, one of five with 15 members for each of the encampments. With her fellow committee members, she organizes the women in the March, arranges logistics such as water and buses, and plans youth-empowerment and cultural activities.

Her own activism began during the first Palestinian intifada (Arabic for "shaking off") or "uprising" and she insists that the goals and methods are the same in the present set of demonstrations. The first intifada began in 1987 and was characterized by a highly coordinated, unarmed mass-mobilization against the Israeli occupation. Widespread acts of civil disobedience included strikes, boycotts, the creation of "underground" schools, grassroots projects to develop economic independence from Israel, and mass demonstrations. Women were that uprising's backbone.

"The masters of the field are the protesters," Abdelalim says of both then and now. "In the first intifada, women and men used to stand shoulder to shoulder beside each other, struggling together."

Abu Mosa, who is typical of many women in Gaza in not having been

politically active in more than 25 years, tells us that the Return March brings back her memories of that earlier period. Even the smell of tear gas makes her nostalgic. "I feel this March is the first intifada."

Hamad was also a young activist during the first intifada. Now 51, she remembers how women were "the vanguard" of that uprising. "There was a unified women's council in 1989 and this council had the responsibility of the streets," she recalls. Women led demonstrations and sit-ins, distributed leaflets, created neighborhood committees, and participated in a unified women's council. They even worked together in remarkable unity, whatever political faction they belonged to.

Women's Activism After the First Intifada

The first intifada ended with the signing of the Oslo Accords, a peace agreement negotiated in secret between the government of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Made up only of Palestinians in exile, the PLO negotiation team was all male.

The Oslo Accords led to the creation of the Palestinian Authority and the return of the exiled PLO leaders to the West Bank and Gaza. Many of the grassroots activists who had led the uprising were promptly marginalized in the formation of new leadership structuresâ€"and women were excluded altogether.

According to Samira Abdelalim, the trajectory of the struggle, and particularly the role of women, then shifted radically. There was now an armed, institutional authority governing a traditional, patriarchal society. "The male societies refused to include women in the decision-making units, and denied women's [engagement] in policies and plans," she explains. So, rather than confronting the Israeli occupation, Palestinian women began agitating for social, political, legal, and economic rights within Palestinian society.

Abdelalim and other women activists organized around the task of creating laws to protect women from honor killingsâ€"that is, the murder of a female family member when she is perceived to have brought shame upon the familyâ€"and to prevent gender-based male violence.

The Oslo process was supposed to culminate in agreements on a set of thorny "permanent status" issues between Israel and the Palestinians. These issues included Jerusalem, water rights, border delineation, settlements, and refugees. However, trust in the process continued to erode over the years and the "final" status negotiations, held in the summer of 2000, collapsed, setting the stage for the second intifada, which erupted on September 29 of that year.

Though that uprising initially began with large-scale demonstrations reminiscent of the previous one, it quickly turned toward armed resistance. According to political scientist Marie Prince's research for the United States Institute for Peace, nonviolent movements create openings for a wide range of people, including women, children, and the old, to get involved in a way that violent campaigns don't. Due to the armed nature of the second intifada, the space for the involvement of women, in particular, began to shrink radically. In this period, according to Abdelalim, women activists refocused their work in the international arena, attempting to expose the violence of the occupation to the world through documentation, media reports, and international conferences.

This sort of activism, however, was predominantly open only to women from a higher socioeconomic classâ€"those, in particular, who worked for NGOs, had access to university education, and had some ability, however restricted, to reach the outside world, whether through travel or the Internet. Many of the women who had been out on the streets during the first intifada were left without roles to play.

In 2006, Hamas (an Arabic acronym for Islamic Resistance Movement) won the Palestinian legislative elections over the previously dominant

Palestinian National Liberation Movement, or Fatah. Some Gaza-based leaders of Fatah then sought to oust Hamas (with US backing), leading to a bloody internecine civil war on the Strip in which Hamas violently gained control in 2007.

The Hamas-Fatah divide became a new focal point for women activists in Gaza. In those years, women generally called for Palestinian unity, remembers Abdelalim, insisting that their enemy should be the Israeli occupation, not a competing Palestinian faction. The official reconciliation negotiation team (which signed multiple unity agreements starting in 2011 that were never implemented) did not include women. Abdelalim and other women activists nonetheless held weekly demonstrations to protest the internal split in Gaza, even drafting a joint statement by women on both sides of the political divide calling for national unity.

Under the Hamas regime, however, the situation of women only continued to deteriorate. "Hamas took us back decades," says Iktimal Hamad, noting the regime's desire to impose Islamic Sharia law in place of the Palestinian law in force on the West Bank. "Hamas doesn't believe in equality between women and men," she says bluntly.

Palestinian society has indeed grown ever more religiously conservative over the past decades, especially in Gaza. Siwar Alza'anen remains among a small minority of women in that imprisoned strip of land who do not cover their hair. She admits, though, that most women in Gaza have little choice but to adhere to restrictive societal norms in dress and culture. They generally can't even leave home without the permission of a male relative. Abu Mosa remembers protesting during the first intifada alongside women with uncovered hair who were wearing short skirts. "Now they ask girls to wear head scarves at the age of 12," she adds with obvious disapproval, though she herself does cover.

Yet throughout those repressive years,

Hamad points out, women continued to play a central role in the Palestinian struggle through family education. Women were the mothers of the martyrs, the wounded, and the prisoners. A woman, as she puts it, remains "half of the community and the community is not complete without her contribution."

Women Begin to Reclaim Their Activist Roles

Abdelalim and Hamad are hopeful that the current protests indicate a new phase for women's activism in Gaza and may provide a path to greater gender equality. "What happened in this Great Return March is that women reclaimed their large role in the Palestinian struggle," Abdelalim says. As Hamad observes, the number of women involved increased each Friday. In fact, according to Abdelalim's estimate, women made up about 40 percent of the protesters, a remarkable figure given the history of these last years.

Because the protests are unarmed and popular in nature, men have even supported women's involvement. Hamad is organizing for the first time not just with men from the national secular movements but from the Islamic movements as well, and she feels respected and appreciated by them.

Still, Abdelalim insists that women have never simply sat around waiting for men's permission to act. "We've always claimed our role in the struggle," she says.

Abdelalim, Hamad, Alza'anen, and Abu Mosa all spoke with pride about the unity exhibited during the Great Return March. As Hamad put it, "In spite of the internal political split, we succeeded in embodying the unified struggle."

"No one raises the flag of their political faction," adds Alza'anen. Instead, the chants for Palestine send a message of unity both to

Palestinians and to the world.

Women's participation in the March boosts their self-confidence, says Abdelalim. "The march broke the wall of silence between the women and [the rest of our] community," she insists. And she's convinced that this new sense of power will lead women to struggle to take part in decision-making on a larger scale, while becoming more courageous in demanding their rights. After marching at the border side by side with her father, her husband, her brothers, no young woman will be content to "stay at home waiting for men to give her small benefits."

All four women hold expansive visions of what they want their national struggle to yield. Abdelalim says that she is "fighting to guarantee the best future" for her children. She wants her people to be free in their homeland. She imagines children playing with joy instead of fear and a future world lacking refugees, hunger, or war-related disabilities. "The future means young men and women singing, dancing, building their homeland," she muses.

For Abu Mosa, "the future is hope and love for the homeland." In her dream of the future, she describes an old man, right of return fulfilled, wiping away his tears so many years later. Her vision also has space for non-Palestinians. "I have no problem with Jews. If they visit me, I will host them in my house, and they can live in my country." But, she adds, she will not tolerate the presence of the Zionists who displaced her family.

Alza'anen hopes the losses sustained during the March will not be in vain. The killings "motivate us to keep walking in the same direction, that our determination and intention will not collapse."

Hamad is convinced that the liberation of Palestinian women is dependent on the national liberation that the Great Return March embodied. "Women," she says, "will always be in the front lines of our national struggle."

Source [*The Nation*](#).

Against Janša, Against Brussels

10 July 2018, by **Božidar Kolar, Jaša Veselinovic, Matej Križanec, Tonja Jerele**

On June 3, Slovenia held early general elections. [96] Incumbent prime minister Miro Cerar triggered the elections — the eighth parliamentary elections since the republic proclaimed independence from the former Federative Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) in 1991 — when he stepped down in March, three months before the end of his mandate. Since 2008, no government has lasted a full mandate. [97]

On election night, perhaps the most striking image was a map of the country that showed each constituency. All were marked yellow — the color of the victorious far-right party, the Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS). An image depicting electoral districts was similarly homogeneous, with only a few left-wing bastions breaking up the sea of yellow.



Figure 1: The winners of electoral districts in the June 3 Slovenian elections.

Bordering Italy, Austria, Hungary, and Croatia — all ruled by traditional right-wing or upstart far-right parties — this small Alpine country seemed to have finally joined “the new Eastern European post-communist ‘axis of evil.’” [98]

But the political landscape in Slovenia is far more complex. To understand it, we must first examine the dynamics of the post-socialist transition.

The Transition

In 1991, after a short-lived national unity government, a cadre of ex-communists and ex-socialists youth stepped in to lead the transition away from socialism. Going by the name the

Liberal Democrats of Slovenia (LDS), the party headed three governments until 2004.

Integration into Western markets was gradual but efficient. One of the only impediments was organized labor, which dragged out the process of privatization. State-owned enterprises were eventually transferred to private hands, but largely to local capitalists. Nonetheless, they quickly became part of an intricate network of post-socialist power.

At the top of the early transitional government’s agenda was joining the European Union and the European Monetary Union. That required bringing policies in line with the EU criteria, which meant making the Slovenian economy more dependent on external capital and market demand. [99] What appeared to be a neutral adaptation of institutional norms was in reality a shift toward ever-greater economic subordination.

In 2004, Slovenia joined the EU and soon after, SDS, the far-right party, won the general elections. Its governing strategy differed from those of the previous governments. [100] It pushed for more rapid liberalization and launched an offensive on public institutions such as higher education and the social-care system. Union mobilizations helped stop some of the government’s harshest neoliberal reforms, such as a flat tax system, but the SDS-led government continued with the EU integration model. Despite relative prosperity, the promised trickle-down effects weren’t materializing for many Slovenian workers.

SDS lost power following the 2008 elections amid corruption allegations against its leader, Janez Janša. The Social Democrats (SD) — formal successors to the League of

Communists of Slovenia, but now firm “third way” adherents — gained power for the first time. But their reign was brief. When the financial crisis hit in 2008, the party was caught flat-footed. [101] A contracting German export sector drove down production in Slovenia, which depended on their market. Between the final quarter of 2008 and the first quarter of 2009, manufacturing dropped more than 25 percent — one of the largest declines of any OECD country. But the biggest crash occurred in the backbone of the Slovenian economy. The last quarter of 2008 saw the construction sector decline by more than 30 percent. Between 2007 and 2010, almost 35,000 jobs were lost and unemployment soared to more than 7 percent, with double-digit numbers among youth.

Voters, upset with the record of the Social Democrats, gave SDS another chance. The party promptly implemented austerity, provoking popular anger that resulted in the biggest uprisings in the country’s history. [102] Although the first mass protest, in the autumn of 2012, was called by trade unions, subsequent mobilizations emerged spontaneously, with a strong anti-corruption line. By the end of February 2013, the SDS-led government had fallen. Its successor was a center-left government led by the first (and still only) female prime minister, Alenka Bratušek. She struck a technocratic tone, worried that the so-called Troika (the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund) would step in otherwise. Meanwhile, the crisis in Slovenia climbed to its peak. The total losses of nonfinancial corporations hit 2.2 billion euros, and the unemployment rate eclipsed 10 percent among the overall population (as well as 25 percent among young

people). Almost 300,000 people had incomes below the the risk-of-poverty threshold.

In 2014, due to infighting within her own party, Positive Slovenia (PS), Bratušek stepped down and, following general elections, was replaced as prime minister by Miro Cerar. A well-known jurist and son of both an Olympic medalist and the first female State Prosecutor General, Cerar won the elections on an openly centrist platform, projecting an image of professionalism, ethical probity, and pro-Europeanism. The election also marked the first time a new radical left coalition, the United Left, took part. It won six seats, bolstered by the still-hopeful winds of Greece's radical left party Syriza, the popular support of an emerging young leftist scene, and the broad-based sense that the country was on the wrong course.

Miro Cerar's party presided over, nominally speaking, an extremely successful economic era, with economic growth among the highest in the EU. High economic growth, however, came at the cost of growing precarization among young people and unending austerity. Discontent festered below the positive headlines, and union activity increased in both the private and public sectors, as well as in previously nonunionized areas. Then in March of this year, at the very moment when negotiations between the state and the public sector unions had reached a deadlock, Cerar stepped down, bringing an abrupt end to his three-and-a-half-year tenure.

New Elections, Old Political Impasse

The revolving door of leaders and the perpetual impasse in Slovenian politics has triggered a downward spiral in voter turnout and youth electoral participation. [103] This time around turnout slid to 52 percent, a bit less than in 2014. [104]

SDS was the big winner, capturing almost 25 percent of the vote. The two center-left parties garnered around 25 percent combined, while the three centrist parties collected around 28 percent. The left-wing Levica (the

successor to the United Left coalition) got 9 percent, while the two smaller right-wing parties collectively received 11 percent. Although SDS won in almost all electoral districts, there were a few dozen in which the center and left-wing parties gained more total votes than the right-wing parties (see Figure 2).

The biggest loser by far was Cerar's party, which shed twenty-six seats. One likely reason was Cerar's opposition to higher wages for public sector workers, who overwhelmingly supported him in 2014. Another was his anti-immigration stance, which failed to resonate with the party base. (As is often the case, it's the center that has paved the way for the Right — it was Cerar's party that installed barbed wire on Slovenian southern border, and it was the centrist interior minister who pushed for legislation restricting the rights of asylum applicants.)



Image 2: The map shows the dominant (winning) political clusters for each electoral district. As we can see, the right-wing parties gained most of their support in the east of the country, mainly in the least developed peripheral rural districts. Left-wing and centrist liberal parties gained most in the more developed western part of the country.

And what, then, of the Right? The base of SDS is quite different from, say, those who attend Hungarian Guard marches. Still, this election marked the first time an SDS leader openly supported far-right organizations (for example, the Slovenian branch of Generation Identitaire / Generacija identitete, a racist movement originating in France). [105] Another new development is the public and financial support from Hungary's ruling far-right party, Fidesz, and the media companies around the prime minister, Viktor Orban. Orban and SDS leader Janez Janša started their friendship in January 2016, when Orban was visiting Slovenia on official business. After meeting with then-Prime Minister Cerar, he proceeded to a closed-door conference with Janša. Hungarian investments into SDS

media outlets followed. Today, three Hungarian media companies connected to Orban own 45 percent of SDS's media-company shares. [106] Hungarian media also owns 52 percent of Nova Obzorja, which publishes a SDS newspaper, and Nova24tv.si (SDS TV) and New Horizon share the same address. Hungarians have so far invested over 2.2 million euros into SDS media, some of it in the months leading up to the elections. If there was any question of their tightening relationship, Orban also took part in the SDS Congress in May, where he declared his full support for Janša's party. [107]

Janša himself is a fascinating figure. In Yugoslavia, he was a very active member of the League of Communists. In 1988, a few years before the socialist federation collapsed, he was tried in a military court on charges of exposing military secrets, and was given an eighteen-month prison sentence. Yet by 1991, during the ten-day Slovenian war for independence, he was serving as the minister of defense and was one of the war's main strategists. He served two terms as prime minister (from 2004 to 2008 and 2012–13), before again landing in legal trouble. In 2013, he was sentenced to two years in prison for allegedly accepting a bribe from a Finnish firm to help it win a military-supply contract during his reign as prime minister. In 2014, while serving his sentence, he was again elected to parliament, but the Constitutional Court annulled the judgement of the Supreme Court and brought the case back for reexamination. The case was time-barred the same year. He then retreated from the public sphere, only to make a spectacular comeback in recent months. He's since dominated the country's politics.

During the election campaign, Janša's party emitted right-wing rhetoric on a whole host of topics, including the migrant crisis, women's and LGBT rights, and the credibility of mass media. At the same time, the election results do not amount to the so-called Orbanization of Slovenia. SDS won 220,000 votes on June 3, 70,000 less than in 2011, when it came in second. [108] For a party with an especially stable voter base (86.6

percent were return voters), this was a mediocre finish. The success of SDS is always in direct correlation to the amount of broken promises and lack of alternatives coming from the centrist and left-of-center parties. Slovenian society is culturally rather left wing, and can be mobilized against the Right — but it has to consider left parties worthy of support.

it is still unclear what government, if any, will emerge from the June 3 contest. All of the center-left and center parties have said that they are — at least for now — unwilling to enter into a Janša-led coalition, and the other right-wing parties do not have the necessary number of MPs to form a majority government. A center-left government is also unlikely, since it would need to bring together at least six parties, and for the time being Levica is not that keen on joining this type of coalition. Nor are the other formations particularly open to Levica, whose demand for a referendum to leave NATO is unlikely to curry favor.

So, a couple weeks removed from the election, the impasse continues, and another round of early elections this fall is a real possibility.

The Slovenian Left

Levica (Slovenian for “the Left”) first gained visibility during the 2014 elections. Going by the name the United Left (ZL), it was a coalition of three parties and some small civil society organizations. [109] Two of the three coalition groups won MPs. But once inside the National Assembly, the parliamentarians gradually severed themselves from accountability procedures until they became the dominating force, leading without any democratic mandate from their parties. Increasingly, the focus was placed on parliamentary activities, to the exclusion of any grassroots initiative. Even a volunteer-based project meant to bring activists and intelligentsia together with trade unionists was neglected to the point of collapse.

What, then, accounts for the party’s relative success? One important factor is that, unlike most Eastern European

and Balkan countries, Slovenian society is culturally left-leaning. The Communist-led Liberation front (OF) and the Partisan movement during World War II are still positively regarded, recognized for the gains they delivered to workers and the contributions they made to Slovenian society. [110] While one of Janša’s goals is to tarnish this chapter of the country’s history, his revisionist aims have been rather unsuccessful. Considering the current political situation in the region (and Europe more broadly), Levica appears much better off.

At the same time, Levica’s relative improvement in MPs in the recent election hardly amounts to a breakthrough. If we look at their under- and overrepresentation in different electoral districts, we see that their success is limited to urban centers — they won most of the central districts in Ljubljana and had good results in downtown Maribor, Nova Gorica, and in almost all of the seaside area in the wealthier southwest.



Image 3: The map shows the percentage of votes for Levica in each of the electoral districts. We can see that the party gained the most votes in the developed and urban districts, and gained little support on the periphery.

The party’s vote totals correspond with its strategy. Where people want roundtables, discussions, and other similar events bandying about progressive ideas, the party prospers. Where there are no venues or appetite for such conversation, Levica fails to gain traction. And after four years of sitting in parliamentary benches while discontinuing grassroots activities, both Levica’s voters and member base have changed. In 2016, a long internal dispute about whether to merge into a unified party — a direction favored by the parliamentary group and the Party of the European Left — led to a split in the leading party of the coalition, IDS. More than a hundred active members and organizers left the party — a sixth of the total membership at the time, or a third of the active membership. Some formed new grassroots

organizations without parliamentary ambitions; most were demoralized and drifted to the sidelines. Levica was left with almost no experienced grassroots organizers. And it shows — their field presence in more marginal areas of the country is very poor, and the party’s link with unions amounts to personal connections among the organization’s leaders.

The limits of Levica’s electoral strategy are also on display in the vision it puts forward. Whereas four years ago ZL was a voice for exploited and disenfranchised workers and dared to say that another world is possible, now Levica focuses on defending the welfare state, supplemented with rhetoric about veganism, animal rights, and equality before the law. The concrete manifestations of class struggle happen independently of them. Unable to engage with movements and transform social forces on the ground, it has confined itself to the parliamentary halls and became closer to a traditional social-democratic party. The breakdown of the June 3 vote highlights this point: Levica lost more than 35 percent of its voters from 2014 and replaced them with former supporters of the centrist SMC. It jettisoned radical politics for the sake of more moderate voters and short-term parliamentary success.

While no one can predict whether Levica will change course and become a vehicle for radical transformation, among socialists and progressive organizers in Slovenia it is quite clear that the party has stopped being a political home of progressive movements. Its present dynamics have more to do with the day-to-day muck of parliamentary calculations, while its political strategy remains tied to the decrepit structures of the EU.

Back to Mass Politics

At a time when it’s increasingly obvious that the EU is ready to impose its will on member countries, anti-immigrant conservatism strikes a chord with a certain demographic. [111] SDS is harnessing the same kind of discontent with

dependency that drove voters in UK to exit the EU. Unfortunately, they do so in divisive and bigoted terms that ultimately serves to safeguard the crisis-ridden EU. In order to have the leverage needed against the EU bureaucrats, JanÅia has to have class peace and continued growth. And, in order to achieve these goals, he's already shown that he can go the extra mile and be a tough patriarch for tough times. That's why by forming a cross-party, anti-JanÅia narrative, the liberal and nominally left-wing opposition is playing into his hands — compared to his bold appearance and alignment with Viktor Orban, they look weak and spineless, aligned with the faceless Brussels bureaucrats.

In reality, what we have here are two

blocs trying to save Europe, each in their own way — and the electorate keeps caring less and less. The result for Leica is therefore promising in this sense; it shows there are indeed many people willing to confront the surge to the right. But parliamentary solutions won't suffice if they keep subordinating struggles from below to their own logic. The coming parliamentary deadlock might clear the way for the EU to push towards its own antidemocratic "Italian scenario" as a form of lesser-evilism, faced with a local unruly bigot.

The Slovenian left must offer a way out of economic and political dependency and tie itself to struggles to defend the public sector and democratic rights. It must build a force that can repel pressures of both

the "Orbanesque" and "Brusellesque" variety. That will require strengthening its relationship with working-class movements. It was organized labor that in the 1990s forced a decent minimum wage, the establishment of the Economic and Social Council, and one of the better labor laws in the world. It was trade union mobilizations that in 2005 prevented the introduction of a flat tax rate, and that in 2012 helped spark the autumn of uprisings that gave birth to many civil initiatives and mobilized countless young activists.

And if the Slovenian left can escape the current impasse, it will be through a similar kind of mass, class-based politics.

[Jacobin](#)

The Kafala System is How Capitalism Is Driving Modern Slavery

9 July 2018, by [Aman Madan](#)

Beirut: I sit across from Raghav [112] at one of Beirut's numerous Sri Lankan resto-café. We're in Beirut's noisy neighbourhood of Doura, an area home to a significant number of Beirut's migrant worker populations from Sri Lanka, India and Bangladesh. Life in Doura is no easy feat. On the drive over from the well-polished neighbourhood of Achrafieh, one can instantly discern the change in scenery; the luxury cars turn to buses, the French to Arabic, Bengali and Sinhalese, and the colour of bodies from white to a distinguishable chocolate brown. The smells of Ethiopian and Sri Lankan cuisine mixing with the assortment of argileh flavours fills the air. Doura is rife with hardened men, many of whom are migrants living pay check to pay check. One such migrant is Raghav, who hails from the Punjab in India.

Raghav has changed since the last time I saw him - his beard is neatly cut, his hair sleekly pulled back and

freshly oiled. He's lost weight. It's his first day off in a month and leaving the compound to get a haircut and to buy oil is only a possibility on that day off. Despite the fragrance of mustard oil which emanates from his body, he seems sadder - as if life itself has been drained from him. Raghav came happy - hopeful even - that life in Beirut would be different. That hope is nowhere to be found today, as Raghav repeatedly asks how he can return to his native India. I don't know what to tell him other than the truth which both of us know so well: he has fallen victim to the complex and subtle system of modern day slavery that profits in the often involuntary movement of brown bodies from South Asian countries for exploitation in Middle Eastern ones. In short, Raghav has simultaneously become a survivor and active participant of the Kafala system.

Six months ago, Raghav paid a man by the name of Mohan Lal - a third party

agent operating in both Lebanon and India - nearly \$6,000 for transport and to find him employment in Lebanon. Today, Mohan Lal is nowhere to be found, with some suggesting that he is either hiding in India or incarcerated. Through this agent, Raghav secured employment at Ramco, a lucrative company, profiting from, among other things, the trash crisis in Beirut. Brought over on the premise of working in packaging and earning \$600 a month, today Raghav earns only \$300, his job is to collect Beirut's trash for 15 hours a day, and he lives in a single room with nine other men. He is not allowed to leave the compound except on his day off, which is never guaranteed. His passport has also been confiscated, relegating him to the status of corporate prisoner.

Raghav's story is not unique but it is revelatory. He is but a tool in the vast repertoire of the Kafala system. The Centre for the Study of Labour and Mobility defines the Kafala system as

a “sponsorship system that regulates residency and employment of the workers in the GCC countries.” In Lebanon, the Kafala system is alive and well, so much so that this economic system which relies on human movement has added another racial element in an already racial society: brown and black bodies are systematically dehumanised and othered in a society where whiteness is considered the ideal. For decades now, the Kafala system has relied on the mass movement of South Asian labour to meet the economic demands of the Arab Gulf. These stories are not new and thousands of individual narratives remain well documented. What is shockingly left out of the narrative, however, is the system’s corrupt collaboration with capital which spans borders and nationalities, and is ultimately race blind; Arab businessmen hire kafeels who then provides the lucrative service of providing human bodies at the lowest possible cost. It is worth clarifying, the Kafala system does not intentionally seek out brown bodies for enslavement, but rather it is the amorphous force of the market capital which determines where labour will come from.

Stories such as this one – the exploitation of labour from South Asian countries, the mistreatment of women in some circles and the broad characterisation of institutionally marginalised peoples as passive subjects lacking agency – are often deployed as political tools which serve power – power which is more often than not concentrated in the geographic West.

The logic, then, is one which naturally constructs itself: the West, fuelled by an amorphous sense of Manifest Destiny, views itself as possessing a moral authority to save oppressed brown bodies from other oppressing brown bodies. It is this narrative which also creates false binaries, most important of which is one which purports the West as a beacon of enlightened thought and boundless humanitarianism, and the Orient as an inherent bastion of backwardness and oppression. This does not mean that Lebanese businessmen and corporations are not directly engaged in the marginalisation of other brown

bodies and that blame lies squarely with former colonists, but rather that this practice is part and parcel of a larger process of historical continuity – a process and narrative which is conveniently left out of most journalistic accounts critiquing the Kafala system.

Hera Syed has argued that “the way certain nationalities are classified are representative of 20th-century British colonial attitudes toward different peoples.” While Syed writes with respect to the Kafala system in the United Arab Emirates, his point is also applicable to Lebanon, where race and class intersect to create a unique racialised hierarchy, in which whiteness is considered the optimal and brown and blackness, an unfortunate condition. Certainly it is hard to prove a direct link between the racial hierarchy of the French mandate, which categorised French citizens and Lebanese Christians as morally and genetically superior to other brown, mostly Muslim, Arabs, to the racial hierarchy which exists today, but the similarities are striking, insofar that the system of classification and the general foundation of “their categorization” have largely persisted. In many ways, the modernity which Lebanon now inhabits and simultaneously produces is one which occupies the same discursive space of the colonial era, a space in which capital and market liberalisations reproduce the same old colonial racial hierarchies.

While thousands of Raghavs can be found in Beirut – they are found in garbage collectors, in domestic servants, in construction workers and the list goes on – a small group of Lebanese citizens, mostly young Lebanese, are at the forefront of fighting a system most of them equate with slavery. The Anti-Racism Movement, more commonly referred to as ARM, describes itself as a “grassroots movement created by young activists in collaboration with migrant community leaders.”

ARM opened its first centre – the Migrant Community Centre – in September of 2011 in Bourj Hammoud, a small neighbourhood close to Daoura. Farah Salka, one of the founders of ARM and the primary

catalyst behind opening MCCs across Beirut, tells The Wire that the “root of all evils” is the exclusion of domestic workers from the Lebanese labour law, which means that domestic workers are not afforded maternity leave, minimum wages, days off or any legal protection. More often than not, their passports are also confiscated, as was the case for Raghav whose employers now demanded \$800 if he wanted his passport back. Migrant workers like Raghav who work in Lebanon on behalf of a sponsor are also subject to similar conditions, but these restrictions are imposed not by an individual but usually by a large corporation, like Ramco.

Salka tells The Wire that the sponsorship system “criminalises freelance work” and ultimately aims for workers “to be obedient, silent, and doing what they are supposed to do.” Despite the fact that suicides committed by migrant workers are not declining in Lebanon – more than 60 a year according to Salka – ARM is making steadfast progress. Since 2011, ARM has opened three Migrant Community Centres which offer English language classes, assistance in navigating daily life in Lebanon and above all a space for migrant workers that is uniquely their own.

Walking into the Migrant Community Centre in Achrafiye, one can see workers coming and going freely, relaxing on the sofas, smoking a cigarette on the balcony, sifting through vocabulary lists and above all, existing as humans as opposed to machines in “slave-like conditions.” While progress has been made, Salka ultimately confesses to The Wire, “the local community is not involved in these issues,” but recently feminist and activist groups have started to include all migrant workers in their conversations and programming.

On Sunday (June 24), activists and migrant workers across Lebanon will gather for the International Domestic Workers Day Protest in Daoura, the same neighbourhood in which Raghav and I first spoke. They will call for, among other things, abolishing the sponsorship system.

The last time I spoke with Raghav, he did not know how or if he would ever

recover his passport from his employers who were presently holding it hostage. Raghav told *The Wire* that he had contemplated fleeing the compound - much like some of his friends - but no sponsor and no passport in Beirut would not only make Raghav a vigilante in the eyes of the law, but returning to India would be impossible. Perhaps Raghav would have been more open to that

alternative if it were not for his sister's wedding that week. Raghav is now back in the Punjab. Rather than finding work in India, however, Raghav now aches to return to the Middle East. The flow of remittances from Raghav's work not only support his family, but provide Indian families who send sons and daughters abroad with a status that is derived from

migration - a sense of reputation, class and stature that propels lower and middle class Indians upward.

"To the UAE or Qatar," Raghav says when asked where he wants to go next. He says life is better there and the pay is higher. For his sake, I hope he's right.

Source The Wire.

We Asked: Geopolitics and the Left (Part I: Russia & the West)

7 July 2018, by **Rossen Djagalov**

by Rossen Djagalov

Ilya Budraitskis, a Russian publicist and historian

Today, when the threat of open military clash between US and Russian forces in Syria has become real, it is important to clarify the anti-militarist position of the international left. It seems, that much of the Western left continues to reproduce the old Cold-war patterns, with the imperialist camp on one side, and a kind of "progressive" or at least "peaceful" on the other. Of course, the military strength of NATO, or even US, and Russia is incomparable, but Putin's Russia remains an imperialist force not only in the post-Soviet space, but also in the Middle East and increases its presence in Africa. It is important to emphasize Russia's role as an important player on the international market of weapons. Unlike the USSR, contemporary Russia has no social or political strategy alternative to the Western bloc. Its main goal, starting from 2014, could be defined as a "struggle for recognition" among the club of global powers. Thus, Putin's "war of nerves" aims to force the West to make such a deal through continued escalation. From the beginning the Russian presence in Syria played such a function.

Another feature of the current model of the Russian state is the existence of different groups inside the state apparatus that act according to their own logic. This could be described as a "privatization" of the some elements of the state, whether we are talking about state corporations, the secret services, or the army. The actions of these groups follow the private interests of their leaderships as they try to influence the main direction of the country's foreign policy. We can see it in some of the international scandals that involve Russia: from illegal private units fighting on the side of Assad's army in Syria, to the role of the Russian diplomats in cocaine traffic from the Argentina or Skripal's poisoning. In the last case, of course, it's hard to imagine that it was directly Putin who ordered the use of the gas, but could be possible that some groups inside the secret services tried to gain from the further escalation. This permanent "external threat" became a key element for the justification of regime's policy inside the country: from the Russian version of "austerity measures" to the repressions and even tortures of the opposition. [113]

For the international left in the West and in Russia today it becomes imperative to expose the fake rhetoric of the Cold war from both sides-the

demonization and "othering" Russia in the West, as well as its self-presentation as a victim of imperialism and fighter for the global justice.

Ana Tomić is a Croatian social anthropologist

Speaking of Croatia's response to the tensions between Russia and the West, as a puny member of NATO, Croatia has subscribed to the military aggression of the United States and its allies towards Syria, which has earned it expressed gratitude from the US Embassy in Zagreb. Croatia's support has not been called into question in the mainstream media which stands as an exclamation of the demonization of Russia that the Western mainstream media has been serving to its audience almost daily in the last three or four years. Russia has been blamed for all the world's ills - Ukraine, Brexit, Trump, the refugee crisis, spying, poisoning, and a plethora of other unfounded accusations treated as facts and which translates a deep anti-Russian sentiment and which dismantles the springs of anti-Russian and anti-Putin rhetoric that have the effect of pushing ever further the chances of true reconciliation. There is a problem with information in the West, pretended more objective, more critical, and having a charter of deontology. But anti-communism has been instrumentalised during the cold

war to wage American anti-Russian war, since it has continued way after the USSR. If you type "Putin covers" on Google images, there is a surge of magazines with covers of Putin-Stalin, Putin-autocrat, Putin-Hitler, Putin-despot, Putin-expansionist, Putin-spy ... it's absurd.

Pavel Kudiukin, ? Russian social democrat and co-chair of the labor union University Solidarity

The term "tension" seems too mild to account for this full-fledged Cold War, true, with some elements of an arranged match. The last element is a function of the embeddedness of the current Russian elite in a West-dominated world system, something absent in the original Cold War.

What is happening is an inter-imperialist rivalry and the Russian leadership's attempt to improve its position in the world-system using military blackmail. At the same time, its actions seem awkward and strategically miscalculated. The Russian leadership is pushing the country further into isolation with which it deepens its problems and reduces the possibility, already not very likely, of exiting its semi-peripheral status.

For the left it would be a serious mistake to consider this conflict as a manifestation of a "national-liberation struggle" or "a struggle against American imperialism" and this way justify the adventurous policies of Putin's team, looking upon it as an ally. The softened formula of this position says "help the weaker imperialism against the stronger one." Yet Russian imperialism is characterized by its reactionary nature, or using Lenin's old characterization, its "military-feudal" features." The position of the left should be against military hysterics among all parts of the conflict. In Russia and its neighbors that means primarily struggling against Russian imperialism and expansionism, for solidarity of laboring and democratic forces of our countries, against xenophobia in all forms.

Philippe Alcoy is member of the editorial board of the French website RevolutionPermanente.fr

and of the Revolutionary Communist Current of the New Anticapitalist Party.

The relations between Russia and the West are at the lowest level since the end of the Cold War. Today we have an international context very different from that of the 90s, when the capitalist restoration in Central and Eastern Europe and in USSR allowed imperialist countries to affirm that it was the "final victory" of capitalism over communism (and even over any other alternative to capitalism), and the USA to be the uncontested imperialist hegemon.

With the international economic crisis of 2007-2008, this situation started to change. The failure of the US-led invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan marked a relative but real decline in the world hegemony of the north-American imperialist, even if today there is no new imperialist power to challenge the USA.

It is in this context that we must understand this new offensive of Western powers against Russia. Not that Russia is challenging USA hegemony (it is really far from that). We are not in a "new Cold War". In the end, the conflict is not even between Russia and "the West". It is a move from the USA to prevent any international power, or international alliance from challenging its hegemony as the main imperialist power.

Today it is not only the US-Russia relationship that is at a very low level but also the US-Germany links that are in trouble. Germany is a bigger potential threat for USA domination than Russia. What the USA is trying to do is prevent any future alliance between Germany, Russia and by extension China. This could be a real challenge for the North American imperialist hegemony.

In this sense, the Skripal affair was an important victory for Trump and the USA. It allowed to recreate, at least temporarily, a "Western bloc" against Russia and to weaken even more the relations between the EU (Germany) and Putin.

Russia is not really an imperialist

power but a regional power able to influence some international affairs. Its military power and its positions in international organisations (inherited mainly from the Soviet period) create the "illusion of world super power". But since the end of the Cold War, the Russian economy has become almost completely dependent on production and export of gas and oil (which technology is largely imported from imperialist countries); its main area of influence is the former Soviet space; the central role it plays in Syria today is mostly the result of the huge blow it received in Ukraine in 2014. Moreover, with the Western offensive Russia is becoming a "pariah state".

Does this all mean that the working-class movement and the revolutionary left must see in Putin a kind of "anti imperialist"? No. Putin is on the top of a reactionary regime; he is the face of contemporary Russian capitalism. And, as we can see, to defend the interest of Russian capitalists he is able to produce humanitarian disasters, massacres, and support murderous dictators as Assad in Syria.

But it will be impossible to fight Putin's influence among the Russia working and popular classes if the revolutionary left doesn't has a clear anti-imperialist stance. Putin is a result of the imperialist offensive in Russia in the 1990s, representing Russian capitalism's reactionary answer to that offensive.

The revolutionary left must condemn and denounce the Western offensive against Russia, including the economic sanctions, which hurt not so much oligarchs but the Russian working class and the large majority of ordinary people. Of course, this should never mean expressing political support for Putin. A class stance against imperialist aggression is the better way to fight Putin, too.

The policy of the revolutionary left must be a class policy, independent from either imperialists and local ruling classes. In the current imperialist offensive the main point to note and denounce is that if, without any evidence, they are able to create a "united front" of the most powerful imperialist countries against Russia, what could they do against countries

like Bolivia, Philippines, Moldova or Zimbabwe? This kind of imperialist offensive in the end helps Putin strength his power at home and his influence among the working and popular classes.

Pinar Donmez, a researcher interested in learning more about theories of state, crisis and restructuring, critical theory and dynamics of (de-)politicisation.

This is a very difficult and complex question the answers to which have serious repercussions so it should not be approached in simplified, schematic and binary manner. I think any plausible answer should start with unpacking our understanding of the state and how it should be conceived in relation to global capitalism and its crisis today. Our (mis-) conceptions and (under-) analysis of a neatly demarcated West vs. East rooted in Eurocentric frameworks also need critical interrogation. The mainstream media and political analysis, not only on the recent tensions but more broadly, often configure the state as a demarcated and monolithic unit and

the so-called 'inter-state' system and relations as a mere sum of these stand-alone units in rivalry with each other. This produces a very simplistic and misleading narration of the actual dynamics and relations of domination not only between but within these seemingly separate spatialities of capitalism. There is already a lot of commentary on the misinformation politics from all sides as to which state did what and allied with who on the basis of which particular national interest. But more fundamentally, it is this understanding of power and its spatiality which serves as a tool of mystification and disguise in so far as the tensions are treated and analysed in the allegedly revived Cold War terms and metaphors. This happens in the leftist analyses of this particular conflict as well and on how 'the international' is understood more broadly [114].

So it seems more plausible to me to take the global class relations as the starting point of a sober analysis of the capitalist restructuring that have been taking place since 1989. This requires the consideration of states as

part of a single system where power is allocated between the territorial forms of global social relations [115]

The focus on social relations therefore allows us to see beyond the statist geopolitical analyses to account for the global as well as the domestic dynamics of crisis, struggle and organisation. So my short answer would be to assess the ongoing crisis and bottlenecks of the global capital accumulation and circuit dynamics comprehensively and explore why this particular content assumes the form of appearance of the escalation of military conflict at regional and global scales in the current political juncture [116]. This is important in order not to lose sight of the class character of these tensions and concentrate on forming alliances and solidarities with peoples and communities who will decisively be on the receiving end of the consequences of war politics in all the authoritarian capitalist countries that are party to this conflict.

April 19 2018

[LeftEast](#)

Elections in Turkey confirm authoritarian regime and tasks for an Anticapitalist Alternative

6 July 2018, by **Sosyalist Demokrasi için Yenyol**

Firstly, economic stagnation that was likely to turn into a crisis was expected to decrease the support for the government. In fact, the main reason for the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and its ally the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) deciding to hold an early election was to prevent negative political consequences of the worsening economy. [117] [118]

Secondly, Muharrem Nce, the presidential candidate of the social democratic Republican People's Party

(CHP) carried out a very successful campaign that mobilized the masses. [119] It was the first time after Gezi protests that millions of people occupied the street, breaking their fear and the bans imposed by the government.

Another reason that was expected to deprive the ruling bloc of a majority was the establishment of Good Party (İYİ Parti) as an anti-AKP alternative by a group which split from the MHP. [iyi Parti, established 2017, described as nationalist, liberal conservative and

[secularist \(Wikipedia\)\]](#)

Finally, the majority of the opposition including the CHP, Good Party and Felicity Party (SP) formed a coalition against the AKP and MHP, which they named "Nation Alliance", to support each other, to act in a united way in the second round of the presidential election and combat electoral corruption. [120] Although they did not include pro-Kurdish Peoples Democratic Party (HDP) in this process, the HDP announced that they would support any candidate of the

Alliance against Erdoğan in the second round. [121]

Despite some partial successes by the opposition parties, the abovementioned reasons did not lead to significant reduction of support for the power bloc. Erdoğan was elected again as president with 52.6% in the first round, while his party the AKP got 42.6 % of the parliamentary votes.

Compared to the elections on 1 November 2015 there was a decrease of 7% in the votes of AKP but more than 1 % increase in Erdoğan's support. Although the MHP did not hold any rally or campaign, it kept its votes of more than 11 % since 2015, which shows that majority of the voters who abandoned the AKP voted for MHP while the Party got at least half of its votes from MHP. This shift from AKP to MHP shows the impact of harsh nationalist propaganda that the government has adopted for three years as well as the nationalist and chauvinist direction of the popular discontent.

Another notable thing about the MHP's results was its increased votes in the Kurdish populated region compared to the last elections. Those votes are overwhelmingly from the Turkish and Arab residents who previously voted for the AKP. In addition, although the scale of the corruption is not known in the region some images and videos appeared on media showing many fraudulent votes were put in the ballot boxes in favor of the MHP. On the other hand, some Kurdish commentators said that few Kurdish people who have been involved in the patronage network of the MHP would vote for Turkish nationalists.

Not Free Not Fair At All

When it comes to the opposition parties, the results cannot be considered just as another defeat particularly when the unequal and unfair conditions are taken into account. The elections were held under the state of emergency which has abolished many civil and political rights and generally meant there was great pressure on the opposition. The

financial resources of the state were used to increase the votes for the ruling party. The mainstream media which is overwhelmingly controlled by the government gave almost no coverage to the positions of the opposition.

Among the presidential candidates Selahattin Demirtaş, the jailed leader of HDP, hardly appeared on the state TV channels that operate as propaganda instruments of the government. In addition to the smear campaign against the HDP for being terrorists and traitors and police pressure on their members, the ballot boxes for 145,000 voters in Kurdish populated southeastern region were moved to other places, supposedly for security reasons. Many voters had to walk long distances to vote, which inevitably decreased the participation rate in the region.

Under these unfavorable conditions, Selahattin Demirtaş got 8.4% of the presidential votes, and the HDP got 11.70 % of the parliamentary votes and 67 seats. Although the support for the HDP decreased in the southeastern region, it increased in western parts of Turkey due to the strategic voting of CHP supporters to make the HDP pass the 10% threshold. If the HDP did not achieve this, all the seats in the southeastern region would go to AKP as the second most powerful party in the area. That is why many people voted for HDP while they supported Muharrem Ersoy (30.64%) for the presidency. It would not be an overinterpretation to say that HDP will be demonized and that the AKP will try to break its links with the West and CHP voters in the near future.

The the Party, which positioned itself on the center-right, got 10% of the secular and nationalist votes and got 43 seats in the very first election in which they took part. It is estimated that at least 60% of their votes were from MHP and 25% from CHP. It seems quite probable that both the the Party and CHP will move further right in order to pick the fruits of the nationalistic tendencies of the society. The CHP spokesperson recently announced that they will change their discourse from one that only addresses their supporters to using

the language of the AKP and MHP supporters.

One of the fears of the opposition was electoral corruption. All the parties requested their voters not to leave polling places until the end of the counting to prevent fraudulent voting and unfair counting and be prepared in front of the Higher Election Council at the end of counting to make the Council announce the true result of elections. Because the Higher Election Council that announces the final results is under the total control of the government, the only way to check the results was collecting the totals from individual ballot boxes.

They also asked people not to follow the elections through the state news agency Anatolian News Agent (AA), which generally manipulates facts in the government's favour, but from the website they established for the last elections. But that website did not work at all. When AA announced the victory of Erdoğan and AKP, the opposition first denied the results and claimed that Erdoğan had not won. But then they disappeared for hours after that and then seemed to concede that Erdoğan was the winner when his victory celebrations had already started. In many places the supporters of Erdoğan occupied the streets with guns to celebrate the election victory before the results were not clear. This led to some conspiracy theories alleging that opposition parties had to accept the victory of Erdoğan although he did not get enough votes in order to escape from clashes between the armed Erdoğan supporters and opposition supporters. Some protests held by CHP members called for the resignation of their party executives who were accused of surrendering to AKP, which has not yet had any visible effect.

Anti-Capitalist Alternative

Radical left groups did not have a similar and clear-cut position and strategies in this snap election. Some groups ran their own candidates some had unclear declarations about the presidential candidates and parties to be supported and some groups openly

called for a vote for HDP – which undoubtedly stands on the far left in the current array of political parties. The common point for the whole far left was that you could not raise and make popular any anti-capitalist demands before the elections. Thanks to the HDP's overcoming the threshold of 10%, some popular candidates coming from radical left will now take part in the parliament.

The majority of the Turkish socialist

movement is in solidarity with the Kurdish movement, and the HDP has created an opportunity for the socialist movement to be politically active in electoral politics. Nevertheless, this relationship with HDP and political priorities raised during the elections reveal that Turkish radical left is not an alternative on its own – not an independent political power. Hence, instead of constructing its own existence with the values of democracy, ecologism, feminism, anti-

capitalism, anti-imperialism socialist movement, it prefers to situate itself as an anti-AKP movement without raising any concrete demands, and sometimes builds opportunistic relationships with more powerful forces in the name of the fight against the AKP. But the uphill task for the socialist movement to build an independent anticapitalist alternative in order to break up the nationalist and conservative policies and discourses of the AKP has become more urgent than ever.

The real reason Saudi Arabia lifted its ban on women driving: economic necessity

6 July 2018, by **Martin Hvidt**

These include more public sector job openings for women, an apparent relaxation of women's strict dress code, the extension of suffrage to women to vote and stand as candidates in the 2015 municipal election, and small but important steps to decrease influence of the country's male guardianship system, which requires a woman to obtain the consent of a male relative for major decisions. [122] [123] [124]

In the weeks before the ban was lifted, a number of female driving activists were arrested in Saudi Arabia, casting some doubt on the government's resolve in relaxing the social control on women. [125] In a country where the central hold on individual ministries is relatively weak, this is most likely an expression of disapproval by some parts of the religious establishment at the speed and content of the reform process.

Saudi Arabia is known to be one of the most conservative regimes in the world. So why is this general easing of societal control over women taking place right now? In a recent research paper, I argue that it's foremost out of necessity to boost the economy by making both women and men more productive at work. [126]

Saudi Arabia currently finds itself in a grave economic situation. [127] Over the past 60 years, plentiful oil income allowed the state to build an extensive cradle-to-coffin welfare system, which on top of free housing and other lucrative features provided citizens with well-paid jobs in the public sector, with few demands, long vacations and early retirement.

This model worked well as long as the population was small and the oil income plentiful. But this is no longer the case. The population is growing rapidly and will continue to do so over the foreseeable future. Today, 60% of the 22m Saudi nationals are below the age of 30. [128] The price of oil plummeted in 2014 – though it has now recovered a bit – which had a severe negative impact on the Saudi state income. [129]

With this in mind, in 2017, the young crown prince, announced Saudi Vision 2030, the most radical reform of the Saudi economy to date. [130] The ambitious long-term goal is to transform the economy from one dependent primarily on oil incomes to a post-oil economy, and to bring larger parts of the Saudi population into the labour force. Out of the 12m paid jobs in Saudi Arabia, today only 5m are

held by Saudis while the remaining 7m are held by migrant workers. [131] A further element of Vision 2030 is for recruitment to be based on merit, and not family or tribal connections.

Women in the workforce

Women play an important part in Vision 2030. In general, Saudi women are slightly better educated than men and so the government believes they can play an active role in developing the country. [132] Women may also be less reluctant than their male counterparts to take over some of the jobs – such as nurses or other service related jobs – today held by migrants. [133] They are also significantly underemployed today. Only one in five Saudis employed in Saudi Arabia are women – extremely low compared to elsewhere in the world. [134]

Part of the reason why women are largely absent from the workforce is related to cultural traditions and religious interpretations which pronounce that women should take care of the home while men take jobs outside the house. But there are also a

range of practical impediments that make it difficult for women to actually take a job, if they should want one. Foremost among these has been the issue of women and transport.

Saudi Arabia lies in a very hot climate where it's physically challenging to be outside in the sun. Cities are also designed in the American fashion with long distances between work, home, services and shopping. So even if there were no cultural barriers, the possibilities of women walking or cycling to work, are very limited. Public transport is significantly underdeveloped and taxis are culturally not an option unless at least two women travel together. Under the female driving ban, this has meant that to leave the house a woman must be driven by a male relative, or if the

family can afford it, by a driver.

Absent men

For well-off families, to hire a driver and buy an extra car is not a problem, but for the majority of employers in public sector jobs, employing a driver is simply too expensive. The crown prince has also urged public sector institutions to create or expand transport services for women workers.

But the issue of transport also has an impact on how effective men can be at work. Husbands without drivers are obliged to leave work to drive their wives if they need to go to the dentist, doctor or attend other appointments deemed important. Most employers

who I've witnessed as part of my research in Saudi Arabia, at least in the public sector, accept this cultural norm, implying that driving one's wife is a legitimate reason not to be present at work.

This makes lifting the ban on women driving an essential step in order to make the Saudi economy more efficient in the long run. It could potentially bring more educated women into the labour market, while also increasing the efficiency of the male workforce. But foremost it is spearheading a change in cultural norms that in the future will allow men and women to occupy the same spaces and work alongside each other.

June 22, 2018

[The conversation](#)

July 1, 2018 - a new historical period opens

5 July 2018, by **Luis Rangel**

During the day, several polling stations registered delays in opening and there were many areas where, in addition to the purchase and coercion of votes, political violence (as throughout the campaign) took an indeterminate number of lives. The reports of violence were not focused around the presidential candidacy (in which the PRI and the PAN rushed to recognize themselves as defeated), but in the few local power preserves, which support more solid clientelist machines. Such is the case in the state of Puebla, which experienced one of the most violent days in its history and where the difference in the votes counted was very close; presaging a possible post-electoral conflict.

The historical defeat of the PRIAN (RD)

And yet, fraud in its common form ("system crashes", unforeseen figures and so on) was defeated. Before the

victory of AMLO, the great event is the resounding defeat of the PRI, PAN, PRD, and the peripheral parties. The PRI is going through what we hope will be a terminal crisis (with about 15% of the overall vote and loss of the governorships in important states such as Veracruz, while, although it maintains the governorship, it lost control of the congress and the vast majority of municipalities in the state of Mexico, rendering difficult the medium-term survival of its clientelist and mafia machine). However, the "political culture of the PRI", although suffering a severe setback through an election day full of hope and joy, is still far from being buried by history.

The PAN comes out of the election divided, challenged and with clear political disagreements although it is positioned as the main opposition force on the right to the new government. Although very diminished before the electoral wave of MORENA, it still maintains a sufficient parliamentary force and at least two governorships (notably Jalisco). But

nothing compares with the terrible crisis of the PRD, its pragmatic alliance with the PAN condemning it to be its uncomfortable shadow with an absolute blurring. In the PRD, and its history, development, degeneration and tragic end, MORENA should see its mirror. Winning elections at all costs has its costs, and the PRD paid, without ever reaching the presidency.

The electoral debacle of the so-called PRIAN (RD) expresses the culminating point of the rupture of the previous governing pact, in force since the 1988 fraud, between the PRI and PAN leaders. They bet on a model of identity politics and a false game of transition of functions in government. At some point in Peñalosa's presidency, the pact between the PRI and the PAN was broken, as shown by the previous state elections with promises to imprison the previous administration (Chihuahua, Veracruz, Coahuila), and by the implementation of structural reforms, after the consensus represented by the Pact for Mexico, and the management of the political

costs of the different political crises in the Peña administration.

The democratic victory and the recognition of the majority

The above reasons are sufficient to explain the excessive joy that was experienced in the country on the night of July 1. The accumulation of rage and social grievances, excessive violence and immodest corruption laid the foundations of the majority for MORENA. When the official candidate José Antonio Meade, went to vote, a woman spontaneously shouted “without fraud, Meade, without fraud”; when the former PRI governor of Veracruz, Fidel Herrera, went to the polls, and tried to skip the line of voters; it generated only anger and shouting from those who had waited their turn to vote. Even after several of the attacks (even armed) in polling stations in Puebla, the people around were looking for a way to resume order and continue with the election.

For the first time, Mexico has an electoral process that, despite the fraudulent obstacles and the violence, was also, paradoxically, the only one in which the popular will was heard loud and clear. The fall of the PRIAN and the social fiesta that followed represented for millions a moment of celebration, which presaged justice after the long list of defeats. Very different from the electoral nights of 2006 and 2012, when anger, frustration and disbelief were imposed. On December 1 of this year, when AMLO comes to power (if no unexpected turn occurs, which is very unlikely) the mobilized sectors will be able to see, analyse and think about the challenges that come, instead of facing the anguish of the number of arrests, of wounded, and having to run from tear gas.

The social anger that was expressed in the polls is so great that the campaigns of dirty war, the concessions and turns to the right by Obrador during the campaign, the scandalous alliances that would have

cost victory and credibility, were now trifles for the electorate. But AMLO would make a mistake in thinking that the electoral majority that takes him to the presidency will be unconditional. On the contrary, the discontent with the existing state of things is such that the millions celebrating today will from the beginning not accept a disappointment or retreat from the new government. It is central in the new moment to emphasize the importance of popular empowerment - if the majorities have put the new government in, they have the primary right to decide on its actions and movements. The joy of last night has to remain in the collective memory as proof that when you want, you can and that organization and popular will is capable of anything.

On the other hand, it is important to stop and analyse the reasons for the rapid acceptance of MORENA's triumph. It seems that the traditional oligarchy, faced with overwhelming defeat at the polls, sat on their hands and let AMLO pass without further ado. But to think that the Meades, Anayas and Peñas are in effect “democrats that know how to recognize defeats” would be much more than a simple naivety. Although it is true that the electoral majority was so great that the only way to reverse Obrador's victory would be practically a hyperviolent military coup, and this was seen as not an option for the oligarchy; they preferred instead to take AMLO's word and to believe in the multiple guarantees of continuity in relation to economic policy, property relations and commercial policy that the winning candidate offered throughout the campaign and which he reaffirmed in his victory speech.

The new government

It is important to analyse, with a cool head, the true potentialities and profile of the new government of Obrador. We must not forget that, despite the indignant, anti-neoliberal and popular electoral majority that voted for this government; not a few representatives of the oligarchic

layers are in key positions (Romo, Ebrard, Espino, to name but a few). Which gives an idea of what the policies promoted by the AMLO government will really be.

As throughout the campaign, everything indicates that important issues of the national situation will continue to be ignored. Will a new development model be promoted that will move the country away from its structural dependence on fossil fuels and mining? It seems not. Will the rights and demands of women be respected and will they advance in tune with the new feminist wave in Latin America? More than ever, that depends on struggle.

There is a big question about the fiscal and public spending policy of the new government. As scandalous and ignominious as is the corruption that Obrador wants to banish, its real cost would hardly be enough to capitalize the resources necessary to initiate the social measures that AMLO promises today. The refusal, for now, to reverse the energy reform and merely “review” the contracts awarded, will eventually clash with the promise to stop oil price increases (intimately linked to the new energy framework). What will happen with educational reform? And with the new airport?

At a local level, the majority of new popular election positions conquered by MORENA are the crudest expression of the pragmatic cost of Obrador's victory. Will the cascade of “unpresentables” that today represent MORENA in the immediate regional space enter into contradiction with the will for change expressed in the ballot boxes? In short, will the expectations that AMLO himself has raised around the aims of his government encounter an economic environment that makes their concrete realization difficult? Will MORENA's huge multi-class umbrella, with conflicting ideologies and interests, remain after the taking of power? In the medium term, given the institutional locks that protect structural reforms today, the only way to fulfil many campaign promises would be the convening of a constituent assembly and the construction of a new social pact (given that the one of 1917 was liquidated antidemocratically in the

three decades of classical neoliberalism). This possibility is not close today.

New political spectrum, challenges for a new anti-capitalist left

Whatever the immediate development of events, it is clear that a process of general political readjustment will accelerate and consolidate. Despite the important access the evangelical Christian PES party will have to parliament, it also runs the risk of losing legal registration. The New Alliance and Greens are in an even worse situation. Many political forces and the political spectrum will be reorganized in the coming months.

In this new historical framework and political spectrum, the question is: what will happen to the anti-capitalist left? In the immediate future, it faces two symmetrical dangers: on the one hand it runs the risk that, seeking to accompany the popular experience in MORENA, it sacrifices political, ideological and tactical independence; this was the case for the immense majority of the socialist left when the PRD was founded, and the result was nothing but political suicide. It would be just as terrible if, in the opposite

sense, the quest to maintain political autonomy means that the anti-capitalist left suffers from sectarian atrophy and places itself at the margins of the course of political events in the new framework. A similar situation exists in relation to the social movements. In the immediate, it is important to take advantage of the new moment so that the struggles advance, maintaining their political and social independence. It is urgent that, in order to face the new historical moment, bold initiatives can be launched that allow the construction of an anti-capitalist and anti-patriarchal pole.

In this sense, the experience of the campaign for the registration of Marichuy, spokesperson for the Indigenous Council of Government, as an independent candidate, was a political success within the framework of the entire electoral process that is now ended. It was an unprecedented experience to bring an anti-capitalist political alternative to the national level, and many lessons must be drawn from it. Likewise, the fact that different sectors of the anti-capitalist left did not explicitly call for a critical vote for AMLO is also a sign of the possibility of the construction of a left to the left of MORENA, as long as it does not fall into a vulgar sectarianism. However, it is much more difficult to know how to interact with the new political situation and the spirit of the masses that today

pushes us forward.

The hubbub and political upheaval should not make us forget that today, on July 2, the violence in the country is still unleashed, that the megaprojects are advancing, that women are still being killed, that hunger is still there, that we are still missing 43 students and thousands of other people. On the contrary, we must translate the joy of victory into organization, into more struggle, into more street activity in raising autonomous political projects. The democratic conquest that the PRIAN (RD) debacle represents will have to become a first step, which is concretized inasmuch as the ballot boxes are no longer the only way of political participation; a political reform that democratizes the public life of the country is necessary. We have to put people at the centre, because yesterday was their victory, of millions who seek a transformation that only struggle will achieve. This was not a final victory (or defeat of the right), but the opening of an unprecedented historical moment that will pose new challenges, contradictions and possibilities.

And yet, last night, for the first time, thousands of people gathered in the Zócalo in Mexico City, not for political catharsis, but to defend life and an end to repression. For these reasons, on the night of July 1, people met to smile, sing, dance, hug and meet. Our struggle is for life, yes, but life without joy is nothing.

Six Takeaways From the Turkish Elections

4 July 2018, by Guney I?kara, Alp Kayserilio?lu, & Max Zirngast

The elections last Sunday in Turkey â€” both parliamentary and presidential â€” ended in what appeared to be a resounding triumph for President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an, the increasingly despotic leader. While at times it seemed that the opposition had a serious chance, in the end the

results were clear. Erdo?an won the presidential election in the first round, and the People's Alliance, the electoral pact of Erdo?an's Party for Justice and Development (AKP) and the fascistic National Movement Party (MHP), captured the majority of seats in parliament.

According to preliminary results, Erdo?an won the presidential race with 52.6 percent of the vote, while his main rival, Muharrem ?nce, the candidate for the centrist Republican People's Party (CHP), was able to muster 30.6 percent. In the parliamentary election the People's

Alliance garnered 53.7 percent, while the Nation Alliance (comprised of the CHP, the nationalist Good Party, and the religious-conservative Felicity Party) captured 33.9 percent. The People's Alliance will have 344 out of the 600 seats in parliament, an absolute majority, while the Nation Alliance will have just 189 seats. The Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), an unaligned pro-Kurdish leftist party, won 11.6 percent of the vote and will get 67 seats in parliament.

Those are the raw numbers. But what does it all mean? Here are six takeaways from the elections.

1 The election was illegitimate

All parties and presidential candidates swiftly accepted the results. While the CHP's presidential candidate and spokesperson railed against the early tabulations as wildly inaccurate, within hours they backpedaled completely. Ak?ener, the Good Party candidate, made no speech at all. We can only speculate if there was an agreement behind the scenes or whether everybody simply saw the results as more or less valid.

Regardless, there were numerous irregularities on election day. In the southeastern, Kurdish province of Urfa, for instance, opposition party observers were forcibly removed from voting sites, and people were caught trying to smuggle in thousands of votes. In the same province, four people were killed ten days before the election when an AKP candidate and his bodyguards attacked pro-HDP shopkeepers with arms. Most of the reported irregularities on election day were concentrated in the Kurdish provinces, where there were few international observers and many local observers were kicked out.

Turkey is still under the state of emergency that Erdo?an imposed after a failed coup against him in July 2016. Under the pretext of fighting coup supporters, Erdo?an and his AKP â€” in alliance with the fascist MHP â€” have engaged in a full-fledged war against oppositional voices, imprisoning tens of thousands of politicians and activists, gradually taking over the judiciary, and establishing nearly full control over an

almost totally centralized media. The opposition parties and presidential candidates â€” from those on the right to the leftist HDP and its imprisoned former co-chair and presidential candidate, Selahattin Demirta? â€” received no media coverage in the lead-up to the election. [135]

What is clear â€” and much more important than any individual irregularities â€” is the overall illegitimacy of the election itself. It was held under a state of emergency, involved massive repression of the opposition (particularly the socialist and Kurdish opposition), and witnessed the use of all means of the state apparatuses to secure an electoral triumph for Erdo?an's bloc.

2 The fascist MHP has become a central player

If there is a clear winner, it is the Sunni-Turkish nationalist bloc consisting of the AKP, the MHP, and the Good Party. Although the latter positions itself as an oppositional force in the current climate, it does not significantly differ from the other two in terms of its political project and vision. The share of the vote of this bloc amounts to about 64 percent. Their success has to be understood in the context of a permanent hyper-nationalistic mobilization in the public sphere, as well as the narrative of the war against terrorism in general and the war waged against the Kurds in particular.

It is worth looking at the numbers for the AKP and the MHP in some detail. While Erdo?an appears to be the winner of Sunday's election, and is certainly being portrayed as such, it is not so straightforward. [136] Erdo?an himself knows that his party took some hard hits, and they don't seem especially happy about the results. The AKP won around two million votes fewer than in the November 2015 elections â€” a 7 percentage point drop. It failed to capture the 301 seats needed to secure a parliamentary majority. It is only with the MHP's help that Erdo?an has been able to take a majority.

This means, in turn, that the MHP's hand has been strengthened. The party had a surprisingly strong

showing in the elections. Despite splitting in half and the other faction (the Good Party) earning over 10 percent of the vote, the MHP was able to retain its share, around 11 percent. And they did it while mounting basically no public campaign ahead of the election â€” MHP leader Devlet Bah?eli held a total of two or three rallies, compared to ?nce's 107. The MHP was able to gain significant increases in the vote, mostly in the Kurdish-dominated regions, even while it lost votes in many of their relative strongholds (such as southern cities like Osmaniye, Adana, and Mersin). If there was major fraud, it favored the MHP in the Kurdish regions.

The MHP is well aware of its position. Bah?eli declared after the election that his party has become “a key party in parliament.” [137] The MHP will be able to impose itself in a more confident and resolute way, especially with respect to the Kurdish question. It is very likely that the AKP-MHP alliance will pursue an even more openly fascist course in the coming months.

3 The CHP is cracking

The CHP and its presidential candidate, Muharrem ?nce, were fairly confident that they would at least push the election to a second round. ?nce ran a spirited campaign that promised restoration and mobilized millions of demoralized people.

The results, however, suggest the birth of a new crisis within the party. The CHP was 3 percentage points off from its November 2015 election results â€” a very disappointing finish for its supporters. ?nce â€” who ran 8 percentage points ahead of his party and became the first CHP presidential candidate since 1977 to receive over 30 percent of the vote â€” implied earlier this week that he will either push to take over the party, or establish a new formation and immediately start preparing for future elections. [138] Incumbent party leader Kemal K?l?çdarolu responded not by congratulating Erdo?an, which ?nce had done, but by talking aggressively about careerism within the party. [139] (The fact that K?l?çdarolu has been the party

leader in nine elections, which all ended disappointingly for the CHP, yet he still refuses to resign, makes the grumbling about people clinging to their posts and careerism rather strange.)

Erdoğan, on the other hand, has announced that he will tour the country, holding meetings in all eighty-one provinces to thank people for supporting him. [140] Needless to say, this is the action of a party leader. A crisis – one that could even spark a party split – seems imminent.

4 The HDP defied the odds

Another winner in the elections was the HDP. Despite the repression, despite the exiling and imprisonment of so many political cadres (again, including its own presidential candidate), despite the violence and threats on election day (particularly in the Kurdish provinces), the HDP once again consolidated itself and entered parliament, passing the (highly undemocratic) 10 percent threshold. This is another clear indication that a strong pro-Kurdish party has become an undeniable reality in Turkish politics.

In addition, despite some tendencies of liberalization, the HDP has sought to incorporate other socialist organizations and representatives of popular forces. Outright revolutionary socialists like Erkan Baş from the Workers' Party of Turkey, (TİP), Oya Ersoy from Halkevleri (People's Houses), Musa Piroğlu from the Revolutionary Party (DP), and Murat Açıpınar from the Socialist Party of the Oppressed (ESP) will all be in parliament, constantly thundering against dictatorship and capital. The HDP is the only party in parliament, and thus the only major party in

Turkish politics, that stands firmly against the patriarchal Turkish-Sunni (i.e. nationalist and Islamist) alliance.

It remains to be seen what will happen with the CHP, but the HDP needs to take the initiative and help strengthen popular movements. The Kurdish liberation movement in particular is one of the most important axes of resistance to the status quo.

5 The view from below isn't all bad

Turkey's despotic state has its roots in the Ottoman Empire and the formation of the Turkish capitalist class. While this relation of forces has undergone major transformations and is now temporarily stabilized around the AKP and the MHP, the popular dynamics that stand against the state and have little or no expectations from the state have been a constant factor in recent Turkish politics, particularly since the Gezi Uprising in 2013.

The forces unleashed by Gezi and Rojava (the autonomous Kurdish region in Northern Syria) still scare the AKP and Erdoğan more than inner-state rivalries or coup attempts. Women, Alevites, Kurds, workers, and many more have no hopes for this regime, and many are ready to break with the state as such.

For popular movements, the election results, though somewhat demoralizing, are not cause for complete disappointment. While most would have loved to see Erdoğan finally go, the social relations of power remain largely intact – admittedly, with some power gained for Erdoğan and the AKP/MHP bloc – and the positive election campaign, based on solidarity across the popular camps, should provide some hope for the future.

6 Erdoğan hasn't won just yet

Sunday's elections indicate that despite everything, the social and political system in Turkey is still at a relative impasse. The balance of power has moved slightly to the Erdoğan-AKP/MHP bloc, with the elections strengthening the already dictatorial presidential system. Yet it was no decisive victory. A large chunk of the country is still against the dominant bloc, as they have been since 2013.

On the other hand, the rise of Erdoğan (of the CHP) and Akkener's Good Party – who just declared that they are not "playing children's games" and accept the HDP as the "representative of the Kurdish political movement" – clearly suggests that the differing views within the state and elite circles are manifesting themselves as fractions with political representation. [141] Even if the Erdoğan-AKP/MHP bloc remains dominant, it's not as if Erdoğan controls everything or everybody is bowing to him. We should expect a power struggle within the Erdoğan-AKP/MHP bloc since the MHP fared much better than anybody expected (that is, if there was no agreement on systematic fraud in favor of the MHP). That power struggle would threaten the AKP's strength if it hit amid a crisis. And there is indeed an economic crisis waiting at the door. [142]

The depth and management of this crisis, the stance of the opposition, and, crucially, mass activity on the streets, will determine whether Erdoğan will be able to institutionalize his authoritarian rule – or whether cracks will continue to form.

Jacobin

Argentina: Who will pay for the crisis, them or us?

3 July 2018, by **Claudio Katz**

In March 2018, Wall Street announced that it would no longer accept the bonds. The government met this refusal with a misleading announcement of a better local financing, but floating capital immediately grasped the meaning of this drying up. A flight of capital began, and the irrepressible rise of the dollar commenced. Financing was cut because of the creditors' fears of the future insolvency of the Argentine debtor – the level of risk for the country has increased and specialist press have described some dramatic scenarios.

A consequence of the model

The fragility of the external sector is the most critical point of the current situation. The banks have withdrawn credits, noting the future absence of the dollars necessary to support indebtedness. They observe the extent of the external deficit, more than 30 billion dollars (5% of gross domestic product, GDP) in 2017.

The central hole is located in the sphere of trade. The deficit of 8 billion dollars (in 2017) was a historic record. It was engendered by the free trade fantasies of the government which opened the market to all kinds of imports. Whereas elsewhere in the world there are tough negotiations over customs tariffs, Argentine has become an entrepôt for all kinds of surpluses. Worst, exports have been reined in because of the rise in exchange rates generated by speculative capital.

The disequilibrium on the financial level is also dramatic. The rise of profits has been as sustained as the flight of capital. This drain is coherent with the elimination of all regulation of financial activity. The controls of the banking circuit were suppressed at the same speed as the cancellation of the obligation to change export dollars into pesos. It is on this same lack of protection that the financial

cycle of the funds benefitting from the very high profitability of Argentinian bonds rests. The dizzying insurance rates which underpin this trading destroy any possibility of productive investment.

The fiscal black hole is equally impressive. It has reached the percentage of GDP (6 -7 %) which has traditionally precipitated big economic earthquakes. The government stresses the scope of this deficit and says it has to maintain it to finance gradualism and avoid greater sacrifices for the population. But all the imbalances derive from the model adopted and not from the rhythm of its implementation. If it has accelerated the latter, the disaster would have been infinitely worse.

When official spokespersons fulminate against “spending more than we earn” all the evils are located in the first component. They forget that income has been seriously affected by the reduction of taxes for exporters. Nor do they register that laundering and tax evasion has not been reduced. Argentina ranks fifth in the world on this front and the official mode of protecting wealth through “off-shore” enterprise illustrates who are the promoters of tax fraud. The government also forgets to acknowledge that payment of interest deteriorates the public accounts. During the first quarter of this year, these payments increased by 107% in relation to 2017.

The neoliberal model generates problems for which the government cannot compensate. The disaster underway was not unleashed by the new tax scale affecting profits on securities, but by the appalled reaction of the central bank. In a few days, it buried several manuals of monetary policy. It resorted to all the known instruments to brake a run and none was effective.

The international crisis has not until now been determinant for the Argentine earthquake. Global financial liquidity persists and there has been

no repetition of the “tequila effect” on Latin American economies. Certainly, the increase in US interest rates altered all world investment, but for the moment this has had limited effects.

If Argentina experiences this cooling by going down with pneumonia, it is because of the panic sparked by the level of its indebtedness. In the last two years the country has become the world leader in bond issue and it is being punished for this lack of control. But the population is not responsible for this. The guilty parties are Macri and his cabinet, who have enriched the capitalist class while reproaching all “Argentiniens” for a fraud committed by this privileged minority.

Return to the IMF

The figures for May 2018 indicate the gravity of the crisis: a devaluation of 20%, interest rates at 40%, a loss of 8 billion dollars from the reserves. The fear of a dramatic outcome is growing, with some symptoms of transfer of this tension to the banks. The government shows contempt for the population in issuing messages of tranquillity. It wants to create the illusion of a simple correction in the fluctuation of exchange rates without any consequence.

However, it repeats that the level of indebtedness is “low in relation to GDP” as if these generic percentages (and not the effective capacity of debtors to pay) determined the attitude of creditors. While the official discourse minimises the crisis, abroad the financiers are urged to “get out of Argentina” (*Forbes*). The government's tranquillity is aimed at avoiding the collective wake-up call faced with this grave situation.

The decision to resort to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for help confirms the dramatic aspect of the conjuncture. A desperate measure which has surprised the leaders of the IMF themselves. It illustrates the panic of a government seeking at any

price to shield against a run. The decision was so improvised that it was announced without any programme or change of minister. The officials made their pilgrimage to Washington without knowing the conditions of the loans that they would beg for. In the context of low international interest rates, and a certain recovery from the crisis of 2008, very few countries resort to the services of the IMF. Those who choose this option have no other refuge.

It is totally ridiculous to imagine the existence of "another IMF". This institution is still managed by experts in demolishing popular conquests. The countries subject to its tyranny live in the worst of worlds, as is shown by the case of Greece which has not been able to shake off the IMF audit. The Greeks have already suffered four bank rescues and three sharp recessions which have cut national income by 25%. The unemployment rate is around the same percentage, the public debt has climbed to 180% of GDP and pensions have been reduced 14 times.

Argentina faces the same perspectives. The IMF will be very harsh with our country. Of the three variants of credits of which it disposes, the IMF only offers the most unpalatable version. It has ruled out the flexible line accorded to Colombia and Mexico and the modality of precaution (used by Macedonia and Morocco). Argentina will only be granted a known "stand by" for an amount as yet unknown. The 30 billion dollars requested by the government exceeds all the amounts allocated to the 13 countries who have stabilisation plans. The final sum will arrive also by eyedropper to avoid its rapid conversion into currencies fleeing abroad. Each portion of this credit used will be rigorously controlled by the IMF envoys. This revision symbolises the brutal return to the 1990s. The IMF experts will return every quarter to note their dissatisfaction and demand greater adjustments.

There is no mystery in the immediate demands of this delegation. In December 2017, these experts drew up a detailed ultimatum to reduce social expenditure, with greater

flexibility of work, a reform of the benefits system and layoffs in the public sector. The gradual privatisation of the social security system (known under the acronym of ANSES) and a drastic cut in provincial budgets appeared at the head of this agenda. In the current negotiations, they have added a new laundering of capital and above all a mega-devaluation with a recession allowing a real improvement in the exchange rate.

The rhythm and application of this package will depend on the intensity of the crisis. But whatever the scenario, the pact signed with the IMF will bring the Argentine economy to the precipice. We can already see the vicious circle of adjustments which contract productive activity, reduce the collection of taxes, boost the fiscal deficit and leads to new adjustments. The anticipations are of a new annual inflation peak of 30 %. If interest rates do not fall rapidly, recession will be inevitable. The government has cut 30 billion pesos in public works, but the IMF will demand a total paralysis. In the coming month, nobody will remember the statistical fiction of a reduced poverty broadcast by the government. It is enough to observe the shocking growth of begging in the streets to see what kind of social panorama faces the country.

What reaction?

The management of the bomb dropped by the government will depend on memory and capacity for popular reaction. The total rejection of the agreement with IMF is shown by polls prior to the negotiations showing that among the 75% of those questioned who reject this agreement could be found the great majority of those who had voted for Cambiemos, the party of Mauricio Macri.

The return to the IMF has enormous emotional meaning. It recreates everything that happened in the 2001 banking crisis, which is why many analogies are being drawn with the approach of Argentina's then president, De la R  a. This must be transformed into active rejection, through mobilisation and alternative proposals. The point of departure

consists in winning the street to generate an immediate reversal of the current course. The climate of tacit acceptance of deregulation - promoted by the mass media - dismantles the economy. To avoid aggravation of the crisis, it is necessary to reintroduce all the regulations eliminated by the government. These are basic emergency measures.

Exchange control is urgent as is stopping the free entry and exit of capital. The deposits of small savers should be protected, whereas the big banks and holders of devalued securities should take on the losses for this. It is necessary to eradicate all the myths of adversity, of an "exchange rate trap". Dollars are not a freely available private good. Without control over their hoarding and circulation, there is no way to defeat runs.

Instead of resorting to the IMF we need an investigation of the debt contracted in recent years and judgement of those responsible for this adventure. Finance minister Caputo, treasury minister Dujovne and central bank president Sturzenegger should be brought before the courts. While the real state of the public accounts is revised, it is necessary to halt the haemorrhage of foreign currency imposed by the payment of interest. The current crisis began with submission to the vulture funds and it cannot be resolved without settling accounts with the plunderers of the national treasury. State management of the financial sector is a condition for getting out of the current delicate situation.

Only this would allow making the cost of the crisis fall on those responsible for it and not on the popular majority. This demands a frontal battle of ideas with all the right-wing economists who dominate the television. They praise the agreement with the IMF as a new justification of the mega-adjustment and present it as necessary so as to "respect our global commitments". But the feasibility of this has reduced drastically. The political scenario has changed, and the election results are far from the current urgency. Macri will try to balance the carrot and the stick and is proposing to veto the tariff

restriction law while seeking to copy the Brazilian model of para-institutional government.

The intensity of the mobilisation will define who wins. The reaction is for the moment limited, and we await the reappearance of the huge forces who took to the streets in December 2017.

This potential for struggle could be recovered in the battles against tariff increases and the ceiling placed by the Macri government on pay increase through collective bargaining. But rejection of the IMF now occupies first place in all the demands.

It is urgent to turn back the huge

aggression against popular conquests of recent years. The much-announced mega-adjustment is finally approaching. Faced with the artillery prepared by the government, the IMF and the capitalists, we need to build popular defences at top speed. As has already happened before, once again it is them or us.

Election Manifesto 2018 - An Alternative is Possible!

2 July 2018, by **Awami Workers' Party**

Youth forms the bulk of Pakistan's population, and the future of the country depends upon this generation of young people entering the political arena. Only by building a progressive politics can we bring prosperity and peace to the approximately 150 million young people, women, minorities, working classes and different nations and ethnicities residing in Pakistan, along with basic rights such as housing, health, education, and water.

Ever since we created the AWP in 2012, we have been striving to introduce progressive politics and ideas to the young generation and to support the struggles exploited and oppressed communities across the country, even while reactionary forces and state institutions lurch from one crisis to the next. The AWP has supported movements against patriarchy, class power, forced and bonded labour, neoliberal privatisation, for the regularisation of kachi abadis in urban areas, and agricultural reforms.

We believe that our role in these elections is the promotion of these movements and their demands. We will not only expose the old, establishment-dominated system, but present solid and practical alternatives in its stead. Many political parties have been tried and tested by the people of Pakistan. The same faces move from one party to another,

misleading people through hollow slogans while tightening their grip on power. But this time, a new leadership based on youth, women and the working classes is emerging under the banner of AWP, with a manifesto demonstrating our clear commitment to social transformation.

A summary of our main agenda points are below, however for the full manifesto read the original Urdu manifesto [1].

Human Equality

In spite of many changes in society – urbanisation, the spread of technology, a growing middle class – the vast majority of Pakistan's people, whether in urban or rural areas, are propertyless. In fact, the increasing control of international capital over the economy is leading to even greater concentration of wealth. We will impose limits on profits extracted by capital, introduce fundamental changes in the taxation system, and use resources, including land, minerals, forests and so on, for the welfare of the working classes. We will wipe away the remains of the feudal system and redistribute land occupied by the civilian and military bureaucracy through agricultural reforms.

Housing as a Fundamental Right

In addition to agricultural reforms and

the distribution of land, the Awami Workers Party will also take steps to provide housing to all working class households in both cities and rural areas.

â€¢ Recognising the constitutional right to shelter, housing schemes will be established in all cities and town on a large scale in which low-income earning and homeless citizens will be given a plot of land and interest-free loans to build a home. 5% of the national budget will be allocated towards housing.

â€¢ All residents of katchi abadi informal settlement will be given land ownership rights and basic municipal services will be provided to them.

â€¢ Legislation will be made to regulate the use of land in cities, with the aim of ending the non-productive use of land, especially the uncontrolled speculative trading of land in the form of "real estate".

â€¢ At least 25% of the area in all new housing schemes will be allocated for low-income earning citizens.

Gender Justice

Pakistan is one of the most patriarchal societies in the world. Women and girls are deprived of fundamental economic, political and cultural freedoms. Even though the number of women in the labour force is increasing at a rapid pace, women are

behind men in the attainment of education, health and economic opportunities. And due to patriarchal traditions and discriminatory laws, women are regularly at the receiving end of brutal violence and oppression. We will strive to eliminate all forms of gender discrimination over time, and in the immediate instance legislate for equal educational and economic opportunities for women and girls, including equal pay and better working conditions. We will also create awareness to reduce instances of sexual harassment and abuse in homes, educational institutions and workplaces, and set into place a procedures for restorative justice.

Religious Harmony

The last 4 decades in Pakistan have seen the rise of extremist ideologies and sectarian violence, making the lives of religious minorities and those desiring religious tolerance extremely insecure. On one hand are discriminatory policies enacted by Zia ul Haq, and on the other hand hate-mongering in media and religious circles that target the innocent and oppressed through mass intimidation. Awami Workers Party believes that laws, discriminatory policies and organizations that promote extremism have no place in Pakistan. The Party will redress extremism by changing the curriculum and adoption of strict media guidelines to promote religious freedoms around the principles of peaceful coexistence and tolerance. The party will struggle for the elimination of terrorism and war in every shape and form, and the propagation of peace not only in Pakistan but the entire region.

Internationalism

From the very inception of the state, Pakistan's rulers have formulated foreign policies on the direction of imperialist powers rather than on the basis of the interests of the country's people. Our relations with neighbouring countries have always been frayed, and as a result Pakistan and other countries have spent immense amounts of wealth on

weapons of war instead of the development and betterment of the population. The Awami Workers Party believes that amicable relations with our neighbours is not only necessary for peace and prosperity but will also strengthen democracy. To support pro-freedom movements across the world the Party will develop a non-partisan foreign policy.

Ecological Sustainability

In Pakistan, just as the world over, the environment has suffered immensely because of unrestrained capitalistic practices. Temperatures have been rising throughout the world, while air and water pollution have reached alarming levels. If this situation is not addressed the very existence of future generations will be at risk. The Party vows to focus on renewable and sustainable forms of energy such as solar and wind power, and will make a clean environment one of our foremost policy priorities.

A People's Government

Pakistan's republic has to date failed to be truly democratic, due to the centralised system of government that has remained in place throughout our history. Local governments have historically been created military dictators to serve their own ends. The Awami Workers party will empower elected bodies at the local level in the truest sense so as to strengthen the federation at large. At the same time we will take all the necessary steps to make non-elected thana, kacheri and patwari systems truly subservient to elected representatives of the people.

A Unified Education System for All

An educated society is a strong society. But in Pakistan education has always been paid scant attention, while the curriculum and pedagogical approach has stunted critical faculties rather than promote them. The Awami Workers Party vows to allocate 10 percent of the country's GDP to education. We will ensure the provision of free education to all and will design a curriculum that will

promote critical thinking and peace and harmony.

Political Freedom

The Constitution of Pakistan guarantees the protections of the fundamental political and democratic rights of its citizens. In reality, however, these have never been implemented and today the basic freedoms of our citizens remain under threat. The Awami Workers Party will ensure that all political freedoms are respected. In addition we will replace neo-colonial laws and hold the rich and powerful accountable the way they should be in a truly democratic society.

A Multi-National Society

Before the creation of Pakistan many ethnic-nations called this land their home, yet these histories have till this day has not been officially acknowledged. We believe that this is the reason why our country remains in the throes of ethnic conflict. The Awami Workers Party acknowledges the historical, cultural and geographical existence of all ethnic-nations, and guarantees equality for their languages and traditions. The Party envisions Pakistan as a multi-national state and will enshrine this fact through an amendment to the constitution.

Dignified Work

In homes, factories and offices all over the country, Pakistan's working people are subject to exploitation that no civilized society should tolerate. Privatization has eroded social security benefits and job security, while existing labour laws go practically unimplemented. Awami Workers Party will set the minimum pay for every worker to Rs 30,000 which will be continuously adjusted with inflation. In addition, bonded labour and child labour will be eliminated, and employees in the informal sector – such as women domestic workers – will be brought under the purview of the labour laws and receive social security benefits.

Lessons from the Portuguese non-model

1 July 2018, by **Adriano Campos, Jorge Costa , Maria Manuel Rola**

1. A difficult decision in October-November 2015

After four years of austerity and social destruction, under the right-wing government and the troika, the Portuguese October 2015 elections imposed a setback to the government parties (the coalition of PSD and CDS, the two bourgeois parties, lost almost one million votes and got 38%) and a modest recovery for the Socialist Party (thereafter PS, 32%). As the two left parties, the Left Bloc (10,2%) and the Communist Party (PCP 8,6%), got almost one in five votes, the parliament was faced with two alternatives: a minority government of the right wing with no allies, except if the PS chose to help it; or a minority government of the PS with a possible alliance with the two left parties - and both of them were required. To make a long story short, the then President of the Republic, Cavaco Silva, empowered the previous Prime Minister, Passos Coelho, to form a new right-wing government, which was defeated in Parliament and, instead, a new PS government (prime minister António Costa) with a formal pact with the Bloc and the PCP replaced it. So, for the first time ever, the PS was forced to establish an alliance with the left, and the left accepted this alliance, also for the first time. (You can find the text of the agreement in the final Annex).

This alliance was preceded by a public call in a TV debate during the electoral campaign by the spokeswoman of the Left Bloc, Catarina Martins, challenging Antonio Costa, the leader of the PS, to drop three essential points of his program

(freezing pensions, creating a new form of easy firing, and reducing firms' contribution to social security). Her clear conditions for a dialogue on the future government became a decisive question in the national debate. This was not an electoral trick but a clear answer to the needs of the people and we believe this is how a left party should act to lead a political change.

After the election, the PS was forced to accept these conditions and some more (see the Annex for the text), in order to obtain a majority in parliament for its government. Both the Left Bloc and the PCP established a written agreement for that purpose, neither of them being part of the cabinet.

2. The results of the agreement of the left with the PS government

The main achievements of this political process may be briefly summarized in two chapters: the democratization measures and the economic and social impacts of the agreement. Then we present and discuss the conflicts between the left parties and the government, and how the Left Bloc is presenting its alternative.

A. Step forward in civil liberties

With the new composition of parliament after the elections, different laws were passed in order to abolish fees for abortion (the legalization of abortion was approved through a referendum but the previous right-wing majority imposed some fees in order to deter its use), to

broaden the rights of gay couples including adoption, to generalize medically assisted procreation to single women and lesbians, to rule on the conditions for surrogacy, to establish full gender parity in political representation, and the medical use of cannabis. In some cases, the Left Bloc and the PS formed a majority for such laws since the PCP voted with the right-wing parties against lesbian rights, gender parity, surrogacy, and cannabis. More recently, both the Left Bloc and the PS proposed laws in order to legalize euthanasia. In this case, these initiatives were defeated by only 5 votes, the PCP again voting with the conservative parties.

The relevance of this agenda is obvious since it pursues a process of democratization and effectively challenges different forms of oppression. In different countries, the social movements will be able to value these achievements.

B. Social and economic effects

The following measures of the agreement that were or are being applied throughout this period, among others:

- The privatizations or concessions established by the right-wing government in public transportation (national airline and public transportation of the two largest cities) were reversed;
- New privatizations were explicitly forbidden;
- The minimum wage is raised by 20% until the 1st January 2019;
- Four public holidays were reestablished after being cut during the previous government;
- The pensions were unfrozen (at the rate of inflation) and the smaller ones were augmented every year by 3 to 4%;
- The program for moving of public servants against their will was

finished;

- The collective bargaining process of public servants was reestablished;
- The tax on consumption in restaurants decreased from 23 to 13%;
- All children will have a nursery by 2019;
- Books are given to all students until they are 17 years old, in successive steps;
- The extraordinary tax imposed on wages and pensions during the troika period was abolished;
- The taxes on labor income were reduced and the tax on large firms increased;
- A new tax on luxury real estate was created;
- Foreclosures are suspended for old or disabled people living in the same place for 15 years, and the rent law is being revised to protect the tenants;
- New rules were applied for self-employed that provide services to different firms assuring them social security protection.

The global effect of these measures in 2016 and 2017, in a favorable context with lower oil prices and better export prospects given the mild recovery in Europe, was a combination of small growth of GDP (plus 4,3% in real terms, after falling by 7,9% during the recession and austerity period), strong creation of employment (the reduction of official figures of unemployment from 17,5% in 2013 to 7,4% currently) and a reduction of the public deficit (from -3,1% in 2015 to 0,9% in 2017 and to a prospective virtually zero in 2018), in this case thanks to the effects of the recovery and also to the freeze of public investment. In any case, aggregate demand expanded as the joint result of more confidence and more pensions and wages. Fighting impoverishment had a real social impact. It is a fact that no other European country has pursued this sort of policies.

Although major challenges are still unmet, such as reducing external and public debt, the fact that the Left Bloc was able not only to study and to present concrete alternatives on such topics but also to force a public discussion on them shows the way forward: indeed, a report presenting a concrete proposal of mutualization of 52 billion euros was signed by the Left

Bloc and the PS, with the participation of members of the government, stating that the current European Union budgetary rules are “unfair and unsustainable”. Yet the government does not intend to act on it and to present any sort of alternative to the European authorities. This clarification of the government in fact opposing a strategy of debt restructuring but being forced to note the unsustainability of those budgetary rules strengthens the fight against the debt.

Other conflicts between the left parties and the government emerged as the budgets were being applied. With no exception, the Left Bloc put forward its views, knowing that building a political relationship of forces requires detailed and convincing alternatives. Some examples of those public conflicts are presented using front pages from the major daily papers in Portugal, below. The first refers to the critique of the daily choices by the finance minister, the most powerful person in the government. As you can see, Catarina discusses in different moments detailed alternatives on banks, on the euro and its damaging effect, on the status of the scientific researchers and on the management of public services expenses.

Alternatives to austerity



Catarina challenges austerity and the action of the Finance Minister. “Budgetary retentions cannot be used in order to meet Brussels and fail with the government partners”; “Austerity is not over. The conditions for that have not been met yet.”

Look now at the second example. Mariana Mortágua, an MP and spokesperson for the Left Bloc for finance and banking, challenges the priorities and the low level of public spending, as further incentives are required for the creation of jobs. That’s what she is arguing in the newspaper.

Budget at the center stage of the debate



Mariana Mortágua, MP, criticizes how the government is managing the expenses and investment: “A government managed by the Finance Minister is an error”.

Left politics is not a gala dinner, so alternatives must be created and presented, they must attract, convince and mobilize the working people. If we look at some other conflicts, the differences between the Bloco and the PS and its government become even more obvious.

3. Conflicts on finance and banking, and labor laws

The two most important areas which were not covered by the written agreement are the regulation and management of the financial system and the labor laws. In some cases, questions that were not determined by the agreement were included in later negotiations and a consensus was eventually established (that was the case of the new tax on luxury property or of many instances of other budget rules). But that was not possible, given divergent strategies, in major cases in finance and labor regulation.

As a consequence, the left parties opposed the sale of Banif, a small regional bank, to Santander, and that of Novo Banco, which used to be the first largest private commercial bank, to Lone Star, a US real estate firm. In other cases, the left opposed special benefits to the banking industry. These conflicts proved why the left parties were right not to consider the participation in the cabinet, since there is a huge divergence between a center government, such as that of the PS, and the left on finance and other questions.

The case of the divergence between the government and the left on the

labor laws is even more consequential, since a social dispute is going on (the photo below refers to a large trade union demonstration this June against the government proposed law).



9th June 2018, trade union demonstration with tens of thousands against the labor laws proposed by the government. The leaders of the PCP and Left Bloc were welcome at that demonstration.

The divergence on the labor laws is important. For two years, the Left Bloc discussed with members of the government a package of measures to correct precarious labor contracts and to promote jobs with full rights. A part of those measures was approved after long discussions: it changed the way the precarious independent workers pay their dues to the social security, and how much the firms contracting their services should contribute so that they have a better pension in the future. It was a major victory, not only for the left parties, but also to the social movement built by precarious young workers, which has been the most militant for the last decade.

Again and again, the social contract came to the front line of the national debate. In one occasion, early 2017, the PS government proposed a reduction of the payment by the firms to the social security, the bosses applauded. It was the first case of a direct violation of the written agreement with the Left Bloc. The party reacted and rejected the proposal, since it would damage the receipts of the public pension system, fought it and finally defeated it (this is witnessed by the report by Expresso, the largest weekly paper in the country, as printed below).

Left Bloc defeats an agreement between the govt and firms



The Left Bloc rejects a proposal by the government for a reduction of the firms' payments for social security and imposes its defeat. The government was defeated.

The most important victory for the workers' movement and for the Left Bloc was forcing the government to accept inclusion of the precarious workers in public services (schools, hospitals, etc.) as permanent public servants. This possibility is extended to more than 30 thousand which applied for this process.

Precarios Inflexíveis, the most important social movement of precarious workers, of which left militants are a significant part, promoted both a new law, which was approved by parliament, and the organization of the workers themselves, in order to fight against the resistance from the intermediate levels of bureaucracy in public services, such as universities and hospitals, and even by the government as such. The process is still going on. This is a strategic movement for the Left Bloc, both as a militant force for self-organization and as a political actor able to impose the new rule.

Defending precarious workers



Catarina Martins presents alternatives for the permanent contract for precarious workers.

After being defeated on the social security payments by firms and accepting the implementation of important changes in favor of the precarious workers, the government proposed in March and April 2018 new changes in the labor laws. Some were good for workers, such as reducing the number of years (3 to 2) of successive term contracts, or limiting the number of contracts established as temporary work (very short term contracts). But some represent the worst-case scenario: augmenting the trial period to 180 days a year (no rights, no compensation if fired) or establishing the possibility of oral contracts up to 35 days (mostly for touristic services but now extended to the whole economy). The trade unions and the left parties are mobilizing against these proposals.

Our final example of a conflict with the government is the energy issue.

The Left Bloc, following its written agreement with the PS government, was able to deliver very quickly an important change to poor families: the access to the social tariff on energy, substantially lowering its price, was broadened from some 50 to 700 thousand families (one in eight families), simplifying the procedure to verify the income tax declarations and avoiding any bureaucratic obstacle. But the big conflict on the energy question would occur by the end of 2017, when the parliament approved a new tax on the energy rents, worthing some hundreds of million euros, after a negotiation between the Left Bloc and the ministries of finance and economy. Yet, the government came under pressure by the Chinese government (public Chinese capital owns, through privatization in 2012, the largest national energy firms) and imposed, with the help of the right-wing parties, a new parliamentary vote reversing the previous decision. This major political tempest proved how difficult it is to challenge international capitalist interests, how vulnerable the PS is to their power, and also how the Left Bloc should pursue its fight for the benefit of the people.

The case of the tax on energy rents



Two daily papers describing how the government accepted, voted in parliament and then rejected a new tax on energy rents, negotiated with the Left Bloc, and commenting on the crisis thus generated.

4. Social action not just for representation, but for presentation

You know by now what we are living through: there is fight everywhere and every day. It is a clear confrontation

for social and economic alternatives. In this framework, the leaders of the right-wing parties and the big bosses accuse the government of being a “hostage” of the left and, although they are wrong on effective power, this is their perception of the strength of the movement led by the left. Simultaneously, the lessons of these agreements are a major topic of division inside the PS itself.

The construction of social action and political protagonism and alternative is therefore a defining role for the left. We conclude in that sense with three contemporary examples. The first one is the teachers’ strikes and protests for wages, leading to a recent large demonstration. Whoever argued that the agreement between the left parties and the PS prevented the social movement or imposed restricted forms of protest, is wrong. Precisely the opposite: as many workers know that the government is more vulnerable to social pressure and that the left parties are their allies, more mobilization is indeed possible. The fact is there, teachers are demonstrating and preparing a long period of fight with strikes for September and October if necessary.

Teacher’s demonstration



Teacher’s demonstration, 19th May 2018. Fifty thousand teachers marched in Lisbon.

Our second example is the organization of different collectives and organizations against oil prospection and, in general, for a radical change in climate change policies. They are particularly strong at the local level, and converge in some initiatives, such as the Portuguese-Spanish demonstrations against the Almaraz nuclear facility or the Retortillo Uranium Mine, with a recent victory against the last one since there was a decision by the Spanish parliament to alt that crime against the environment. Mobilizations against the opening of other mines, the pollution of rivers by major paper producers or intensive agriculture companies and the defense of animal welfare against

agrobusiness firms, for example through internationally articulated demonstrations against live cattle transport, gained momentum in the last couple of years.

Against nuclear power



The Left Bloc in the Iberian demonstration in Almaraz against a nuclear facility and a demonstration in Lisbon against oil prospecting

Finally, a third social movement that proved to be resourceful and growing is the feminist movement, in particular rejecting insulting Portuguese court decisions underplaying domestic violence and feminicide, criticizing street harassment and denouncing rape culture. These movements grow as they develop a feminist working class agenda articulating gender inequality with the rights of productive and reproductive work, as well as the fight against inequality as a result of the capitalist patriarchal society. The feminist movement has delivered some local protests, but also large national demonstrations taking place simultaneously on various cities, like marches against Trump and misogyny and demonstrations the 8th of March. These movements are now preparing the 8th March 2019 Women’s strike.

8th March demonstration



Demonstrations were called in different cities the 8th March and the preparation of the 2019 Women Strike is under way.

The same could be said of other movements, such as of tenants against expulsion from their homes and against gentrification of the cities or the informal caretakers associations that now arise. In all this, the Left Bloc is part of the movements. They all represent the social struggle as it is: moving, sometimes slowly, sometimes effervescent, joining forces,

contradictory and motivating. Nonetheless, bigger and more organized than it was when there were no alternatives. Representing this strength as “hostages” to the PS is not only a mischaracterization, it is sheer insult.

We insist that we do not present the Left Bloc or the Portuguese experience as a model. When mass politics is at stake, there are no models: only a well-rooted capacity of learning and fighting along its own people prepares a party for its strategic choices. Furthermore, we are aware the Left Bloc has still immense progress to make. It must change and be more open to represent the social left. It must help creating new expressions of the workers and the popular movement. It must fight the tendencies to adaptation to institutions and routine. It must organize the education of rank and file members and their involvement in social organizations. It must fight sectarian views inside and outside the party. Still, the Left Bloc is the most important experience and transformation of the Portuguese left for the four decades of democracy.

5. An agenda for social justice

During this short period of the PS government, these social movements inspired political debate and generated new ideas. They also influenced the political framework. One of the consequences is the debate inside the PS between two wings: one is pushing for the continuation of social policies and the alliance with the left, while the other pushes for a neoliberal and austerity Blairite style of party and political program.

The very contradiction inside the PS proves that there is a political implication for the agreement established with the Bloc and PCP. Feeling threatened by many socialist voters who favor the alliance with the left – some of them to the point of considering it an advantage to have their own party constrained by the left parties – some members of the leadership of the PS decided to challenge the pact with the left at the

recent congress of the PS (June 2018). Some of them actually invoked the example of the neoliberal Third Way, while others stated that the PS should not abandon the pacts with the left. This is indeed a relevant debate on ideas, but we prefer to think of it in terms of political action since it is the consequence of the initiative of the left toppling the right-wing government. The fact that to be or not to be allied to the left becomes a major dividing topic for the PS congress is proof of some success for the left parties. The neoliberals in the PS and the European Union mongers fear the influence of the left and they are right on that - better than anyone, they know that the left constitutes a political alternative with popular support.

As far as the Left Bloc goes, it signed an agreement with the PS in 2015. This imposed a new framework to its activity but did not change the party's aims: to create a large class movement for socialism. Steps in that direction are made at different levels, such as favoring the recovery of the standard of living of workers and pensioners, creating better conditions for trade union collective bargaining, promoting self-organization of precarious workers, taking the fight to the core of the economic and social system. In this sense, the debate on the future of the National Health Service is nowadays the most heated, since it is at the center of the offensive of financiers against welfare, and it involves crucial decisions on budgeting.

This is the case in which the impact of the neoliberal views is pretty obvious, as it asks for a combination of privatization of services and extraction of rents to be paid by the public to the private sector. The Left Bloc responded to neoliberalism by proposing a deep restructuring of the health system and did so in the most effective way, in coalition with António Arnaut, the honorary president of the PS and founder of the modern health system as it emerged from the April 1974 revolution (he was the minister of health in the late 1970s). Arnaut prepared a new law together with João Semedo, an ex-MP for the Bloc, once its coordinator and a distinguished spokesperson of the

party for health questions. They published that law in a book (December 2017, the cover is below) with huge impact. This is an expression of a political initiative looking for convergences in order to change the landscape of the discussions and choices.

A book and a law defending the national health service



"To protect the National Health Service", a book by Antonio Arnaut (honorary president of the PS) and João Semedo (ex-coordinator of the Left Bloc, was an MP), proposes a new law for the organization of the health system, opposing the neoliberal solutions. It is currently being presented by the Left Bloc in parliament and, while many PS members support it, the government opposes it.

In this case as in others, the Left Bloc challenges and confronts the politics of the center. In fact, our views on the national health service have currently no majority in parliament but we are not defeated. We persist and insist. And this is how left politics will win: talking to people that share the same ideas, including in other parties, creating social movement, standing for concrete proposals and being able to deliver an alternative and not just a protest.

That is our strategy: we fight for the majority on every front. As militants for socialism that is our determination and experience and that is what we want to share with our brothers and sisters.

Annex

The Socialist Party and Left Bloc's joint position for a political solution November 2015

The Socialist Party (PS) and Left Bloc

(BE) undertake the following agreement on a political solution within the framework of the new institutional reality of the XIII parliamentary term that resulted from the elections of 4 October.

1. The results of the national election of 4 October 2015 meant a clear defeat of the strategy of impoverishment and austerity conducted by the right-wing coalition (PSD-CDS) during the last four years. Taking into consideration the profound difficulties that Portugal is experiencing in the wake of a long social and economic crisis, and an external context of high uncertainty, and in the light of the new parliamentary composition that came out of the most recent electoral process, the PS, the Left Bloc and the CDU [electoral coalition between the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) and the Greens (Verdes)] have announced a process of convergence founded on the patriotic necessity of translating into a political solution the will expressed in the ballot boxes. In this sense, these parties have assumed the responsibility of negotiating an agreement with the ultimate goal of constructing a stable, durable, and credible majority in parliament which sustains the formation and action of a government founded on the will of change expressed in the ballot box.

2. It is within this framework that both the PS and BE have established a joint position to identify matters, measures, and solutions that can implement the necessary changes. This is a serious position, which recognizes the distinct programs of both parties and the varying viewpoints from which they observe and frame structural aspects of the country's situation. This is also an evaluative process which acknowledges a series of measures that will respond quickly to the legitimate aspirations of the Portuguese people, namely the recovery of their lost income, the restoration of their rights, and the securing of better life conditions. These were the points of convergence, not of divergence, that both parties chose to value.

3. Among others, the PS and BE identify the following issues where convergence is possible, despite the

different reach of each party's program, and solutions for immediate policies that are in view: Unfreezing of pensions;

- restitution of public holidays cancelled by the previous government;
 - a decisive struggle against precarity, including false self-employment, the abusive use of internships and mandatory "social" work for the unemployed;
 - revision of social security contributions for the self-employed;
 - an end to the "special mobility" program for public sector workers;
 - the right to collective bargaining in the public sector;
 - reinstatement of all complementary pension plans for workers in state-owned enterprises;
 - reduction of VAT to 13 % for restaurants;- real-estate protection of the most vulnerable;- protection of homes against foreclosure;
 - tax incentives for SMEs;
 - a reappraisal of all exemptions from social security contributions;
 - a revival of the public national health system through an injection of sufficient resources, personnel and adequate technical and financial means, including the objective of guaranteeing to all services users access to a general practitioner and nurse;
 - a repeal of the recent change to the law concerning the voluntary termination of pregnancy;
 - guaranteed access to nursery school for all children from three years of age until 2019;
 - increased social support for vulnerable students;- permanent contracts for all education-sector workers;
 - the reduction in the number of pupils per classroom;
 - school textbooks to be made progressively free of charge for compulsory education years;
 - permanent contracts for all PhD researchers working in public research centers and other public entities;
 - repeal of all privatization and concessions in the public transport sector;
- no new processes of privatization.

With the aim of including these measures in the government's program, the basis of the future

cooperation between both parliamentary groups, the PS and BE have listed some of these and other points in the appendix attached to this declaration.

4. The PS and BE recognize the largest demands of political identification that a government and a government program would imply. The PS and BE also recognize that, within the framework of convergences that it was possible to achieve, the conditions are created to:

i) end the cycle of economic and social degradation that a PSD/CDS government would prolong. For this reason, both parties will reject any governmental solution that proposes a PSD/CDS government, and will, as well, try to defeat any initiative that tries to stop this alternative governmental solution;

ii) ensure the existence of an adequate institutional basis that can allow the PS to form a government, present its governmental program, assume functions, and adopt policies that ensure a long-lasting perspective for this legislative term;

iii) on the basis of the new institutional correlation present in parliament, adopt measures that respond to the aspirations and rights of the Portuguese people.

In this sense, the PS and BE affirm their reciprocal willingness to:

i) start a joint investigation into how the identified issues of convergence can be translated into the state budgets, with the objective of not missing the opportunity that these instruments enable: the indispensable restitution of salaries, pensions and rights;

- the indispensable reversal of the degradation of the life conditions of the Portuguese people;

- a commitment to the social services that must be provided by the state, to their accessibility to all citizens and to quality of service provided;

ii) examine the measures and solutions that, outside the sphere of the state budget, can be achieved more immediately;

iii) examine in bilateral meetings (on

an as-needed basis) other measures whose complexity so requires, or that are related to:

a) legislation with a budgetary impact;

b) motions of no confidence;

c) legislative initiatives coming from other parliamentary groups;

d) legislative initiatives that although without implications for the budget constitute fundamental aspects of the governmental program and the functioning of Parliament.

This position does not limit other solutions that both the PS or BE decide to establish with the PCP or The Greens.

5. With full respect for the political independence of both parties, and fully open to the Portuguese people about the differences between the structural aspects of the political vision of each party's program, the undersigning parties of this text confirm with enough clarity their willingness and determination to prevent the pursuit of a political course by the PSD and CDS that the country has now expressly condemned, and to embark upon a new path for the country that guarantees:

a) a reversal of the policies that have implemented the strategy of impoverishment carried out by the PSD and CDS;

b) to defend the social functions of the state and public services, social security, education and health, and to promote a serious fight against poverty and economical and social inequalities;

c) a new economic strategy that sustains growth and employment, an increase in family income, and the creation of conditions for public and private investment;

d) to promote a new model of progress and development in Portugal that hinges on the valuation of salaries and the fight against precarity, returns to public investment in education, culture and science, and restores trust and hope in the future for Portuguese society.

e) value citizens' participation, political decentralization, and autonomy of the insular territories.

Lisbon, 10 November 2015

Appendix to the joint political position

1. In order to prepare common initiatives on fundamental matters, a series of working groups will be created prior to the beginning of the legislative term. These groups will be composed of the undersigning parties, that is, by the member of government responsible for that particular area, and will present biannual reports:

- Working group to establish a National Plan against Precarity, to be presented to the "Conselho Económico e Social" [body where the government, the unions, and bosses meet to discuss labor laws];

- Working group on social protection and the fight against poverty;

- Working group on external debt sustainability;

- Working group to evaluate energy costs with a focus upon families and proposals for their reduction;

- Working group on housing policies, mortgage debt, and real estate taxation

2. The "regime conciliatório" [a form of labor market liberalization] will not be included in the government's program.

3. There will be no reduction of the Single Social Tax for employers included in the government's program.

4. On 1 January 2016, the norm established by Law no. 53-B/2006 of 29 December will be reinstated. This norm concerns the amendments to pension rates, with the guarantee there will be no nominal cut to pensions.

5. The need to diversify social security funding sources should be discussed through social dialogue institutions ("Conselho Económico e Social"). The signing parties commit to working together on a proposal to be presented

to the "Conselho Económico e Social".

6. In order to increase household income there will be a reduction of 4 percentage points on the social security contributions paid by workers earning less than 600 euros a month. Such a reduction will not have any impact on final pensions;
- the loss of revenue is to be covered by fiscal transfers.

7. The National Minimum Wage will hit the 600 euros benchmark during the on-going legislative term through an annual raise of 5 % in the first two years;

8. Conferral of new powers to the Authority for the Labor Conditions for its fight against falsely reported self-employment and other illegal employment contracts that should be immediately converted into regular employment contracts;

9. The gradual restitution of public sector wages will begin in January 2016 (25 % in the first trimester; 50 % in the second; 75 % in the third; 100 % in the fourth);

10. The four holidays that were eliminated by the previous government will be reinstated.

11. Tax policy:

a) Move to progressive income tax through the introduction of new income brackets;

b) Withdrawal of the category "household coefficient" for tax purposes, which has a regressive impact, and its replacement by "each child" deductions with no regressive character;

c) Introduction of a limited annual increase of 75 euros for real-estate tax when it concerns permanent homes with a low market value;

d) Outlawing of any home foreclosures related to tax payments in arrears when the latter is a lower amount than the debt;

e) Revision of fines and interest charged in tax arrears;

f) To facilitate debt payment, plans for

tax and social contributions arrears;

g) Reduction of VAT to 13 % for restaurants;

h) Reversal of the capital income tax code regarding "participation exemption" and the period given for the report of tax "losses";

i) Tax incentives for firms located along the border, through capital income tax deductions

12. On the costs for families with electric energy and gas:

a) Redesign the Social Energy Tariff, making it automatic in its application to low-income families and beneficiaries of social support whose access is subject to conditions. In the case of consumers who are not beneficiaries of social support and are in a vulnerable financial situation, the income note issued by the Portuguese Tax Authority will allow compliance with the requirements for the application of the social tariff;

- consumers who, due to their level of income, are exempt from filing income declarations, must do so in order to obtain the income note from the Portuguese Tax Authority and thus access the social tariff;

- access to the social tariff gives automatic access to the Extraordinary Social Support for the Energy Consumer (ASECE);

b) Withdraw the audio-visual contribution fee from electricity bills and incorporate it into the realm of communications without loss of revenue for RTP (Radio and Television of Portugal)

13. Privatizations and Concessions:

a) Cessation of the on going processes of concessions and privatization of the public transport systems of Porto and Lisbon;

b) Reversal of the mergers of water companies that might have been imposed on some municipalities;

c) Reversal of the process of privatization of EGF [company that builds and administers river dams], due to its illegality;

d) No new concession or privatization. *Luxembourg Foundation. The political joint position is the same text as that established between the PS and the CP, the appendix was signed only by the PS and the Left Bloc.*

Notes: translation by the Rosa