



IV523 - August 2018

Radical Socialist condemns attacks on human rights activists and arrests

31 August 2018, by **Radical Socialist**

Over four years of the BJP in power at the Centre; well over three decades of aggressive struggle by the fascists to force the pace and promote their agenda, India today has moved so far to the right, that gross violations of civil liberties can be wiped out of consciousness when the targets are secular and rationalist activists, or civil rights/democratic rights activists, or Dalits, Adivasis, Muslims, people whose existence is seen as socially less valuable by the Brahman-bania elite at the core of the Sangh's elite politics, and at the same time people on whose oppression their conception of Hindutva is based.

The attacks on Human /rights activists on 28 August 2018 must be denounced without hesitation, and the release of all who were arrested demanded. Radical Socialist joins all democratic forces in making these as the primary demands today. We do not need to go into raptures over the Supreme Court's interim order, for us to realise that even less aggressive fascistic components of the state find the assault irrational and totally violating democratic rights.

The growing openness of the far right violence needs to be understood with clarity. The attacks on secular and rationalist activists, leading to the murders of Kalburgi, Pansare, Dabholkar, Lankesh; the attempt a few

days ago on Umar Khalid; the mass lynchings in the name of cow protection in large parts of north India; the attacks on Dalits and Adivasis including driving Rohith Vemula to suicide, the violence in Una, and the violence in early 2018 in connection with the annual celebration by Dalits of the Bhima Koregaon battle; the violence unleashed by state as well as far right forces on Adivasis, are all tied together.

On 28th of August 2018, the police forces raided offices and residences of nine activists. The raids and arrests were by the Pune police, in connection with the Bhima Koregaon violence in January, in which Dalit activists had clashed with upper-caste Marathas. Those arrested include noted radical poet and cultural activist Varavara Rao, lawyer Sudha Bharadwaj, and activists Arun Ferreira, Gautam Navlakha and Vernon Gonsalves. The raids were carried out in Delhi, Faridabad, Goa, Mumbai, Ranchi and Hyderabad.

Rao was arrested on the alleged involvement of his in a plot to kill Narendra Modi. Arun Ferreira and Vernon Gonsalves were arrested from Thane and Mumbai. Human rights lawyer Sudha Bharadwaj was picked up from her home in Faridabad. Gautam Navlakha's transit remand to

Pune is also on hold, the Delhi High Court said. He will stay at home under police guard and can meet only his lawyers.

Earlier, in June, others had been arrested — Sudhir Dhawale, Surendra Gadling, Mahesh Raut, Rona Wilson and Shoma Sen. They had allegedly made "provocative speeches". In a country where a right wing MLA can even speak about the need to kill intellectuals, this charge is laughable, or would have been, had it not been backed up by court cases and arrests.

A new term has been created, in conjunction with ultra-right television channels whose task is to prepare the ground for the state and right wing. This is the term Urban Naxal. In reality it means nothing, since Naxalite is a term used about a range of left wing parties and groups that owe some allegiance to the Naxalbari uprising of 1967, the Andhra struggles of Srikakulam etc., as well as to Mao Tse Tung and the Cultural Revolution in China. Beyond these few points to day these groups have diverse politics. Many are involved in ttrade union work, some in elections, while for some rural work continues to be primary. Any radical left activist who supports any of these organisations and lives in cities, is formally speaking an urban Naxalite.

But the term has been coined for a very different aim. It is to suggest that the original Naxalites were rural guerrillas, and urban Naxalites are all, to use some of the favourite terms of the government and its pet media, "terrorists", "anti-nationals", etc. By putting these claims, an attempt is made to deprive citizens, accused of being urban Naxalites, of the democratic rights that everyone is supposed to have.

Apparently the Delhi Police, after having arrested Sudha Bharadwaj, waited for Republic TV to arrive so that her arrest could be used on television in a sensational manner, to demonise activists, human rights defenders and intellectuals. And of course this is further evidence of how Republic TV and its ilk need to be seen, not even as run of the mill

bourgeois right wing media, but as part of the fascist-Hindutva brigade.

It is also a matter of significance that the Bhima Koregaon issue has been made a focal point. If Dalits and Muslims and Adivasis join hands, that would mean a major blow to the ideological project of the Hindutva forces. We do not take the position that these attacks are in any sense attempts to remove attention from some supposed "real" issues, reducing the class struggle to only bread and butter issues. But we do underscore the need to take a class approach to these struggles.

For each ascent of the Hindutva Right, when the left has failed to put up principled struggles, has resulted in a popular front which has only used

people's anger to form alternative, non-BJP bourgeois coalitions rather than forge mass struggles. Yet each time, the Sangh has managed to raise the bar higher.

Fighting for real issues that affect dalits, adivasis, Muslims, working class and peasant women, men and persons of other gender identities, have to be brought together. We join all democratic forces in condemning the attacks and arrests, we demand the release of all those arrested, and the withdrawal of cases. At the same time, we warn that this will be a tough battle, and only if we are not prepared to succumb to the charm of merely electing a non BJP government as the solution to all evil can we resist the constant shift to the right that is happening.

IV523 August 2018 PDF magazine

30 August 2018, by robm

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The White World and Black Reality

30 August 2018, by Malik Miah

African Americans historically have been willing to join and lead the battle for real equity and against white supremacy. It's a fight they can't win alone. Allies are needed.

Will white Americans, then, step up or accept the status quo? If not, it is a delusion to expect the far right to be defeated by an electoral strategy based on new compromises with the conservative movement.

Establishment Democrats, including many liberals, continue to see Blacks standing up for themselves, and upstart progressives winning

elections, as the primary threat to their power.

Class solidarity must stand on a platform of anti-racism, anti-white supremacy to build working-class unity to defeat the right. It will not be a re-run of the 1930s "when segregation was the law in much of the land, and the practice in most of it" where the labor movement could grow even while refusing to confront segregation and laws against nonwhite immigrants.

The hard truth is that support for the Trump Republican Party remains

strong (of course not unanimous) among whites in what's called the red states. His regime actively erodes and rolls back basic civil and human rights, and programs that help working people, especially people of color but big parts of his white voting base too!

Most white Americans will at least voice opposition to racism, and open white supremacists are a minority. But since they don't see racism directly affecting them, the majority of white people either actively or passively go along with policies that disproportionately hit Blacks and

communities of color, immigrants in particular.

African-American Leadership

Blacks, on the other hand, have seen this picture before and are afraid of the white backlash. There is anxiety. There is also a greater awareness from the new generations, especially Black women, to fight back by any means necessary.

The gap between what the Democratic Party elite and mainstream liberal media are saying, and what the Black media report about resistance, is widening. As was the case during the civil rights era, there is the white world, and the Black reality.

White supremacist ideology “has consciously and by default” centuries of roots in the country. Even at the height of the great labor upsurges in the late 1880s and 1930s, issues of race and racism were subordinated to white-defined working class issues.

Organized white labor unions ignored or opposed fighting racism and supporting equality. The goal of ending Jim Crow segregation (like ending racist immigration policies) was not considered a labor issue, except by the most conscious radicals.

Class solidarity is impossible until the race issue becomes central for white workers to win their own fight. Unless that occurs, every civil and human rights gain can and will be reversed by racist backlash. Donald Trump rode that racism to win the Electoral College.

The right is growing stronger as its white supremacist base grows and other whites do nothing. These forces so far have the stronger position because of government support.

Their main concern is that African Americans will rise and go to the streets around racism and link up with other social forces. So far this is not happening. Black rebellions historically strike the greatest fear among whites and the ruling class.

Vicious Attacks and Resistance

While white people who are uneasy or even dislike the racism of Trump “accept” the system of inequality, since it does not directly impact their daily lives, the right wing uses all its levers of political and extralegal power to advance its objectives.

Attacking African-Americans’ rights, and other minorities, is a key weapon in their strategy to win whites, including white workers, to support employers and racist policies.

Trump viciously attacks Black football players and Black Lives Matter protesters because of the potential power of African Americans and the delusions of white Americans. (He cannot deport Blacks, even if some of his base wish that were possible.)

White supremacists (neofascists in ideology) cannot be defeated by centrist compromise. They only respond to the proverbial “two by four.”

Protests and African American opposition to police brutality are important actions and key to eventual change. Leon Trotsky, the Russian revolutionary, told American socialists in the 1930s that Blacks because of their position as the most oppressed section of American society, “will in any case fight better than the white workers” for emancipation.

Black Lives Matters was formed in struggle against police violence and mass incarceration of African Americans. Its full program is aimed at ending racism and winning others to its program.

Black rights and lives are under fierce attack by the capitalist system “again. It might seem with the teachers’ strikes, the #MeToo movement for women’s rights and anti-police brutality protests that the tide is possibly turning against the right. It hasn’t, so far.

Most liberals and many progressives fall into the trap of believing that elections in November 2018 and beyond are the key to stopping racist

and reactionary forces. Pointing to Trump’s victory, they attack those who reject this strategy. Supporters of democratic socialism within the Democratic Party are being blamed “in advance!” for future election defeats.

The central lesson of history here and abroad is the opposite. It is not elections that cause change. They can only reflect what has been won or lost. Mass popular resistance, legal and extralegal, is how change and victories are achieved.

Martin Luther King did not ask for permission from the Democratic Party to organize mass actions against segregation. The 1963 March on Washington was aimed at the Democratic President and Congress.

Politicians and institutions respond when they feel threatened. Blacks were never considered human beings, much less citizens, before the Civil War. While slavery was abolished, and formal citizenship was granted to former slaves, real citizenship rights lasted less than two decades.

In today’s anti-immigrant climate some conservatives openly question whether the 14th Amendment clause, adopted in 1868, establishing citizenship by birth on U.S. soil should be reversed – even by presidential decree (see “Trump’s New Target: Citizenship,” by John Ganz, The New York Times, July 23, 2018, A21).

It took 80 years of popular struggles to gain back legal citizenship, which had been in name only, in the former Confederacy. Blacks could rarely run for or win elections until the 1970s. It was mass protest actions that forced politicians and officials of both major parties to shift.

Labor’s Dirty Compromise

The U.S. labor movement’s Achilles heel has been racism. It failed to understand the centrality of race. Today, not surprisingly, 10% (7% in the private sector) of workers are in unions “the lowest point since the 1920s, and expected to fall further.

Organized labor has mostly circled its wagons. With no battle plan, it is easier to blame the right or the Supreme Court.

The lesson of the 1930s was to organize mass strikes and win public support to defeat employers and force the government to pass laws recognizing labor rights (except for Blacks in the segregated South).

That dirty compromise of throwing Black workers under the bus is why

the labor movement would never grow beyond its high point in the 1950s. The established union leaderships' refusal to take on Jim Crow segregation and structural racism is a key reason for its decline.

Capital always knew it could eventually take union plants from the North to the "right to work" South. Japanese and European manufacturers saw it too, and built most of their "transplant" facilities in those states.

At a time when the number one issue of fighting the Trump regime and policies is defense of civil and human rights, much of today's organized labor instead is in lock step with Trump on tariffs.

So long as that's the case, it will be impossible to turn the tide. Under these conditions, is it any wonder that racism trumps class solidarity?

Against the Current

On the National Register of Citizens

29 August 2018, by **Radical Socialist**

The number of people excluded by the draft NRC is massive - out of 3.29 crore people who had applied for inclusion in the NRC the names of 40.07 lakhs have been excluded in the draft. There have been glaringly obvious omissions, and these have been highlighted, but beyond such cases there is the gross figure itself. Both the Central Government and the Assam Government have been repeating that this is only a draft and there will be scope for corrections. But certain fundamental issues need to be addressed, before we look at technicalities about how far the draft can be tweaked and so on.

As internationalists, we are opposed to aggressive nationalism, ethnic hatred, and other forms of divisions that weaken the working class and the broader mass of toiling people. In an era when capitalism claims to be capable of ignoring all frontiers, when every government in the past three decades has welcomed this huge movement of capital across borders, it is indeed terrible that the movement of humans is the only thing that will be blocked by vast shows of force. In an era when the Trump administration is seeking to treat some 500,000 Indians living in the USA as "illegal", for an Indian government to treat people living in India in the same way shows how right-wing political goals damage the interests even of ordinary

Indians.

The arguments made in defence of the NRC are the following:

â€¢ This was built into the Assam Accord

â€¢ This is the result of a Supreme Court directive

â€¢ This is necessary in order to save the jobs of Indians

â€¢ The influx of "illegal" immigrants from Bangladesh have skewed the population distribution of Assam.

Along with these there has emerged a communalisation of the issue by the BJP and all the Sangh forces. This has been shown by the massive online as well as word of mouth and other propaganda, claiming that it is not a matter of Bengali versus Ahomiyas, but of Hindu versus Muslim. We do not support inter-ethnic conflicts any more than inter-community violence. But we draw attention to this vicious propaganda. By this portrayal, as well as the attempt to make a distinction between "refugee" and "illegal immigrant" based on religion, and making the conferring of citizenship linked to religious identity, the BJP has done what it does best - sowing hatred based on religious identity, drumming up Hindu majoritarian

support, even among the poor, by pointing to the poor with different religious identities as the enemy, rather than the exploiting classes. We oppose such a divisive policy without qualification and reject the NRC or any segregation policy and classification based on such communal principles. Also, we reject the argument that once a province has a historic group, internal migration by others must be blocked when it is not specifically provided in any way constitutionally (as it is in the case of Jammu and Kashmir). This is crude, violent regionalism. Whether by the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra, or by the TMC sponsored Bangla Paksho in West Bengal, or any Ahomiyas ethnic group, this is equally unacceptable, for carried to its extreme it can only lead to ethnic violence tending to ethnic cleansing. This is not simply a matter of mobilising a core constituency for the 2019 elections, as sometimes being portrayed, but part of the Sangh's strategy of redefining the Indian nation. Should the imposition of the NRC succeed, it will set up a dangerous precedent and open the door to legitimisation of ethnic cleansing. We need to remind all that the Nellie massacre was a consequence of exactly this kind of xenophobia.

Beyond this, we need to stress three or four fundamental points of

principle.

First, we are opposed to the principle that it is the responsibility of the people to prove that they are legal citizens. Rather, it is for the state to produce evidence that they have been involved in any illegal action. To do otherwise is to damage the principle that all who are accused are presumed innocent till proven guilty in a court of law. They do not have to provide documentation of having been there before 1971 and if they do not have 'sufficient' identification papers as arbitrarily determined by the authorities no matter. It is for the government to disprove their citizenship with proper documentary evidence, while taking note of the fact that a huge number of Indians are not born in hospitals and have no birth certificates let alone passports, the two most reliable means of confirming citizenship.

Second, we reject the 1971 cut off date, regardless of the Assam Accord or anything the Supreme Court may have said. India's own citizenship rules say that anyone living in India for 12 years can apply for citizenship. Unless the state disproves their claim, it is not for them to "prove" they are not "illegal immigrants". So in 2018 to put the date to 1971 is completely unacceptable.

Third, regardless of whether the person is in fact an Indian falsely accused of being an illegal immigrant, an immigrant whose papers are being disputed, or an undocumented person, we reject any forcible return to Burma or Bangladesh. India has a record of permitting large numbers of Tibetans, Sri Lankan Tamils, Chakmas & others to reside in India. It is that honourable example that should be followed.

The NRC, or any process of identification of citizens, must not

violate any human rights convention, under any pretext whatsoever. Since there is no possibility of deportation or repatriation, the NRC would render a huge population "stateless" which in effect would make them permanent second and/or third grade citizens of the country sustaining under the mercy of administrations. All left and democratic forces must oppose this. If there are genuine grievances about the potential or perceived adverse impacts of changing demographic patterns in Assam or the North-East, a framework of discussion and dialogue could be instituted rather than harassments or punitive actions against a section of the population.

It is after these principled issues that technicalities can be discussed. The present NRC updating exercise was raised by the previous Congress government in Assam as a step towards implementing the Assam Accord which had stipulated 24 March 1971 as the cut-off point for determination of "foreigners" or illegal immigrants. The 1951 NRC and subsequent electoral rolls till 1971 have been made the main basis (legacy data) for inclusion in the updated NRC. The way electoral rolls are handled, tampered, etc., it is not difficult to make a serious case that the basis of the NRC thus has exclusion built in. Moreover, the fact that the 1947 Assam has since been repeatedly redrawn, and that this has involved repeated internal migrations, it is difficult for people to document all their moves. This is particularly true for the poor. The NRC has disregarded certificates issued by panchayats.

A special situation also exists for Assam's transgender community. Most are either abandoned at birth or disowned by their families later in life. Some start to feel differently from their ascribed gender identity. They leave their homes and start living with fellow transpeople. They live as

families within their own community. As a result, the kind of documentation demanded from them is impossible to provide. At least 20,000 of them and possibly double that number if the closet transgenders are identified, may end up being ghettoised further and pushed into camps and declared illegal immigrants if the current NRC is finalized.

The BJP is playing a dangerous game. By amending the passport entry rules and introducing the Citizenship Amendment Bill, it has made it clear that it wants to deal with the issues of citizenship and immigration on the basis of a communal framework where Muslims will be excluded and treated as enemies.

At the same time, the Trinamul Congress and its intellectual allies in West Bengal are playing into the BJP's game, by presenting a Bengali chauvinist, rather than democratic, response. Meanwhile BJP leaders in Bengal are now demanding implementing the NRC in the state, attacking the Muslim community of the province, calling them all "Bangladeshi infiltrators". This is part of the BJP's strategy of polarisation in Bengal prior to the 2019 parliamentary elections.

We reject this, while also rejecting Bengali chauvinism. We do not equate Hindutva communalism and its politics of ghettoisation with the politics of minority community defence/self-defence. But we do not see the TMC and their adjutants as defenders of any democratic values.

Of the over 40 lakh excluded by the NRC in Assam, those who for whatever reason do not wish to stay in Assam must be enabled to be fully rehabilitated elsewhere with due compensation provided for any material losses wherever this may become necessary.

Chronicle of a green day in Buenos Aires

29 August 2018, by **Camila Baron, Gabriela Mitidieri**

The proposal that had been approved by the Chamber of Deputies on June 13th, 2018 was rejected on one of the coldest and most humid nights of the year by 38 votes against 31. Although in the main newspapers it is no longer news, we know that we are a living revolution and that we are writing the story. We continue to try to name what we lived during the day of 8A. We vindicate our incessant and always open pursuit; it is not yet written where the strength of feminism moves (and pushes us).

The background

The unprecedented level of mass activity in the streets invites an impression which perhaps misses the depth of the accumulated Argentine and Latin American feminist experience.

Since 1986, National Women's Meetings (ENMs) have been held once a year in different parts of the country. These are instances where thousands of comrades divide in workshops with specific axes of debate, from which articulations, agendas and political intensity emerges which everyone takes back to their own province. In workshops like these, comrades met who would then build pink relief networks, pre-and post-abortion counselling that provides quality information to interrupt unwanted pregnancies safely.

Also, from an ENM in 2003 there arose the initiative of constituting the national campaign for the right to legal, safe and free abortion. The campaign from its beginnings was a federal articulation composed of a broad spectrum of political parties, independent activists and feminist professionals involved with the struggle for abortion rights. It worked in a focused way to install the theme and to gain presence and support at the parliamentary level.

This year was the seventh time that the campaign presented a draft law in

its 13-year history. This perseverance was accompanied with an international feminist effervescence, with the dissemination of an agenda of demands of the women's movement and the LGBT collective and the agitating focus of Ni Una Menos (Not One Less). Ni Una Menos was to become the slogan of a movement of activists and organizations. In a matter of months, we went from repudiating macho violence to also incorporating the demands of formal and informal workers, paid and unpaid, in this struggle; we discussed cis-heteronormativity and of course we took up the historic fight for abortion rights.

Dinosaurs

An image that is repeated everywhere on the networks came to the halls of the Senate during the night of the vote: a gathering which in its ancient composition resembles a sort of Jurassic Park. Despite the effectiveness of the metaphor, it is worth pointing out some essential differences with prehistoric times: the result of the vote teaches us that it is not an open and green space but an armoured stronghold on whose walls crucifixes hang and where those wearing blue scarves managed to move like fish in the water.

In this interior, so impervious to the outside, we found that the level of debate was not even a shadow of what had taken place in the Chamber of Deputies. The presentations of specialists in the commissions that were to deal with the draft left scenes impossible to forget, like that of the doctor who said that condoms do not prevent the contagion of HIV or that of the priest who had been the receiver of testimonies of violated minors and had not reported the rapists.

The level did not rise when the senators themselves debated in a session that lasted more than fifteen hours. We feel anger at not being able

to answer live and direct to a legislator like Urtubey, who claimed that "there are rapes that do not involve violence for women." He did not even make efforts to hide his misogyny, his hypocritical morality, his dangerously reactionary values. Or the senator De Angeli who justified his veto thus: "When a woman is pregnant we go with joy to congratulate her. You are given a plant so that the plant grows and see the image of your child. Those are the things we can't lose. That's why I'm voting against."

The names of those who expressed their negative vote are repeated in a thousand formats on the networks and we all promise to remember them, especially when the time comes for them to submit to the ballot box. However, the slogan "Let's never vote for them again", clear, powerful and capable of frightening any career politician, was also used. It is clear that for many senators the powerful local ecclesiastical institution was more persuasive, its huge economic resources allowing them to have a "basic unity", than the arguments of the massive feminist movement faced with this new Inquisition. On our side we are doubling down and we already carry orange handkerchiefs, a new symbol that pleads for the separation of the church and the state.

Almost all the speeches in favour of the law underscored a temporality that we share: sooner or later, we will have legal abortion. On the other side they also seemed to know it: "they call us archaic, retrograde, say that we do not listen to young people... But I know how society is going to evolve, I know absolutely," said a senator, who, like many others, tied his vote to a personal electoral calculation despite being personally in favour. In other words, "guarantee me that this does not complicate my candidacy as governor and you will have my vote", laying bare the logic with which Congress approves or rejects laws.

To the astonishment of many, when the draft bill entered the Senate, the positive vote maintained some

advantage over the No. That made me think that the photo of the June 13th demonstration that showed the full green streets on one side and just a handful of Argentine flags and rosaries on the other had influenced the upper chamber. We quickly understood that it was necessary to hold the streets. We filled them over and over again, we mobilized in plazas from all over the country and we had space in the mass media: we had the support of actresses, artists and journalists with a great capacity to impact on the mass public.

For every piece of bad news about some undecided senatorial vote coming down against us we responded with more activities, public debates, dissemination of materials and arguments in favour. But on the other side we had a stealthy and powerful enemy who copied our insignia (celestial handkerchiefs instead of our green ones) and marched with crucifixes in all the provinces of the country.

However, winning the streets did not bring us victory. The visibility of our debates, the public transparency of our interventions, the tireless search for democracy in our organizations was opposed by the opacity of parliamentarians, electoral calculus and obscurantism.

In spite of despair with each new *poroteo* - the colloquial term to refer to the counting of votes - and having lost finally by seven votes, we have a certainty: now they see us. The feminist movement has burst into the political system with insolence. We proposed a debate of almost unprecedented magnitudes for Argentina's democracy. That's to our credit. Also, for the first time in the history of the Chamber of Senators such slogans as "the maternal is political" and "the right to enjoyment" as well as the words feminism, machismo and patriarchy.

We were protagonists without having any seat in the Senate. Ours is a lively, booming movement in the midst of a creative process. Before our threat to make the earth tremble, on the other side they showed their teeth and brought out their ancestral practices, misogynistic and scornful of civil

rights. But yes, no doubt: they see us. And despite the fact that the traditional parties continue to minimize our power, the political system as a whole had to take note of everything that happened. No one escapes the winds of political instability and, in this open process, the feminist tide may be able to articulate several discontents: from repudiation to misogyny and the ideology of domesticity prevailing in parliament to highlighting the fact that the patriarchal discourses and practices of the right that govern us are not merely an accessory, but structure a neoliberal program of the hollowing out of the state and precarization of the conditions of existence of working people. And in that precarious existence, we women, cis, lesbians and trans continue to bear the heaviest burden.

Weathering the storm

On June 13th we were witnesses to and protagonists of an unprecedented scenario of mobilization of the movement of women, feminists, LGBT, political parties, unions and social organizations in the campaign for the right to abortion. On August 8th efforts were redoubled: minibuses brought comrades from all over the country and from the night of August 7 tents and gazebos, scenarios and screens were mounted throughout the main avenues of the political centre of the capital city, with similar mobilizations and deployments in the other main cities of Argentina.

After midday, the rain gave no respite and while we followed the debate minute by minute, coordinating the various activities of the day (panels, lectures, workshops, recitals), we invented creative ways to protect ourselves from the cold downpour. Beyond the fenced Congress square, the state seemed to have withdrawn to its parliamentary precinct, and the general care of the massive mobilization had to be built between us, in coordination with the campaign. A joint deployment between organizations also ensured coordination throughout the night even with a tidal wave of people

making a simple two-block walk in an impossible odyssey that took an hour. Thousands of teenagers, in groups, behind the wet flags of their student centres, were present and also showed how the fight for the right to legal abortion is intertwined with the fight for the application of the law for comprehensive sexual education.

Organized comrades from the poor neighbourhoods of the city and the Buenos Aires suburbs arrived early to deny with their presence the misogynistic and patriarchal arguments that talking about sexuality, desired maternity and safe ways to interrupt pregnancies were points on an agenda of middle class women alone. Colleagues from the front of transmasculinities, partners of trans comrades, queers, non-binaries and lesbians supporting abortion rights shouted in the midst of the downpour that abortion is not only a matter for cis women. On the one hand, because we prefer to think in terms of building capacity to take into account the diversity of possible sex-gender experiences in the interruptions of pregnancies, but also because we understand, as a trans partner once said, that there is a powerful emotional alliance between those who struggle for the autonomy of our bodies, to decide on our own terms how to inhabit them. Together with our demands we defy the cis-hetero-patriarchate, its violence and its ordinances.

The street condensed a powerful accumulation of organization and articulation. It was not just a handful of those discontented with the illegality and clandestinity of abortion that came. In addition to social and political organizations, feminists, trade unions, student centres, the articulation with those who daily challenged the clandestinity of abortion was also visible. The Network of Professionals for the Right to Decide, who intervene to guarantee interruptions of pregnancy for causal reasons (health of the pregnant person, rape and foetal unviability), coordinated a talk in which they reaffirmed their will to continue working from the health system itself to reach more comrades. Pre-and post-abortion counselling, safe information lines, collectives of pink relief

feminists were also involved.

What about the other side?

On the other side of the square, very close to the entrance through which the Senators enter the Congress, there were huge Argentinian flags and rosaries. Also, the famous giant papier mache baby which was paraded in each of the marches of the anti-rights sector. In recent weeks, public figures such as actress Amalia Granata cordially invited us to “close our legs” while Cecilia Pando, a well-known advocate for genocide in the last military dictatorship, urged the fight “for both lives.” And the presence of Bandera Vecina, an openly xenophobic neo-Nazi political party, was the element that we needed to bring together in the same framework the ecclesiastical, fascist, conservative and misogynist alliance on the opposite side of the sidewalk to the feminist movement.

And beyond the symbolic violence of their words, in recent weeks we encountered multiple cases of comrades physically assaulted in the streets for the mere fact of having tied the handkerchief to their backpacks. For the same reason, teachers were harassed in private schools where they teach and even “invited” to leave the institutions. In this context, the post-voting panorama indicates that within the ruling party torn between a liberal right and a conservative and reactionary right inside the Cambiemos alliance, the balance has shifted in favour of the latter.

The compass is ours

We do not wish to deny or overlook the anger, frustration, sadness of the moment the vote was known. The distress and the moment of fatigue is also political. The balance sheets, the review of strategies and the new challenges to come are made. But feminism as praxis and daily reflection supports us. Also, in urgent and concrete senses: we continue to build networks of accompaniment so that the interruptions of pregnancy for causal reasons are respected, so that secure information circulates, so that the rights conquered so far are fulfilled.

In the course of the last week, we witnessed attempts to run the axis of the nodal discussion around our draft bill. Through isolated, petty, senatorial initiatives that ended up abstaining in the vote, we encountered projects of decriminalization of abortion and others that repeated what had already been won over the causal issue. Rumours circulated that they were to be dealt with after our law was rejected in the August 8th session.

The confusion thus created responded to the position of the ruling party, the main force against the law within the Congress, which began to fear the political cost if the law was rejected without any alternative project. Again calculation, opacity, manipulation. On August 9th, very early, the newspapers confirmed this hypothesis: some of the civil servants who had

strongly opposed our draft now appeared as the creators of a possible reform of the Penal Code that would contemplate depenalization. Hours later, the draft of this reform confirms to us that it does not even envisage the elimination of the penalties but only proposes to leave it free to the discretion of each judge.

We insist: without legalization there can be no decriminalization. That is because preventing free access through the public health system penalizes those who do not have the means to safely interrupt a pregnancy. Decriminalizing without legalizing is to clean up the consciences of those who can resort to a private clinic. It is the panorama dreamed of by the liberalism that governs us: each takes care of their body with the purchasing power they enjoy. We want decriminalisation and legislation that makes it possible in a real and concrete way, that guarantees rights, that does not take public resources from the state. And we want the application of the Comprehensive Sex Education Act that enables places of study throughout the country to be spaces for reflection on sexuality, desire, gender roles and depatriarchalization.

Our feminist networks cannot do everything, they do not have the resources and the infrastructure of a state and its public health system, even in a neoliberal period when they are being hollowed out. But they can do a lot. We get here and go for more. The compass is ours. As are these new feminist ways of thinking, feeling and existing in politics.

Defending "Our Democracy"

28 August 2018, by **Against the Current** Editors

Even more important is how democracy is being defended, and hopefully extended – by teachers in West Virginia, Oklahoma and Kentucky, by the magnificent youth upsurge in the wake of the Parkland

massacre; by the resistance against Trump's brutal immigration policies; by the new movement fighting back against sexual harassment and rape culture.

The victorious strike of the West Virginia teachers erupted in a state where they don't have legal collective bargaining rights, where their union leadership was essentially swept up in the tide of militant action organized at

the rank-and-file base, and where the teachers stayed out against the leadership's wishes until their five percent pay raise (for all state employees) was delivered and signed into law.

It may be premature to proclaim the much-awaited dawn of a "new labor upsurge." But we might be seeing the future of public sector worker activism in the face of an anticipated Supreme Court's Janus decision to cripple their unions by outlawing the collection of non-member "agency fees" for services that unions are required to provide. West Virginia teachers, like many public sector workers across the country, are at the mercy of their state legislature "which is how they wound up close to the national bottom in wages and benefits.

Their statewide unauthorized (i.e. "wildcat") strike instead put the legislature and the governor at the teachers' mercy. Why did it happen? Skyrocketing health care costs, and the denial of the respect and dignity the teachers deserve, was the last straw. Importantly, they didn't think only of themselves. Recognizing that many of their students in deeply distressed communities depend on free school lunch programs, teachers organized food deliveries on their own to bridge the gap while the schools were shut down.

Respect, dignity and solidarity "those values are essential to keep in mind, because they fuelled not only the West Virginia and other teachers' actions, but other manifestations of labor unrest, notably the Fight for \$15. And yes, they're also driving forces for the youth movement that the Parkland, Florida high school students have spearheaded.

In the wake of yet another unspeakable school massacre, mourning their 17 classmates, teachers and coaches sacrificed on the altar of the unrestricted "right" to sell and buy semi-automatic assault rifles, the students were confronted by yet another wave of politicians' boilerplate "thoughts and prayers" and the gun manufacturer lobby's cynical proposal to turn schools across the country into locked-down armed fortresses.

The Parkland students' response is remarkable, not only for its eloquence in the face of unimaginable pain. First, they spoke up for themselves, not letting politicians usurp the platform "and the students' voices were what stood out, both at Parkland and at the huge March for Our Lives in Washington on March 24. ("I trained to be a teacher, not a sharpshooter" was one notable sign among many.)

Second, while the Marjory Stoneman Douglas students are relatively middle class and "privileged," they recognized immediately that other young people, in communities of color particularly, face deadlier daily threats "not so much from mass school shootings as from risking violence and death on the way to and from school, or just walking on the street and playing basketball in the neighborhood. And placing armed police in every school automatically means disproportionately kids of color arrested, suspended and expelled for minor infractions or for nothing at all.

Because they understand what's at stake not only for themselves but their entire generation, these students will not let the issue fade out as usual "per the gun manufacturer lobby's strategy "until the next mass shooting. It's not a question of fine-tuning one or another particular piece of gun control legislation. (Surely, people can responsibly own guns for protection and hunting without having millions of AR-15s all over the place?) It's a matter of confronting the realities of this brutally violent, chaotic and unequal society and getting to the race, class and gendered roots of our condition.

Those values of respect, dignity and solidarity are also on the table when the DACA recipients "from teenagers to young adults, these are Americans who lack citizenship because their parents brought them as children without documents "are not only fighting for their own lives.

They're refusing to sell their families and communities down the river by accepting relief for themselves in exchange for supporting Trump's border wall and stepped-up immigration raids. Their courage is what's impelled many cities to defy

the immigration police's "right" to grab and deport folks who are in local custody for traffic or minor misdemeanor violations.

Trump Going Down?

It's naturally tempting to fantasize that Donald Trump will be removed by indictment, impeachment or implosion from the combined weight of scandals, investigations and revelations of the criminal conduct of his enterprise before and during his occupancy of the White House "as if the prospect of the creepy Christian-supremacist Mike Pence were an improvement. Unfortunately, it's necessary to put some sobering realities on the table.

Reality: Donald Trump is not going to be brought down by sex scandals. His filthy contempt for women was no secret to anyone, including his voting base, before the November 2016 election. And while we fully believe the accounts by women who have come forward, and while America loves "celebrity sleaze" beyond all other forms of infotainment, those revelations with more to come aren't going to turn the ruling corporate elites against "their President" and useful tool.

Reality: Trump isn't going to be impeached by popular demand or through the initiative of Congressional Democrats. By its nature, impeachment is a long and grinding affair, which is instigated by elites when the president no longer meets their needs, or when his behavior actually threatens the institutions that guarantee the "stability" they crave. In Richard Nixon's case, that was the 1973 "Saturday night massacre" firing of special prosecutor Archibald Cox. For Trump, it would be firing Robert Mueller, which is why he hasn't done it. (The impeachment of Bill Clinton was an opportunist Republican stunt, which fizzled in the Senate and backfired.)

Reality: If and when the big twit is brought down, it will be either because his antics are dragging the Republican Party into the electoral abyss, or because his incoherent

economic nationalism and policy zigzags threaten to generate a recession or global slump.

It appears that ruling class intervention has pulled the Trump team back from its brinksmanship NAFTA demands that would cripple the North American auto industry. Fears of economic chaos also led to an exemption for the European Union from his much-touted steel and aluminum tariff scheme, and no one yet knows where the threats of anti-Chinese measures and China's retaliation might lead.

Reality: Behind all the wild and weird doings in Washington, much business as usual continues. Donald Trump grumpily signed the \$1.3 trillion "bipartisan" spending bill that didn't fund his border wall or some of the savage budget cuts he'd trumpeted, but did allocate \$700 billion to the military "while leaving in the lurch the DACA youth and "Dreamers" whom the Democrats had pledged to defend. Another day, another betrayal.

Hundreds of thousands of families "parents who risked everything to find a place where they hoped their children would be safe and secure, and the young people who have grown up as American as anyone else in this country" are left to be collateral damage of Trump's blatant appeal to racism, along with Haitian and Salvadoran refugees losing Temporary Protected Status and facing deportation to countries that U.S. policies have shattered.

All this was punctuated by the April 14 bombing of the Syrian regime's suspected chemical weapons facilities, which changes effectively nothing in that country's catastrophe "but did give Trump the opportunity to tweet "Mission Accomplished." That this strike was not only meaningless in substance, but illegal under both U.S. domestic and international law, hardly registers in the news cycle.

Rights Under Attack

So where are the threats to democracy coming from? Elsewhere in this issue

of *Against the Current*, we're publishing several pieces exploring the left's response to the rise of open, sometimes violent racism and ominous far-right militancy that Trump's presidency has enabled. We refer our readers to that important discussion of strategy and principle.

But what about Russian meddling with all the fake-news campaign ads targeted at gullible U.S. voters? In fact, if the Russians are guilty of everything they're accused of, it barely rates in fourth place among the attacks on democratic rights in the United States.

First, there's the electoral system rigged by racist voter suppression laws, extreme gerrymandering, and now a pending "citizenship" question on the 2020 census that's specifically designed to depress participation and thereby reduce political representation and budgets for cities with communities of immigrants and people of color.

The disenfranchisement of prisoners and in many states, lifetime disqualification of convicted felons "in the context of mass incarceration in America" also reduces the voter base of working class and people of color. Of course, there's the anachronism of the Electoral College that enabled the 2000 election to be stolen in Florida for George W. Bush and put Trump in the White House in the 2016 election.

Second, in a country that's so grossly unequal to begin with, elections and legislatures can be bought with the dark money of the Koch Brothers, the likes of the Mercer and DeVos family fortunes, and the other operations detailed in Nancy McLean's *Democracy in Chains*, reviewed by Dianne Feeley in this issue. It's not so much a deep conspiracy as a heist in broad daylight, designed to make democracy itself meaningless.

Third, in a relatively short time the Trump swamp creatures and Republican Congress have done substantial damage, some of it difficult to reverse (with or without a 2018 midterm "blue wave," given that the Democrats won't fight for much of anything).

Climate change not only isn't reversing, it's accelerating "and the administration is committed to extracting every bit of the fossil fuels that so desperately need to be left in the ground. Puerto Rico remains in a devastating crisis after Hurricane Maria, with the next hurricane season now months away. Arctic sea ice has reached all-time lows, with winter temperatures reaching up to 45 degrees Fahrenheit above normal "while the U.S. east coast and northern Europe suffered a series of monstrous storms, and the west coast burns up and then floods.

Raids and deportations terrorize immigrant communities. The "tax reform" bill, Trump's major legislative "achievement," stuffs hundreds of billions of dollars into corporate coffers and the fortunes of the super-rich, and puts the country firmly on the road to bankruptcy "deliberately, so that Paul Ryan can claim the "necessity" to privatize and gut Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid.

Those are the real live threats to what's called "our democracy" "along with the reactionary Supreme Court majority that may be getting ready to strip away what remains of workers' right to organize unions, women's right to abortion, Muslims' right to enter the country, and people's right to elect their representatives without crippling voter suppression and other election-rigging techniques.

The Democrats' feeble resistance will barely slow down these attacks, let alone stop them "no matter how long or short the big twit's presidential tenure may be. It will be now, as it always has been, the power of mass movements that change the tide and the political equation.

Substantive democratic rights, more important than the purely formal ones, are always hard won and subject to being lost if not continually defended and renewed. That's where the West Virginia teachers, the students of Parkland and the nation, and all the communities of resistance large and small, are showing the way.

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The rising tide: Kerala 2018 flood

27 August 2018, by **Arundhati Roy**

This year in Kerala, the monsoon that we long for, and the rivers that we pretend to love, are talking back to us. Certainly, for me, the rain was the ink in my pen, and the river, the Meenachil, drove my story. They made me the writer that I am.

Now their fury is unimaginable, and the scale of the disaster and peoples' suffering is still unfolding. The Army, the navy, various government agencies, local communities, an extraordinary collective of fisher folk, journalists, and thousands of ordinary people have shown exemplary courage and fellow-feeling, risking their lives to bring others to safety. Help and money is pouring in. More help and more money will be needed. And yet, as the waters recede, revealing oceans of plastic and debris, we are faced with the fact that it would be dishonest of us to treat this calamity purely as a natural disaster in which we humans played no part.

We know by now that in the era of global warming and climate change, the mountains and the coastal areas will be the first to pay the price. The intensity and the frequency of climate catastrophes will only increase. California is burning. Kerala is drowning. Our beloved Kerala is a strip of land sandwiched between the mountains and the sea. We could not be more vulnerable.

Unbridled greed, the shocking denuding of forest land for mining and illegal development of resorts and homes for the wealthy, illegal construction that has blocked all natural drainage, the destruction of

natural water storage systems, the blatant mismanagement of dams, have all played a huge part in what is happening. How could it be that the Central Water Commission did not predict this flood? How could it be that dams that are supposed to control floods ended up releasing water from their reservoirs at the height of the crisis, magnifying the disaster several times over?

With waters receding, Kerala may be staring at a 'second disaster'

Today funds are pouring in to the Chief Minister's Distress Relief Fund—much of it hard-earned money from ordinary people, believing quite correctly, that it is only the government that can co-ordinate relief work that will reach the most far-flung places where the most vulnerable people live.

And yet, many of us worry about these funds being controlled by the very machinery that ignored past warnings in the first place. The Madhav Gadgil Committee Report, for instance, predicted just such a scenario if the government did not take serious steps to control unplanned development propelled by corrupt politicians and avaricious businessmen and industrialists.

Disasters such as this one can bring out the best as well as the worst in

people. It can bring people together, or it can widen the fissures and reward those whose deeds are to some extent responsible for creating the catastrophe.

We have seen how during other disasters, like the Tsunami, or Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, ruthless developers moved in to try and take over the lands and homes of the most vulnerable people. Here in India, sadly, various forces are at work, doing their best to spread poison and disaffection between communities, at a time when there should only be love and concern. Fortunately, the people of Kerala have never fallen prey to this, and are unlikely to now, in their moment of grief and hardship.

We hope and trust that in the days and weeks to come, while people try to put their devastated lives back together, the Kerala government will pay special attention to its most disadvantaged people, in particular dalits and forest-dwelling Adivasi people who do not have the power or the means to elbow themselves to the front of the queue for aid and relief.

It will not be enough for us to rue the past. Rebuilding and rehabilitation cannot be taken to mean a return to business as usual. We will have to take steps to correct the environmental imbalance we have created. If not, God's Own Country will cease to be fit for human habitation. For all its fury, perhaps the 2018 flood is only a very gentle warning.

[The week](#)

Welcome to the Next Deadly AIDS Pandemic

26 August 2018, by Laurie Garrett

The 2016 optimism that fueled a United Nations declaration that the end of AIDS was near has been replaced by a gnawing fear among experts. If properly treated with available drugs, today's 37 million infected people no longer face mortal illness as did their counterparts in the pre-treatment days of the 1980s and 1990s. [1] That much is true.

But given the rest of the equation, it's remarkable that the mood in Amsterdam isn't one of panic. Danger surely looms.

For years, humanity had the virus on the run, and death tolls plunged to joyously low levels. But the disease is now poised, for the first time in recent memory, to add massively to its global death toll of 35 million since 1981. Three factors are contributing to its runaway resurgence: flawed public health strategy, rapidly shifting demography, and diminished resources.

A flawed strategy for HIV control

Let's start with strategy. In 1996, researchers from multiple institutions and pharmaceutical companies announced the discovery that a combination of drugs, taken daily, could drive HIV levels down so dramatically that the treated individuals could live normal lives. And more than a decade ago, it was shown that the anti-HIV drugs worked so well that viruses were forced into hiding in parts of the body from which they couldn't spread to other people sexually, through shared needles or blood, or in utero from mother to child.

A worldwide strategy for HIV control was set upon, aiming to place all HIV-positive people on the drugs, both to spare their lives and to stop the spread of the virus. [2] The year 2030 was set as the world's deadline for halting the spread of HIV, stopping AIDS deaths, and having the first

generation since 1980 born and raised completely free from infection. To make the dream a reality, a cocktail of anti-HIV drugs was manufactured cheaply, bringing the annual cost down from a 1996 high of well over \$10,000 per person to less than \$75. And a multibillion-dollar infrastructure was created to find infected individuals, provide them with those drugs, and monitor their health.

But the strategy was a gamble. The drugs didn't cure anybody—HIV still lurks in the bodies of the nearly 22 million treated individuals. Any interruption in taking the medicine allows hidden viruses to flood into the individual's bloodstream, endangering the health and survival of the patient and making him or her a contagious risk to others. War, a transport breakdown, government financial glitches, loss of international donor support, patient migration, individual forgetfulness—hundreds of personal, financial, and political factors can interrupt treatment.

Moreover, 15 million people are still untreated and therefore infectious to others. Worse, most of these individuals are unaware that they carry the virus, do not see any reason to get a HIV test, and are unlikely to take precautions to protect others, such as using condoms during sex. As a result, the pandemic is continuing to grow. Last year, 940,000 people died of HIV-related causes, while 1.8 million were newly infected with HIV.

And new infections are increasingly showing up in forms that are very hard to treat because the strains of HIV spreading today are more likely to be resistant to those \$75-a-year treatments. Drug resistance forces the use of more expensive medicines, and the supply chain for second- and third-line treatments in poorer countries is minimal, in some cases nonexistent. When an individual is infected with a strain of HIV that is already resistant to available drugs, all aspects of the patient's treatment and survival are affected.

Between 2014 and 2016, the World Health Organization (WHO) surveyed new infections in 11 poor countries, finding in six of the countries more than 10 percent were drug resistant. [3] 63-nation survey funded by WHO and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation found anywhere from 6 to 11 percent of new infections involved drug-resistant forms of HIV, and the trend was dire, with resistance increasing as high as 23 percent annually. [4] Once individuals were put on their daily treatments, in 2017 failure rates due to drug resistance were as high as 90 percent in some countries, meaning new infections in those regions could no longer be controlled with the \$75-a-year first-line therapies. [5] The first such survey conducted in Cameroon, recently published, found that the majority of patients failing their primary treatments—up to 88 percent of them—were infected with resistant strains of HIV, and overall drug resistance rates in the West African nation in 2018 approach 18 percent. [6]

Meanwhile, preventing HIV infection has fallen off the priority list, both in funding and individual action. A new UNAIDS-Lancet Commission report on defeating AIDS calls for an all-fronts urgent increase in prevention efforts worldwide. [7] Rates of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)—syphilis, gonorrhea, chlamydia, herpes, various forms of hepatitis—are skyrocketing, especially among young gay men in Europe and North America and heterosexual youth in much of sub-Saharan Africa, often in antibiotic-resistant forms. [8] [9] [10] [11] A type of essentially incurable gonorrhea—so-called XDR, or extensively drug resistant—has emerged in Australia and the United Kingdom, prompting alert across the European Union. If sexually active young adults were using condoms and following the sorts of safe sex guidelines that would protect them from HIV, these other STD trends would not be the new normal. [12]

The demography challenge

Demographics are also contributing to the resurgence of AIDS. Sub-Saharan Africa's population is growing at the fastest rate on Earth, projected to increase by 50 percent to 1.8 billion people in 2035 and 2.1 billion by mid-century. [13] The total African population is forecast to top 2.5 billion people by 2050. [14]

The World Bank is urging African governments to aggressively promote family planning in hopes of slowing population growth and minimizing the chaos inherent in a child-dominated society. [15] But in 2018, 62 percent of sub-Saharan Africa's population is under 25 years of age. [16] The 10 youngest societies are all African, with mean ages below 18 years. [17]

If fertility rates remain high regionally over the next 10 years—and there is no reason to believe they will decline appreciably given current policies—tens of millions more sexually active teens and young adults will potentially be exposed to HIV during the 2020s. If drug resistance continues to rise at its current alarming pace, the majority of infections by 2025 will defy first-line affordable treatments.

A deeply disturbing possibility presents itself: the emergence of a second AIDS pandemic, surging out of Africa's most densely populated cities, riding the wave of a youth-dominated population boom, and built atop an already existent base of tens of millions of currently infected adults. Such a pandemic would dwarf the scale of today's AIDS crisis.

The resource crunch

According to a newly released report from UNAIDS, the current roughly \$19 billion in spending on HIV prevention, care, and treatment is about half of what funding is needed to reach the 2030 HIV eradication goal. [18] Dependency on external donors is acute, with the United States

responsible for the lion's share of financing. [19] Sadly, net funding for HIV efforts flatlined. [20] It is inconceivable that countries with minimal tax bases and majorities of populations living on less than \$3 a day will be able to muster the resources to tackle their epidemics without outside help.

So the race is on, pitting the treatments and an inadequately funded multibillion-dollar global public health apparatus against rising drug resistance and an imminent tidal wave of African youngsters maturing into their sexually active teens and early 20s.

The UNAIDS-Lancet Commission reckons that a minimum of \$36 billion a year will be required to win the race against rising drug resistance and surging youth populations. [21] Yet eight out of 14 donor countries have reduced their support over the last few years, in some cases drastically. [22] And U.S. funding via the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) is expected to decline amid cutbacks in foreign aid and global health by the Trump administration. [23] A "dangerous complacency" has set in, fueled in part by exuberance over the use of anti-HIV drugs as the equivalent of morning-after pills, taken by sexually active youth in lieu of using condoms or avoiding unsafe sexual encounters. [24] For millions of young people around the world, this strategy has spawned a sort of collective shrug about the risks of HIV. [25]

Many in the leadership of global HIV efforts blame overly optimistic messaging for high-level complacency and declines in funding. As Chris Beyrer, the former president of the International AIDS Society, said, "We have done ourselves a disservice by selling to a policymaker or donor audience that we have this problem solved when we haven't." [26]

But the two greatest resource needs receive little rhetorical or financial attention: a vaccine and a cure. No matter how optimistic the assumptions made in models forecasting the mid-21st-century status of the world's pandemic, it is impossible to imagine global control of the virus continuing

to rest primarily on lifelong, daily drug treatment for tens of millions of people. If current new infection trends hold, by 2030 another 22 million people will be infected. There are 37 million living with HIV today, dying at a rate of about 1 million a year. If that trend holds, and treatment isn't radically expanded, 12 million will die by 2030. Combined, this could mean that nearly 50 million people will require daily treatment by 2030, and millions of them will be infected with strains that defy the cheap drugs.

Even that figure may be wildly optimistic, as there is no way to calculate the impact that Africa's demography change might have on youthful sexual exploration or other mass behavior changes that might favor viral transmission. The future seems horribly grim.

But over the nearly four decades since HIV was discovered, revolutions have unfolded in basic biology. Not only has the entire human genome been sequenced, but there are now commercial kits that allow one to decipher a human genome in a matter of hours for less than \$1,000. The gene-editing technology CRISPR and other innovations in manipulation of genetic material make it possible to alter the DNA and RNA of microbes at the single-nucleotide level with precision. The very tools that bacteria have used for billions of years to fend off invading viruses similar to HIV are now being refined for medical purposes. And researchers are characterizing the interactions between microbes that reside inside the human body and its highly complex immune system, conjuring almost daily revelations about how the body's own cells and biochemistry can be programmed to fight cancers, heart disease-inducing plaques, genetic disorders, and, yes, infections.

Humanity's war with AIDS has reached a dangerous, critical juncture, forcing a collective reappraisal of strategies used to treat the infected and prevent spread of the virus. This should be a pivot point for rethinking the scientific mission—its funding, urgency, and directions—bringing fresh vitality and robust energy to the search for an effective immune system response to the constantly mutating,

deadly virus.

The treatment strategy now in use from London to Pretoria must be seen as an opportunity to buy the world

time, saving lives, until a technology that truly vanquishes the HIV threat is discovered and put to use. But the sands of time are pouring through the pandemic hourglass. Humanity will have betrayed today's children if they

grow up to face the same small set of options to protect themselves from infection as 20-somethings today.

[Foreign Policy](#)

Yemen's turn

25 August 2018, by **Tariq Ali**

In the event, Washington has relentlessly targeted national sovereignty in those parts of the Middle East where it still exists. Countries that have resisted total submission to American hegemony, imposed directly or via local relays, are being dismantled. Regime change is accompanied by massive destruction and loss of life, followed by *de facto* partition along ethno-religious lines and the entry of giant corporations—some entrusted with rebuilding cities bombed by the us and its Euro-allies, others going for the oil—and all this in the midst of a generalized political chaos under the watch of the us and Israeli military.

The Arab Spring, numerically strong but politically weak, failed to break this destructive dynamic. With the corpse of Arab nationalism in a state of advanced decay and the principal opposition, the Muslim Brotherhood, desperate for a deal with Washington, the 2011 uprisings were easily confiscated by the US to further its own aims in the region. Despite its many national peculiarities, the ruinous war in Yemen has to be viewed in this context. For the past three years, a military coalition spearheaded by Saudi Arabia and the UAE, but with critical diplomatic, logistical and intelligence support from Obama and Trump, has wracked the poorest country in the Middle East, devastating its infrastructure and blockading its ports in an effort to bludgeon the 27 million inhabitants of this mountainous and mostly arid land—who rely on imports for 70 per cent of their food—into submission to the dictates of foreign powers. Helen

Lackner's *Yemen in Crisis* opens with a horrific description of the havoc they have wrought. “By mid-2017 Yemen faced total humanitarian disaster, its first famine since the 1940s and the world's worst cholera epidemic.” The situation was unprecedented and avoidable: both famine and cholera were “the result of a civil war dramatically worsened by foreign intervention”.

It's been a long journey for Lackner from the hopes and struggles of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) in the seventies to the neoliberal wreckage that is today's Republic of Yemen. A research associate at SOAS's Middle East Institute and an independent consultant on rural development, Lackner has lived and studied in Yemen for long periods beginning with her arrival in Aden, capital of the PDRY, as a young SOAS-trained anthropologist and linguist, to practise her Arabic and conduct fieldwork in the only socialist state in the Arab world. Her supportive but not uncritical assessment, *PDR Yemen: Outpost of Socialist Development in Arabia*, appeared in 1985. She also produced a careful study of Yemen's powerful neighbour, *A House Built on Sand: A Political Economy of Saudi Arabia* (1978)—“written, as she puts it, “from the point of view of the welfare of the Saudi Arabian population, not that of Western capitalism”. All of this accumulated experience lies behind the matchless geopolitical profile of contemporary Yemen—its political conflicts, its economic structures, and, above all, its people—that she has now

provided. She knows the country at least as well, and in some respects better than the gangs in Foggy Bottom and Whitehall, not to mention Mossad operatives or the other spooks of the “international community” based in Riyadh. *Yemen in Crisis* patiently traces the complex network of influences and rivalries which intertwine on the branching rope that constitutes Yemeni national consciousness—a rope that outside military intervention has now severed.

On a peninsula teeming with petty emirates and the pampered scions of the House of Saud, Yemen has always stood out. It has been under republican rule for half a century, divided into two states until 1990. In the North, Nasserite nationalists triumphed over the Saudi-backed Imamate in 1970 after a tragic conflict. In the South, communists and socialists ejected the British from the port-city of Aden, which commands the entrance to the Red Sea through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait. Cold War competition resulted in massive inflows of aid from the West and the Soviet Union, helping to build a strong social infrastructure in both territories. Remittances from the more than one million Yemenis working abroad, mainly in Saudi Arabia, were also vitally important.

The PDRY pushed through land reforms and education for all, breaking the traditional shackles on the advancement of women. When I visited Aden many years after the regime's demise, I met a number of women who mourned for the old state and were angered by the renewed

pressure on them to wear the hijab. Lackner's retrospective in *Yemen in Crisis* chimes with their recollections. "Life for ordinary citizens was reasonably good, with jobs and incomes that enabled them to achieve an acceptable standard of living, to eat correctly and to finance basic necessities.' This comes with a crucial caveat: "By contrast, involvement in politics was inadvisable and a sure way of reducing one's life expectancy rather substantially.'

The implosion of the PDRY in the late 1980s paralleled the disintegration of its sponsors in the Soviet bloc, albeit in more dramatic fashion. There was a shoot-out at the Central Committee, two rival factions which belonged to different tribal groups literally fighting for power—not unlike the strife in Afghanistan a decade earlier, when an intra-left battle triggered a Soviet military intervention and US-sponsored Mujahideen resistance, with tragic results for the country: the Americans still grip Afghanistan by the throat. In the Yemeni case, as in the German, disintegration of the communist regime at the endpoint of the Cold War allowed the veteran leadership of the capitalist half of the country to dictate the terms for national unification. Sana'a in the North became the capital of a merged Republic of Yemen, with Ali Abdullah Saleh—a wily and repressive leader of North Yemen since 1978 and a veteran of the 1960s military struggle against the Imamate—as president.

Only a matter of months after the new state came into being on 22 May 1990, it was dealt a huge blow by the Bush administration in Washington for refusing to join the assault on Baathist Iraq, following Saddam's invasion of Kuwait—an invasion which the Americans, for all their pious outrage, had declined every opportunity to discourage. Saddam was an ally of Saleh's and also popular with ordinary Yemenis for his anti-Americanism and his Palestinian sympathies. Yemen and Cuba cast the only 'no' votes against the Security Council resolution authorizing the American onslaught against Baghdad. Secretary of State James Baker's baleful reaction to Yemen's temerity at pursuing an independent foreign policy: "That's the most expensive vote they ever

cast.' The Americans promptly terminated their entire \$70 million aid programme, and the Saudis expelled hundreds of thousands of the country's migrant workers on whose earnings so many Yemeni households depended.

Stripped of external means of support, Yemen's economy was plunged into a prolonged crisis. Its GDP fell each year between 1990 and 1995. Saleh was also confronted with a Saudi-sponsored secessionist uprising in the South, where people felt disenfranchised on every level under his regime. Once that had been put down, Saleh turned to the IMF and World Bank for financial assistance. A series of structural-adjustment programmes hammered the poor and did nothing to boost the productive sector. The Washington institutions looked the other way while the proceeds from foreign aid and investment were snaffled by their client state. All the best jobs and juiciest contracts went to Saleh's cronies; "no business could succeed without this group's participation as a partner in the profits', Lackner writes.

Then came 9/11 and the ratcheting up of us military intervention in the Middle East. Perceiving an opportunity, Saleh hurried to Washington to denounce al-Qaeda and pledge Bush Junior his full support. He obtained a \$400 million aid package in return for hosting us Special Forces and acquiescing to airstrikes by Predator drones flown from an American military base in Djibouti. The following year, the first us drone strike outside Afghanistan killed six alleged al-Qaeda operatives in Yemen, including one of the suspected ringleaders of the October 2000 bombing of the USS Cole. In subsequent years, as al-Qaeda activity dropped off, the Bush administration began to lose interest in Yemen. Saleh, anxious to retain his fee, insisted that the country remained under terrorist threat. As if on cue, there was a mass jailbreak of al-Qaeda fighters in Sana'a, followed by a spate of attacks. Four South Korean tourists visiting the ancient city of Shibam, where Pasolini had filmed his version of the Arabian Nights, were killed by a suicide bomber, along with their guide.

Despite such outrages, many people whom I spoke with during a trip to the country in 2010, both within officialdom and outside its ranks, insisted that the presence of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula was very limited. Abdul Karim al-Iryani, a former prime minister and still an adviser to Saleh, smiled mischievously when I asked for a rough estimate of AQAP's strength. I suggested a figure of three or four hundred fighters. "At the maximum', he replied, "the very maximum. The Americans exaggerate greatly. We have other problems, real and more important.' When I visited Shibam in east-central Yemen and asked the mayor if there was an AQAP base in the town, he whispered in my ear: "The AQAP base is in Saleh's palace, just next to his office.'

Certainly the "war on terror' proved most useful to Saleh, providing him with American weaponry and elite us-trained army units for deployment against the far more pressing Huthi insurgency in the far North, which had flickered on and off since 2004. Muhammad al-Maqaleh, a leader of the Yemeni Socialist Party and editor of the party's newspaper, fearlessly documented some of the atrocities committed by government forces as they drove 150,000 villagers from their homes in Operation Scorched Earth, begun in August 2009. For this he was held without trial for four months, tortured and threatened with execution. I wrote at the time that while Sana'a was not Kabul, if the regime continued to use force on this scale, new civil wars seemed probable.

A key factor in Saleh's growing isolation was the postponement of elections, scheduled for 2009 but delayed until 2011. The Yemeni opposition parties were real entities and had to be persistently bullied before they agreed to the change. Saleh added more petroleum to the flames by a crude attempt to alter the constitution that would have enabled him to stand for a third term. By then he had been in power—ruler of the Republic of Yemen and of North Yemen before that—for 33 years. It was hardly a secret that, like his fellow despot in Egypt, he was grooming his son to succeed him. Since multinational contracts involve

the greasing of presidential palms, political succession requires careful handling to ensure that the cash continues to flow into the family coffers. Yemen is not alone in this regard.

It was the local version of the Arab Spring, and the West's panicked response to the unrest, that finally unseated Saleh. In the days after the ouster of Ben Ali in Tunisia on 14 January 2011, the tensions long brewing within Yemeni society spilled out onto the streets. Thousands of demonstrators marched through Sana'a demanding that Saleh should quit: 'Irhal!' (Out!). The protests grew rapidly in size and spread to all parts of the country. Since 70 per cent of the Yemeni population is under 25 years of age, it is unsurprising that the movement was led by the country's youth—interestingly, with the participation of large numbers of women, veiled and unveiled.

On 2 February, Saleh tried to ease the situation by cancelling the constitutional amendments and announcing a government of national unity. But it was too late. Lackner was in the Yemeni capital on 11 February when the crowds exploded with joy at the news of Mubarak's fall. After several more weeks of upheaval, on 18 March, government snipers opened fire on a 'Friday of Dignity' march, killing at least 45 and wounding 200. This massacre provoked a split in ruling circles. Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar, commander of the First Armoured Brigade and formerly a close ally of the president, declared his allegiance to the protestors, as did the leaders of the established opposition parties who had hitherto held aloof.

The sight of such multitudes demanding jobs, incomes, dignity and free and fair elections alarmed the Western powers. Fearful that Yemen might deviate from the 'correct path', i.e. the agenda of the IMF and World Bank, they swung behind a Gulf Cooperation Council initiative which offered Saleh immunity from prosecution if he agreed to stand down. Saleh initially refused to sign. On 3 June, while praying in his palace mosque, he was seriously hurt by a bomb blast. Many expected him to die. He was airlifted to Saudi Arabia for

emergency treatment, where the doctors saved his life—ironic, given that he would shortly become a sworn enemy of the regime. Before that, on 23 November, still in very poor health, he capitulated and agreed to hand power to a transitional government headed by long-serving vice-president Abdu Rabbu Mansur Hadi, a Saleh makeweight from the southern governorate of Abyan.

The elite factions which dominated the transitional administration, Saleh's republican General People's Congress and the Islamist Islah party, proved supremely corrupt and incompetent. One of their last acts in power was to raise diesel prices at the IMF's behest, thereby further antagonizing the mass of the population. Meanwhile, abandoned by the West, Saleh ganged up with the Huthi rebels against whom he had fought a number of inconclusive wars, and together they made a semi-successful bid for power. *Yemen in Crisis* contains an illuminating chapter on the Huthis, a religious revivalist movement within the Zaydi branch of Shi'i Islam led by the sons of Badr al-Din al-Huthi, a notable Zaydi scholar, in the Sa'ada province on the Saudi border, where nationalist and leftist political cultures are virtually non-existent. Zaydis account for a third of the population, but religious sectarianism doesn't fit easily into the Yemeni mould. Closer in some ways to Yemen's Sunni majority than to the clerical orthodoxy in Qom, the Zaydi share mosques with the Sunni and accept some of their rituals and the teachings of their legal schools. The distinguishing ideological feature of Huthism is that sada—'descendants of the Prophet'—have an innate right to rule: a view, it should be pointed out, that was not espoused by the Prophet, who was in favour of caliphs being elected by the ummah. However, Huthi leaders insist that they do not favour bringing back an imam from the old family, and the assertion of hereditary links to the Prophet is little more than a device to re-empower the Zaydi tribes on whom the old Imamate had been based. The Zaydi were integrated into the power structures of North Yemen, but the Anschluss of 1990 resulted in new priorities and they found themselves frozen out. Though a Zaydi himself, Saleh

angered the community by allowing Sunni Salafism to put down roots in Dammaj in the Zaydi heartland, to appease the Saudis.

Even after resigning from the presidency, Saleh retained a lot of support within the security services, which had been shielded from democratic reform by the Americans. In September 2014, Huthi militias took over government buildings in the capital while the army stood by. Hadi fled to Aden and pleaded with Riyadh and Abu Dhabi for military assistance. The cash-rich Saudis and Emiratis proceeded to assemble an alliance of biddable Middle Eastern and African states—Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar, until it found itself on the receiving end of Saudi wrath; plus Eritrea, Morocco, Senegal, Somalia and Sudan—'acting in the name of Hadi's government in exile. The first Saudi air strikes were launched on 26 March 2015 to prevent Aden falling to Saleh's Republican Guards. 'Without the intervention of the Saudi-led coalition', Lackner observes, 'there is little doubt that the Huthi-Saleh troops would have taken control of the whole country in short order'.

The present conflict in Yemen, therefore, is less a civil war than a proxy one. The Huthis receive a modest degree of external support from Tehran in the form of money and training. Saudi military interventionism on this scale is relatively new and linked to the palace coup which has seen Mohammed bin Salman, favourite son of the new king, make a bid for personal power with Washington's strong backing. He has found a willing collaborator in Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the Sandhurst-trained crown prince of Abu Dhabi. Obama gave bin Salman the green light to do as he pleased in Yemen in order to salve Saudi grievances over the US nuclear deal with Iran. The Yemeni debacle may well become the first nail in the crown prince's political coffin.

For what ensued was not a Saudi blitzkrieg but a bloody stalemate. 'The military intervention of the Saudi-led coalition failed to restore to power the transitional government, and turned a political and

humanitarian crisis into a catastrophe', Lackner argues. 'Liberated' from Saleh-Huthi control, southern Yemen is a morass of competing militias under loose Emirati supervision. There are almost daily protests in Aden at the lack of basic services and the non-payment of salaries and pensions. Trump's defence secretary, James Mattis, hailed the UAE as a 'little Sparta' for the exploits of its special forces in the US's disastrous war in Afghanistan. But since 45 Emirati soldiers were killed on 5 September 2015 when a Huthi missile struck an ammunition depot in the Marib governate, east of Sana'a, the brave Spartans have increasingly preferred to let local paramilitaries and foreign mercenaries, including ex-Colombian military, do their fighting for them. They have built up extremely abusive 'Security Belt' Salafi militias, along with secessionist forces, prompting an impotent Hadi kept under virtual house arrest in Riyadh to accuse them of mounting a coup against his authority. AQAP has swelled to a force of several thousand amid the chaos, the Saudi Royal Air Force turning a blind eye to the group's stunning capture of the eastern coastal city of Mukalla in the opening stages of the war. Meanwhile most of the more populous north of the country including the capital, Sana'a remains under Huthi control, despite the pulverizing of civilian areas by Saudi bombers. The Saudis are also supporting Islah militias, including Ali Mohsen and the remnants of his First Armoured Brigade, in the northern governates of Mareb and Al Jawf on the eastern flank of Huthi-controlled territory.

Though the Saudis cry foul about alleged Iranian missile shipments to the Huthis, their own far more formidable military arsenal depends almost entirely on gunrunning from North America and Europe. Drawing on data from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute for the period 2001 to 2016, Yemen in Crisis establishes the US as easily the largest arms supplier to Riyadh, followed by the former colonial powers, Britain and France. Lackner suggests that all previous arms sales are 'reduced to insignificance' by the \$110 billion worth of deals

flaunted by Trump on his visit to Riyadh in May last year, but this is a false comparison: the 'deal' reached by Trump represents merely a Saudi wish-list based on sales conversations dating back to the Obama administration. According to William Hartung of the Washington-based Center for International Policy, Obama offered to sell over \$115 billion worth of weapons to the Saudis in 42 separate deals. For a long time now, Riyadh has been able to buy whatever it wants in the American shop. Obama's record is indistinguishable from Trump's in this respect.

As Lackner points out, both administrations have also provided essential targeting information and in-air refuelling for Saudi-coalition aircraft. By February 2017 the Pentagon had logged 1,800 tanker sorties transferring 54 million pounds of fuel. 'Given that many of the bombing sorties could not happen without this action, the us Air Force must be considered an active participant in the air strikes, most likely including strikes which have killed civilians and destroyed civilian facilities', she comments. A large majority of the 16,400 civilian casualties recorded by the UN between March 2015 and May 2018 are attributed to coalition airstrikes. Scores have also been killed by us aircraft and drones ostensibly targeting aqap forces. As the penholder for Yemen in the UN Security Council, the British governments of David Cameron and Theresa May have ensured that numerous war crimes go uncensured.

The continuing machinations of the Western and Gulf powers play into a cut-throat competition for cash and other resources on the ground which has fractured the political forces on both sides of the conflict. In late January this year, forces loyal to the Southern Transitional Council, a UAE-sponsored secessionist front, surrounded the presidential palace in Aden to demand the resignation of the Hadi-appointed government on grounds of corruption and mismanagement. Weeks earlier, there had been fierce clashes in Sana'a provoked by Saleh's reneging on his alliance with the Huthis, in response to overtures from Riyadh and Abu

Dhabi. Saleh and several other senior GPC figures were killed in the fighting. Saleh's nephew Tareq took the remnants of his late uncle's forces over to the Saudi coalition, which is currently attempting to force its way up the Red Sea coast. On 14 June, Saudi and UAE aircraft began pounding Huthi positions in and around Yemen's largest port. Capture of Hodeida would tighten their stranglehold over the 'rebel' north, sealing off the Huthis from the sea.

The clamour of mass protests these days is often drowned out by aerial bombing and constant drone attacks. Despite all this, a famished and tormented people still mobilize in large numbers to protest against the Saudi onslaught and against those who supply the coalition with the latest in military hardware: the giant monopolies of the global arms trade in Europe and America; the politicians who lobby for them including the hundred or so Labour MPs who recently refused to support their own frontbench's resolution demanding an end to this bloody trade; and the English judiciary which stamps its imprimatur on the weaponry.

The closing chapters of *Yemen in Crisis* zoom out from the present destruction to analyse longer-term trends in the country's social evolution: the genesis of southern separatism; the warping of social structures under Saleh's patrimonial rule, as access to central-government patronage overrode traditional tribal authority; the mismanagement and over-exploitation of natural resources ground-water reserves could run out in Sana'a at any moment; the gutting of the economy by Washington-consensus austerity; the dynamics of uncontrolled urbanization and rural impoverishment. The discussion has a developmentalist tenor, patiently setting out the myriad challenges that any future Yemeni government will have to confront assuming, that is, that the country holds together. But as the concluding section acknowledges, 'it is very unlikely that Yemen will, at the end of the war, resemble the Republic of Yemen which existed since 1990'. Instead,

it is more likely that an internationally

backed peace agreement will, at best, put an end to the external military intervention, while within Yemen itself, fighting will continue at greater and lesser intensity between numerous small entities over access to the country's very limited natural resources. This could lead to fighting between small groups in the south-west, reminiscent of the rival emirates of the Protectorates period, a Shafi'i-Zaydi split in the northern parts which lack major economic resources and support; while the resource-rich areas might become one or more separate fiefdoms.

Across the Middle East, the imperial powers have seen to it that the democratic gains of the Arab Spring – what a misnomer that seems now – proved short-lived. The principal demand of the mass movements was for an end to autocracy. Anti-capitalism, anti-imperialism, cross-border Arab solidarity and freedom for Palestine were scarcely on the agenda, and even this minimal programme has been quashed – except in Tunisia, cradle of the Revolution, although here economic sovereignty has been ceded to the G8 and IMF under the erroneously-named Deauville – partnership'. In Egypt, a military bloated with billions of dollars from the Pentagon is firmly back in the saddle. Field Marshal Sisi receives a warm welcome in Washington and all

the European capitals while presiding over a state if anything more deeply implicated in torture, arbitrary imprisonment and institutionalized sycophancy than it was in Mubarak's time. In Libya, the original movement for democracy was rapidly taken over by the NATO powers, who bombed the country for seven months, propelling a chaotic conflict which claimed between 20,000 and 30,000 lives. Qaddafi was publicly and brutally lynched without even the show trial put on for Saddam, but to Secretary of State Clinton's obvious satisfaction: 'We came, we saw, he died.' Seven years later, the country remains torn between warring governments and militias, including jihadi groups.

In Syria, likewise, the US flanked by Britain, France, Israel, Turkey and Saudi Arabia moved in very quickly after the irruption of a mass uprising, arming al-Qaeda and other jihadis to take on the Baathist regime. Within weeks, secular forces had been shoved aside. They fled to neighbouring countries or attempted to reach Europe; many drowned in the Mediterranean. With backing from Moscow and Tehran and a surprising degree of local support, given his record, Bashar al-Assad held on. Much of the countryside and all its major cities are back under Baathist control, but Syria has been devastated and the scars go deep. Kurdish illusions that the Pentagon would protect them

against reprisals from Turkey, a NATO ally, have been cruelly dispelled.

The speed with which friends become opponents and then friends again, according to the changing priorities of empire, has made some nostalgic for the simpler dichotomies of the Cold War. These days Russia and China are half-enemies, half-friends. Too large to swallow, their sovereignty is more or less intact. When it comes to the states surrounding them, it is a different matter altogether. Here the route to American hegemony is mapped: any wayward country can be reduced to the abject condition of Yemen. Despite many acts of resistance to the New World Order at one level or other, in various parts of the globe, any structural alteration to us-centred capitalism remains only a hope. Centuries ago, Goethe's Faust posed the question of agency:

Who shall achieve it?
Gloomy question
To which destiny wears
a mask;
When on the day of great
misfortune,
Bleeding, all mankind falls dumb.
But revive yourselves with new songs,
Stay no longer bowed:
For earth engenders them
again
Just as always it has done.

[New Left Review](#)

Building the movement of the working class and the dispossessed

24 August 2018, by Amandla!

It's also worth thinking about the actual numbers of people, not just percentages. In 1994, 4.7 million South Africans were unemployed. Now, as we approach the 25th anniversary of the first democratic election, that number has almost doubled to 8.9 million. And we suspect that a large number of the 2,577,000 people designated as "homemakers"

are unemployed women who want a job. This would mean well over 10 million unemployed people.

The dramatic increase in unemployment has had a severe impact on poverty. As of 2015, with a poverty line set at R441 per person per month, 30.4 million people were living in poverty. That's 55.5 of the

population – an increase of more than 3 million from the 27.3 million (53.2) reported in 2011. Almost a quarter of South Africans "who were not poor" when surveyed eight years ago were "either poor or severely poor" in 2015. And 28 of those who were "poor" in 2008 now live in "severe poverty".

So the situation is getting worse, not

better. And then there's inequality. South Africa maintains the dubious privilege of being the most unequal country of all. 10 of the population earn around 60 of all the income. And that is nothing compared to the figures for wealth - ownership of property, pension funds and shares in listed companies. New tax and survey data from the University of Cape Town calculates that 10 of the South African population own at least 90 of South African wealth.

Social crisis

Under the weight of South Africa's unemployment crisis, the social fabric of society is collapsing giving, rise to a pandemic of violence, crime, gangsterism, and substance abuse. The recording recently of several cases of cannibalism and an increase in the amount of brutal violence against women and children only confirm the depth of the social crisis facing the country.

It is, of course the most vulnerable sectors of society that bear the brunt of these statistics. For example, violence against women has become endemic. It is estimated that a woman is raped every 26 seconds. That means a staggering 1.2 million rapes committed every year in South Africa! Even more horrific is the estimate that on average a woman is killed by an intimate partner every eight hours! Clearly, not just the legacy of Apartheid, but the worsening socio-economic crisis has created a nightmare of barbarism for the very poor majority. Collapsing state institutions, services and infrastructure have produced this ticking time bomb.

Government's response: no more money for the poor

After the recent cabinet lekgotla, Cyril Ramaphosa said that government will "move with urgency to develop and implement a stimulus package to ignite growth that will lead to the creation of jobs, especially for young people and women." Nice words. Until

you read the next sentence:

"This stimulus package will be based on existing budgetary resources and the pursuit of new investments while remaining committed to fiscal prudence." So, the "urgent" response of government will be to stimulate the economy whilst spending no more public money. They will "increase investment in public infrastructure" whilst spending no more public money. They will "increase support for entrepreneurship and employment opportunities for youth and women, as well as small and medium businesses", whilst spending no more public money.

Where will this miracle come from? Of course - Trevor Manuel and his gang of four will wander the world looking for R100 billion of foreign direct investment. Private overseas capital will come riding, to the rescue like the US cavalry in a Hollywood movie.

We are being taken for fools

We know that there is plenty OF local, South African capital which prefers to invest in exotic financial instruments rather than invest in public infrastructure. So foreign capital will come where local capital fears to tread? A recent Hollywood movie was called "La La Land". It seems that is where the President is living.

Creating our own "new dawn"

The unfortunate truth of our situation is that poor and working people have to look to themselves and their own efforts to wake to a "new dawn." "There have been one or two glimmers recently of possible resistance to this attack on living standards and dignity and, more importantly, of building a force that can mobilise to take power in order to steer in a direction that is more realistic for the 10 million unemployed and their families. Firstly, there was the Saftu inspired Working Class Summit. Then the TotalShutdown movement which is mobilising against the violence against

women. And in the Western Cape there is the forthcoming launch congress of UniteBehind, an initiative aimed at uniting popular forces for equality, social justice and against corruption.

The Summit

The working class summit represents a significant step forward. It was a major achievement to bring 147 organisations together in one space in a very short period of time. A programme of mass action was agreed, centred on:

â€¢ Building a mass, independent working class movement democratically, from the bottom-up and building working class power to defeat capitalism.

â€¢ Keeping communication between all the 147 organisations on their struggles and campaigns so that no struggle is isolated.

â€¢ Ensuring the launch within the next three months of provincial structures and local assemblies across the country.

â€¢ Helping to reunite the student struggle for free, decolonised education.

â€¢ Mobilising for a three-day general strike and mass occupation of all cities in October 2018 - the "siyalala edolophini" strike.

â€¢ Mobilising a single day for mass occupation of land and an end to evictions of farmworkers, backyard dwellers and informal sector workers.

#TotalShutdown

Given the scale of the violence against women and the failure of most progressive social movements and labour formations to make this issue central to their programmatic work, this initiative could serve as a significant means to unite a broad popular movement in fighting sexism and gender-based violence. We agree with the #TotalShutdown movement's decision to target the economy in its mobilisation. Bringing the economy to

a halt would catapult the demands of the movement at a national level. We can understand the organisers' desire to make the marches an exclusive space for women and gender nonconforming persons. This ensures a safe space for those who often face horrific forms of violence and abuse. However, as the movement consolidates, if it truly wants to shut down the economy, it will be necessary to reach out to the broader working class movement and secure the support of both men and women to achieve their objectives. In fact this has already begun, through participation in the Working Class Summit and putting the #TotalShutdown on the Summit's agenda. The unconditional support of the Summit marks a significant step forward in building mass popular support for addressing gender-based violence.

#UniteBehind

This coalition of popular movements, largely based in the Western Cape, was also present at the Working Class Summit through representatives of its co-ordinating structure and through the participation of several member organisations. From 28 to 30 September, #UniteBehind will hold its launching congress. The coalition aims at uniting a range of struggles for social justice, equality and against corruption, that have been largely pursued in an isolated manner. Some important social movements are participating in the process of building #UniteBehind, including Equal Education, the Social Justice Coalition and the exciting Reclaim the City movement. This movement, with the support of Ndifuna Ukwazi, has already occupied two public buildings in Cape Town and created new homes and communities for hundreds of families. It had its launch Congress on

9 August, and it has already taken the initiative to reach out to other forces involved in occupations. With these energies, #UniteBehind can play a very important role in forging the working class unity and militancy discussed at the Working Class Summit and demonstrated by the TotalShutdown movement.

As all of these initiatives demonstrate, the time for isolated set piece events is over. What is now needed is to build sustained mobilisation. To this end, every effort must be made to synergise these initiatives and to use them as a basis to reach out to other formations, such as the other major labour formations, and the faith-based organisations that form a significant part of the lives of working people. We have witnessed a glimmer of what is possible. The challenge now is to build, organise and mobilise.

[Amandla](#)

Samir Amin: a vital challenge to dispossession

23 August 2018, by **Nick Dearden**

Samir Amin (1931-2018) was one of the world's greatest radical thinkers – a 'creative Marxist' who went from Communist activism in Nasser's Egypt, to advising African socialist leaders like Julius Nyerere to being a leading figure in the World Social Forum.

Samir Amin's ideas were formed in the heady ferment of 1950s and '60s, when pan-Africanists like Kwame Nkrumah ran Ghana and Julius Nyerere Tanzania, when General Nasser was transforming the Middle East from Amin's native Egypt and liberation movements thrived from South Africa to Algeria.

Africa looked very different before the International Monetary Fund destroyed what progress had been

made towards emancipation and LiveAid created a popular conception of a continent of famine and fecklessness. Yet through these times, Amin's ideas have continued to shine out, denouncing the inhumanity of contemporary capitalism and empire, but also harshly critiquing movements from political Islam to Eurocentric Marxism and its marginalisation of the truly dispossessed.

Global power

Amin believed that the world capitalism – a rule of oligopolies based in the rich world – maintains its rule through five monopolies – control of technology, access to natural resources, finance, global media, and the means of mass destruction. Only

by overturning these monopolies can real progress be made.

This raises particular challenges for those of us who are activists in the North because any change we promote must challenge the privileges of the North vis-à-vis the South. Our internationalism cannot be expressed through a type of humanitarian approach to the global South – that countries in the South need our 'help to develop'. For Amin, any form of international work must be based on an explicitly anti-imperialist perspective. Anything else will fail to challenge structure of power – those monopolies which really keep the powerful powerful.

Along with colleagues like Andre Gunder Frank, Amin see the world

divided into the 'centre' and the 'peripheries'. The role of peripheries, those countries we call the global South, is to supply the centres - specifically the 'Triad' of North America, Western Europe and Japan - with the means of developing without being able to develop themselves. Most obviously, the exploitation of Africa's minerals on terms of trade starkly favourable to the centre will never allow African liberation, only continual exploitation.

This flies in the face of so much 'development thinking', which would have you believe that Africa's problems come from not being properly integrated into the global economy which has grown up over the last 40 years. Amin believes in fact Africa's problem stem from it being too integrated but in 'the wrong way'.

In fact, as long as the monopolies of control are intact, countries of the centre have had few problems globalising production since the 1970s. Sweatshop labour now takes place across the periphery but it hasn't challenged the power of those in the North because of their control of finance, natural resources, the military and so on. In fact, it has enhanced their power by reducing wages and destroying a manufacturing sector that had become a power base for unionised workers.

So there is no point whatever in asking countries of the centre to concede better trading relationships to the peripheries. Amin is also concerned at environmental activism which too often becomes a debate about how countries of the centre manage their control of the world's resources, rather than challenging that control. It is vital that Northern activists challenge the means through which the ruling class in their own society exerts control over the rest of the world.

De-linking

Of course, this is not just a project for activists in the North - far from it. The theory for which Amin is most famous that of 'de-linking'.

De-linking means countries of the periphery withdrawing from their exploitative integration in the global economy. In a sense it is de-globalisation, but it is not a form of economic isolation - something which African socialist leaders too readily fell into. Rather it means not engaging in economic relationships from a point of weakness.

Amin argues that Southern countries should develop their economy through various forms of state intervention, control of money flowing in and out of their financial sectors and promoting trading with other Southern countries. Countries must nationalise financial sectors, strongly regulate natural resources, 'de-link' internal prices from the world market, and free themselves from control by international institutions like the World Trade Organisation. Whatever problems come with nationalised industries, it is the only possible basis for a genuinely socially controlled economy going forward.

After 30 years of being told that their problems would be solved by exporting more, privatising their natural resources and liberalising their financial sectors, many developing countries would today do well to heed Amin's advice. Instead, too many countries have bought into a de-politicised narrative which posits ideologically loaded terms like 'good governance', 'poverty' and 'civil society' carefully disguising questions as to how poverty happened, what interests governance serves, or the legitimacy of organisations claiming to speak on behalf of the dispossessed.

Amin did not believe that the 'rise' of China, India and other emerging economies has in any way broken the power of the oligopolies, in fact that power has only become more concentrated. But there have been important changes. Imperialist powers have realised competition between themselves is not helpful and have created a sort of collective imperialism which is expressed through institutions like the WTO and IMF.

Capitalism, 'a parenthesis in history'

Capitalism is experiencing a profound long-term crisis to which Amin believes it has no solution short of political barbarism. He describes this form of capitalism as 'senile'.

This crisis is characterised by an increased dependence on finance, which means less and less money is being made from productive activities, and more from simple 'rent'. It is a far more direct means of stealing wealth from the majority of the world. The accompanying form of politics means that democracy has been reduced to a farce in which people are spectators in an elite drama - that is when they're not fulfilling their proper role of consuming.

Capitalism necessarily requires an ongoing process of dispossession so that it can accumulate and continue to expand. Capitalism could not have developed without the European conquest of the world - the availability so many 'spare' resources was vital. The safety valve for many of those dispossessed from European land was the 'new world' which allowed mass emigration - though of course others died in droves, witness the Irish potato famine.

So as much as many of the dispossessed might aspire to the lives of those in advanced capitalist countries, it is simply not possible. Nor can traditional Marxists be correct when they say capitalism is a necessary stage on the path to socialism - a view which Amin describes as 'Eurocentric'.

Industry cannot incorporate more than a small fraction of humanity, but it does require the resources that that humanity depends upon. So the only way that capitalism can move forward is through the creation of a 'slum planet' - a sort of 'apartheid at the world level'. Amin sees the dispossession of the peasantry across the peripheral countries will become the central issue of the twenty-first century.

This is one reason why Amin see the role of the peasantry in the South - almost half of humanity after all - as key to determining the future. The strength of movements around food sovereignty, against land grabbing and supporting the rights of indigenous peoples, give support to this theory. But for Amin, agriculture is not merely a big opportunity, the existence of the peasantry presents capitalism with an insurmountable challenge.

Amin believes the road to socialism depends on reversing this trend of dispossession meaning, at national and regional levels, protecting local agricultural production, ensuring countries' have food sovereignty and de-linking internal prices from world commodity markets. This would stop the dispossession of peasants and their exodus into the towns.

Only this revolution in the way the land is seen, treated and access can lay the basis for a new society. This also means ditching the idea of 'growth' as it is spoken about today and by which all world economies are judged, which really benefits only a minority of the world population. The rest of humanity is "abandoned to stagnation, if not pauperisation".

The long road to socialism

Perhaps this makes Samir Amin sounds rather idealistic in his approach, but this is far from true. Amin explicitly rejects the idea of a '24 hour revolution' - a single insurrectionary act which ushers in a period of socialism. Indeed he accepts there may well be a need to use private, even international capital, in order to diversify Southern economies. The important thing is control. For this reason Amin also refuses to use the phrase "socialism of the 21st

century" focussing on the need for "the long route of the transition to socialism".

But that's not to say there have not been significant victories. Interestingly, Amin is less interested in developments in Latin America, which he believes contain risks of repeating the mistakes of many national liberation movements on the 1950s and 60s in becoming a form of "popular statism". Amin is more interested in Nepal as an possible future model to look towards. He also sees the Chinese revolution as an incredibly significant event in directly challenging the basis of capitalism and in the struggle for democratic socialism, most especially in its "abolition of the private property of land" and the formation of powerful communes and collectives.

Amin's somewhat romantic view of the Chinese revolution is certainly challenging to Western sensibilities, but his underlying view that the formation of democracy must go beyond a narrow political project, and that peasants - and especially women - through collective organisations, might be better placed than Western individualists to define a really progressive vision of democracy needs to be properly taken on board by activists.

Enlightenment

Perhaps Amin's central thesis is somewhat obvious, but it's often forgotten - that a true revolution must be based on those who are being dispossessed and impoverished. But he goes further in undermining the assumption that any thinking emerging from the South will lack enlightenment, or that a lack of enlightenment should be excused.

He believes the Enlightenment was humanity's first step towards

democracy, liberating us from the idea that God created our activity. He has caused controversy in his utter rejection of political Islam. This ideology, embedded for example in Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, obscures the real nature of society, including by playing into the idea that the world consists of different cultural groups which conflict with each other, an idea which helps the centre control the peripheries.

Amin's view is that organisations like the Muslim Brotherhood, with their cultural and economic conservatism, are actually viewed positively by the US and other imperialist governments. And he doesn't limit his critique to Islam either, launching similar criticism on political Hinduism practiced by the BJP in India and Political Buddhism, expressed through the Dalai Lama.

Creative Marxism

Samir Amin describes himself as a 'creative Marxist' - "to begin from Marx but not to end with him or with Lenin or Mao" - which incorporates all manner of critical ways of thinking even ones "which were wrongly considered to be 'alien' by the dogmas of the historical Marxism of the past."

These views are surely more relevant today than when Amin started writing. A creative Marxism takes proper account of the perspective and aspirations of the truly dispossessed in the world, break out of historical dogmas and rejects attempts to stick together a broken model, but equally sees the impossibility of overthrowing this model tomorrow.

[27]

August 13, 2018

[Red Pepper](#)

A Brief History of the Relations between the

World Bank, the IMF, the US Government and Nicaragua

23 August 2018, by **Éric Toussaint**

"Thus one of the largest developing country borrowers, in number of loans, was Nicaragua, a nation with one million inhabitants, controlled by the Somoza family. Washington and the Somozas found their relationship highly convenient. The United States supported the Somozas and the Somozas supported the United States - in votes at the United Nations, in regional councils, and by offering Nicaragua as a base for training and launching the Cuban exile forces that met disaster at the Bay of Pigs in 1961. Between 1951 and 1956 Nicaragua received nine World Bank Loans, and one in 1960. An American military base was established in 1953 from which was launched the successful overthrow, by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), of Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz, who had legalized the Communist Party and threatened to expropriate the assets of the United Fruit Company. Guatemala itself, with three times the population of Nicaragua, and though it was one of the first countries to receive a survey mission (published in 1951), did not obtain a loan until 1955, after the overthrow of its "communist regime'." [28]

On 12 April 1961, just five days before the United States was due to launch a military expedition against Cuba from Nicaraguan territory, [29] the directors of the Bank decided to grant a loan to Nicaragua although fully aware that the money would be used to reinforce the dictator's economic power. It was the price to pay for his support for the assault on Cuba. Below is an excerpt from the official minutes of the discussion between the Bank's directors on this 12 April 1961:

- Mr. [Aron] Broches. *I am told that the Somoza Family is in everything and it would be difficult to find anything in Nicaragua which did not raise this problem.*

- Mr. [Robert] Cavanaugh. *I am concerned that we would appear to be fostering an arrangement under which people will be urged to sell land that the President wants...*

- Mr [Simon] Cargill. *If the project itself is satisfactory I don't believe that the interest of the President is such a problem that the whole thing should be held up...*

- Mr Rucinski. *I agree that it is too late to turn it down.*

- Mr. Aldewereld. *The problem of land ownership and of the Somoza family is an unfortunate one but it is one we have been aware of from the very start and I think it is too late to raise the question now.* [30]

Concerning the attitude of the Bank with regard to the Sandinista regime during the 1980s and the influence that was brought to bear on it by the US government, we quote another excerpt from Catherine Gwin's study: *"A more recent example in which the Bank's refusal to lend clearly coincided with U.S. policy is that of Nicaragua in the 1980s. The reason for the suspension of lending was the accumulation of arrears. However, in September 1984, the Nicaraguan government formally proposed a solution to its arrearage problem."* [31]

Gwin details the concrete proposals formulated by Nicaragua and she explains that although these proposals were acceptable, the Bank made no effort to help the Sandinista regime. She pointed out that this was in contrast to the flexibility adopted by the Bank in respect to other regimes which were allies of the US.

Reminder: While the Somoza clan had held power in Nicaragua since the 1930s thanks to United States' military intervention, on 19 July 1979 a powerful popular movement

overthrew the dictatorship forcing the dictator Anastasio Somoza to flee. The Somoza family had a stranglehold on a huge proportion of the country's wealth and encouraged the implantation of foreign corporations, especially from the US. The people hated them. The World Bank had showered loans on Somoza's dictatorship. After the dictatorship fell, a coalition government brought together the traditional democratic opposition (led by top businessmen) and the Sandinista revolutionaries. The latter made no secret of their sympathy for Cuba or their desire to undertake certain economic reforms (land reform, nationalization of some foreign companies, confiscation of Somoza clan landholdings, a literacy programme...).

Washington had supported Anastasio Somoza to the bitter end but feared that the new government might spread communism in Central America. The Carter administration, in office when the dictatorship was overthrown, did not immediately take an aggressive stance. But things changed overnight when Ronald Reagan moved into the White House. In 1981, he announced his commitment to bring down the Sandinistas. He provided financial and military backing to a rebellion by former members of the National Guard ("Contrarevolucionarios" or "Contras"). The US Air Force mined several Nicaraguan ports. (See box on the condemnation of the United States by the International Court of Justice in The Hague). Faced with such hostility, the Sandinista majority government opted for more radical policies. During the 1984 elections, the first democratic ones in half a century, the Sandinista Daniel Ortega was elected President with 67 per cent of the ballot. The following year, the United States called a trade embargo against

Nicaragua, cutting the country off from foreign investments. The World Bank had put a stop to its loans from the time of the Sandinista presidential election victory. The Sandinistas actively urged the WB to resume its loans. They were even ready to accept a drastic structural adjustment plan. The WB decided not to follow up on this and did not resume the loans until the Sandinista electoral defeat in February 1990, when Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, the US-backed conservative candidate, won the vote.

The condemnation of the United States by the International Court of Justice in The Hague

After Somoza's fall in 1979, the US attempted, by different political, economic and military means, to destabilize and then overthrow the new Sandinista system. This led to a plea by Nicaragua against the US in the International Court of Justice of The Hague which delivered a verdict in 1986 condemning the United States for violation of obligations enforced by international law, in particular the ban on the use of force (article 2 & 4 of the UN Charter) and on attempts against the sovereignty of another state. [32]

It is well worth including the official case overview as published on the ICJ website:

"On 27 June 1986, the Court delivered its Judgment on the merits. The findings included a rejection of the justification of collective self-defence advanced by the United States concerning the military or paramilitary activities in or against Nicaragua, and a statement that the United States had violated the obligations imposed by customary international law not to intervene in the affairs of another State, not to use force against another State, not to infringe the sovereignty of another State, and not to interrupt peaceful maritime commerce. The Court also found that the United States had violated certain obligations arising from a bilateral Treaty of Friendship, Commerce and Navigation of 1956, and that it had committed acts such to deprive that treaty of its object and purpose.

"It decided that the United States was under a duty immediately to cease and to refrain from all acts constituting breaches of its legal obligations, and that it must make reparation for all injury caused to Nicaragua by the breaches of obligations under customary international law and the 1956 Treaty, the amount of that reparation to be fixed in subsequent proceedings if the Parties were unable to reach agreement. The Court subsequently fixed, by an Order, time-limits for the filing of written pleadings by the Parties on the matter of the form and amount of reparation, and the Memorial of Nicaragua was filed on 29 March 1988, while the United States maintained its refusal to take part in the case. In September 1991, Nicaragua informed the Court, inter alia, that it did not wish to continue the proceedings. The United States told the Court that it welcomed the discontinuance and, by an Order of the President dated 26 September 1991, the case was removed from the Court's List."

As we've just seen, in 1991, Violeta Chamorro's government, elected in 1990, discontinued the proceedings and would not demand compensation from Washington.

president in 2006 and took office at the beginning of 2007, the World Bank's and the IMF's attitude was radically different from what it was in the 1980s, and the same applies to Washington's response. Daniel Ortega's regime is now considered to be quite amenable. The agreements that the right-wing governments had passed with the two Bretton Woods financial institutions –the World Bank and the IMF– from 1990 to 2006 were renewed. Ortega's government received loans and proceeded with neoliberal reforms the former governments had launched. In February 2018, the IMF congratulated Daniel Ortega's government. [33] He had decided to implement a counter-reform of the pensions system and social security, which triggered massive demonstrations in April 2018. Ortega withdrew those measures to try and put a stop to the demonstrations but repression had been very harsh with many casualties among demonstrators so the protest movement continued. As for the World Bank, it chose the very moment in April 2018 when his government had just announced neoliberal measures concerning social security to congratulate Ortega on his sound economic policies. [34] We will have to be vigilant about what is going to happen next.

Further reading to better understand the strategic issues at stake through the intervention of the World Bank, the IMF and the US government in the field of "development":

- Eric Toussaint, *The World Bank: a never-ending coup d'État. The hidden agenda of the Washington Consensus*, VAK, 2007.

- Eric Toussaint, *The World Bank – A Critical Primer*, Between the lines, Toronto/Pluto Press, London/David Philips Publisher, Cape Town/CADTM, Liège, 2008.

Eric Toussaint, Doctoral thesis in political science, defended at the universities of Liège and Paris VIII in 2004, [Enjeux politiques de l'action de la Banque mondiale et du Fonds](#)

When Daniel Ortega was again elected

Pakistan elects mini-Trump in military-rigged elections

22 August 2018, by **Farooq Sulehria**

Second-placed Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PMLN), that ruled Pakistan during the previous term from 2013-18, was reduced to 64 (from 126 in 2013). The Pakistan People's Party (PPP), led by the late Benazir Bhutto's widow, Asif Zardari, bagged 43 seats (slightly improving its 2013 tally of 33) as the third largest party. The rest of the seats were won by various small parties and independents including a grassroots Marxist activist, Ali Wazir. The MMA (United Council of Action), a coalition of fundamentalist parties, won 11 seats.

On July 25, voters also voted to elect the four provincial assemblies. While the PTI and the PMLN won almost equal number of seats (PMLN: 127, PTI: 125) in the largest province of Punjab, PPP won a comfortable majority in Sindh province, the second largest in terms of population and the home province of Bhutto dynasty. In Khayber Pakhtoonkhwa (KP) province, PTI retained its simple majority. In Balochistan, largest in land mass but smallest in population, no party was able to command a clear majority, a pattern established since the first general elections in 1970.

Though the election outcome - marred by credible rigging charges (discussed below) hence ridiculed by critics as General Selections - offer a flicker of hope for the left yet the overall outcome is disappointing for country's democratic transition.

Through a military-rigged PTI victory, all powerful generals have staged a soft coup. The election results are disappointing also because a right-wing pro-Taliban and conservative party of the rich, PMLN, has been

replaced by the PTI, another right-wing party of the rich with a similar agenda.

Meantime, the PPP, once a left-reformist project, has decisively shifted to the right. Hence, in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, electoral politics is presently largely a political wilderness from a progressive viewpoint. However, a PMLN victory would have subverted the domination of military. Irony of ironies, the PMLN, led by now-jailed former prime minister, Nawaz Sharif, was catapulted to power in similarly rigged elections in 1990.

The Rise and Fall of the Sharif Dynasty

Mr Sharif was patronised and cultivated as a politician by the Pakistan military to counter the PPP in the late 1980s. Benefitting from military patronage, Sharif not only established an industrial empire as a text book example of idiomatic crony capitalism but by the mid-1990s had founded a political dynasty. His brother, Shahbaz Sharif, was appointed as the Punjab Chief Minister in 1997 while other relatives were assigned positions of power.

Sharif's politics, a toxic mix of religious conservatism with a neoliberal agenda, helped him secure a base in the trading classes and urban petty bourgeoisie. Top corporate houses also benefitted as state assets were sold (gifted would be a more appropriate description) to cronies under the name of

privatisation. Sharif's ability to politically sell his 'mega development projects' such as motorways and bullet trains (the latter luckily never materialised) as magic bullets capable of catapulting Pakistan to the status of an Asian Tiger, only consolidated his appeal among social classes he was trying to woo. Meantime, PPP's embrace of a neoliberal agenda and political capitulations demobilised sections of the working classes and a general atmosphere of depoliticisation only benefitted Sharif. In 1997, he managed a two-thirds majority to become Prime Minister a second time.

However, every time he held the office as a prime minister (1990-93; 1997-99; 2013-17), serious differences with the military cut short his tenure in the office. In 1999, after the military coup led by General Musharraf, Sharif was initially jailed and later - thanks to his good relations with Saudi dynasty - he was exiled to Riyadh along with his entire family (parents, siblings, children).

In 2007, when a mass democracy movement led by lawyers, known as the called advocates movement, humbled Gen Musharraf, the Sharifs returned to the country. However, the PMLN lost national elections to the PPP but gained a majority in the Punjab. Shahbaz Sharif, as Chief Minister, formed the provincial government and once again Sharifs were able to promote certain mega projects as a sign of their development agenda.

Meantime, the federal PPP government, spearheaded by Benazir's notorious widow as President of the country (even though the

constitutional power lies with the prime minister), was making itself scandalously unpopular through its inefficiency and corruption.

Symptomatic of PPP's inefficiency and corruption was country's electricity crisis. There were hours-long power outages on a daily basis (called load-shedding in Pakistani parlance) intermittently spanning over eight to twelve hours. The Sharifs promised to end load-shedding, which had seriously undermined an already poor industrial production besides making daily lives hell. The Sharifs' ability to sell mega dreams won them a simple majority, largely in Punjab, in the 2013 elections. While the younger brother continued as the Punjab chief minister, Nawaz himself was back as Prime Minister for the third time.

While he had estranged the military in the past and was hence a suspect in the eyes of generals, his attempts to normalise relations with India and his efforts to assert civilian supremacy in the matters of foreign policy and economy further antagonised the Pakistan Army's General Headquarters (GHQ).

Through the courts, the military managed to get him disqualified as prime minister in 2017, ten months short of his mandated five-year term. It is not that he was not corrupt. Pakistani politicians and generals often make headlines for their gigantic corruption scams and the Sharifs are no exception. However, Sharif's disqualification was seen by his supporters and many others in the country as a vendetta. He now sits in jail on corruption charges, along with his daughter, Maryam Nawaz Sharif.

While the military-judiciary alliance in Pakistan has historically collaborated to undermine democracy, this time, however, PTI leader Imran Khan, a Pakistani version of Donald Trump, was deployed as a tool to lodge and pursue the corruption cases against Sharif. As a reward, the military rigged elections to ensure a PTI victory. But before a brief on rigging and PTI's politics, a note on Pakistan's military is called for here.

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Wherever you look, the Army

Pakistan can be described as a praetorian state. In this state, the military is the most organised political party that has intermittently ruled the country for about forty years since independence in 1947. It is the largest business conglomerate with stakes in industry, education, tourism, health, retail and banking sector. As an institution, it also is the largest feudal lord in an agrarian country. Of late, it has developed an interest in media and cultural industries and effectively controls the mainstream discourses.

Space will not allow me to adequately delineate Pakistan military's diverse economic and political ventures. The revolutionary poet, Ustad Daman, who was jailed by successive military dictators, aptly summed up the military domination of Pakistani polity long ago:

Pakistan diya mouja ee mouja

Jidhar waikho fouja ee fauja

(Everyday is fair and balmy.

Wherever you look, the Army).

On sensing Sharif's victory in 2013 elections, the military started cultivating Imran Khan, a former cricket star who captained the Pakistani side that won the Cricket World Cup in 1992. Post-retirement, Khan turned to philanthropy which further contributed to his celebrity status.

In 1997, he launched the PTI but remained isolated until 2011 when all of a sudden he began to pull huge crowds. Many suspected a military hand behind his sudden popularity. However, reducing his popularity to the military's manipulation would be a poor analysis.

Large sections of the urban middle classes in white collar jobs, in particular young people (70% of the population is below 30), were disillusioned by both the PPP and the PMLN. While the PMLN has a support base among traders and petty bourgeoisie besides a wide network of patronage in Punjab, jobless educated

youth with university degrees and professionals (doctors, engineers, advocates, teachers, clerks, militarymen) feel marginalised by the PMLN. It is true that the PMLN and the PTI have similar economic and social agenda but command a rather different social base. Also, while PMLN enjoys popularity in Punjab alone, the PTI is popular in the KP province and amongst the urban middle classes in Sindh as well. Most importantly, simplistic PTI discourse that corruption is the mother of all ills and the PTI would rid Pakistan of corruption has struck a chord with its social base.

However, in 2013 Imran Khan's growing popularity placed his PTI in the parliament only on third place (28 mandates) slightly behind the PPP (36 mandates). The PTI did manage to secure a majority in KP province but its performance as a provincial government was at best mediocre.

Meantime, the PMLN government did not perform any better. Yet, the PMLN base did not erode radically. To its credit, the PMLN government rather successfully solved the electricity crisis while the law and order situation also improved in terrorism-hit Pakistan (for the latter, the PMLN can not be credited though). The PMLN looked all set to win 2018 elections. To subvert any such possibility, the military intervened decisively to rig the elections.

Rigging as usual

Ironically, the military is too uncreative to introduce new methods of rigging but resorted to time-tested schemes. First gerrymandering was employed to target the PMLN and the media were coerced to support the PTI. Traditional politicians capable of winning their constituencies, the so-called 'electables', were convinced to join the PTI. Next, the PMLN candidates were forced to change their loyalties. Finally, on the polling day, over three-hundred thousand military men were stationed at the polling stations to ensure peaceful conduct of the elections. However, in at least 50 constituencies, the routine vote-counting processes were not followed. An eerie delay of two days in

election results lent further credibility to the charges of rigging. Not only the PMLN and the PPP have refused to accept the results as credible, many smaller parties have termed the election results fake. Despite media censorship, reports of mass irregularities have been reported by a section of press.

While a clear evidence of post-polling rigging has neither emerged nor will emerge anytime soon owing to a number of technical factors, the factor of pre-poll rigging is well-established and acknowledged by an EU mission that observed the electoral process. Ironically, Khan has contested four elections on the platform of anti-corruption. However, he has come to power through a rigged election as if rigging is not corruption.

Khan's politics

This irony also reveals the hollowness of his anti-corruption crusade. Practically, he has employed anti-corruption sloganeering only to flog his political opponents, notably the Sharfis and the Zardari-Bhutto clan. He never speaks of institutional corruption by the military, judiciary, bureaucracy or the corporate corruption. He refused to remove his billionaire PTI deputy, Jahangir Tareen (who bankrolls PTI politics), when he was disqualified as a member of the parliament on corruption charges in a similar fashion to which Sharif was convicted.

On the economic front, he has a boring neo-liberal agenda. But most dangerously, he is a Taliban sympathiser. The PTI provincial government not merely built a coalition government with Jamaat-e-Islami, it provided lavish financial support to a seminary considered as the Oxbridge of the Taliban.

Khan is a misogynist to the core. Recently, he claimed feminism undermines motherhood. In the past, as a parliamentarian he has opposed the Women Protection Bill that was aimed at providing relief to rape victims. In one case, a woman PTI parliamentarian accused him of sexual harassment.

He is viewed with suspicion by oppressed religious minorities. Symbolic of his anti-minority stance is his support for the blasphemy laws that have been dangerously deployed by religious fanatics not merely to literally lynch members of religious minorities but recently for political gain.

Most importantly, he has brutalised political culture. He does not merely employs verbal abuse (recently declaring PMLN supporters as 'donkeys'), but his party has cultivated an army of trolls that harasses any critic of Khan/PTI on social media. From rape threats aimed at women to death threats, every form of abuse has been deployed to malign critics. And it is not merely xenophobia, misogyny, religious conservatism, and sexual harassment that liken him to Donald Trump. He is also generous with facts.

But amid all the gloom described above there is a hope as country's miniscule but expanding left has made history in this election.

The Left makes History

In the past, a few self-styled Marxists managed to win parliamentary mandates standing for leftwing parties such as the PPP and the National Awami Party (NAP). However, Ali Wazir, made history when he scored a victory on July 25 as an independent. Months ahead of July 25 elections, he began to make national headlines as the leader of a grassroots movement, the Pashtoon Defence Movement (PTM), that emerged in the tribal regions bordering Afghanistan. This region has been a stronghold of the Taliban. His opposition to the Taliban has resulted in the assassination of over ten members of his family, including siblings and uncles.

The region has also been subjected to brutal military operation against the Taliban. Most importantly, it has been an arena for Pakistan's double game in Afghanistan. These events have led to devastation and mass displacement of local communities. A few months ago, a mass movement on the PTM

platform emerged in this region to register protest against the military excesses. Ali Wazir was one of PTM's key leaders. He won the elections in 2013 too but after initial announcement of his victory, the Election Commission announced re-polling in his constituency and through rigging in he was denied the victory.

However, given his mass popularity, he not only won his seat this time but another PTM leader, Mohsin Dawar, also managed to win a seat. There are at least two progressive voices in the present parliament.

Beyond the tribal region, the left fielded over fifty candidates. While the president of Peoples Workers Party (AWP), Fanoos Gujjar, scored over 11000 votes, other leftwing candidates ran spirited election campaigns and for the first time in three decades, the left was able to register a presence even if on the margins.

Conclusion

For the first time in Pakistan's history, two consecutive governments have been changed by way of elections. In many cases, this would have been seen as a case of democratic transition. However, through PTI's rigged election victory, the Pakistan military has staged a soft coup. Therefore, a civilian ascendancy does not seem to enter into the civil-military configuration; a necessary condition for Pakistan's democratic transition.

The jacked-up PTI victory, however, cannot be attributed to military's sleight of vote-counting hand. Pakistani youth, the PTI's mainstay in terms of support, is desperate for a change. But the change promised by the PTI will only reinforce the status quo.

The PTI's Finance Minister, Asad Umar, has announced that he will privatise 200 state owned enterprises in order to secure an IMF bailout package. Secondly, PTI's victory is yet another instance of Trump-style populism's ability to sell neoliberal agenda in a period of acute economic, political and social crisis in the

country. In the case of Pakistan, this agenda was disguised under an anti-corruption discourse.

The crisis of the German government and the EU: an explosive farce

22 August 2018, by **Angela Klein**

"The right to asylum

When we look closely at the compromise that was achieved, it is difficult to discern a victory by Seehofer. A judgment has to be made according to Merkel's criteria; were they unilateral decisions, approved by key EU partners, made at the expense of third parties."

The transit centres of the agreement with Seehofer, which were the bridge for him to remain minister of the interior, are but hotspots or ANKER centres [35]...at the German frontier - with the reservation that refugees who have already been registered in other countries and are not taken back by those countries are to be brought to Austria. But it depends on a corresponding agreement with Austria, which is still written in the stars.

In the transit centres, the Dublin regulations prevail, i.e. all the exceptions intended for passed deadlines, pending lawsuits, the case of relatives present in the country or special regulations for pregnant women. This means that the refugees have a minimum of legal rights which still stand in the way of a fast deportation. Thus Seehofer's wish to make short shrift of the refugees has not been met.

On the other hand, refugees are now not only to be prevented from submitting a request for asylum at airports, but generally in Bavaria (for the moment) since the transit centres are declared as "no man's land" where refugees who have been rejected in

other EU countries will be rejected in Germany as well before they can even ask for asylum.

The compromise with Seehofer has been watered down (in his view) as arranged with the SPD, the third partner in the government coalition: the transit centres are not to be named as such; they are not intended to be special installations but to be put under the authority of the federal police; refugees' stay in the transit centres may not exceed 48 hours - but they are also not allowed to leave the centres during this time. In fact, the stay can exceed 48 hours since a refugee has the right to make a legal appeal against the rejection of their request for asylum - and this needs time.

In the centres of the federal police "airport proceedings" take place which means that according to the law "asylum proceedings have to take place before the decision on entry". A claim for regular asylum proceeding results only from a stay in a country. Thus the airport proceedings make it possible to accelerate decisions and rejections. The transit centres are simply declared as extraterritorial territory through a bureaucratic act.

Further agreements with the Social Democrats have taken the edge off Seehofer's intention to deprive refugees of their rights in order to be able to deport them out of hand. There will be no hotspots on the German border. Nevertheless, through this whole summer fuzz, a red line has been crossed: for the first time a German federal minister has been demanding an open break with European law following in the footsteps of the countries led by

extreme right-wing governments. And it is not a personal trait of Seehofer's.

On 14 June, the Bavarian Prime Minister Markus Söder put forward the idea of ending "well-ordered multilateralism" in the EU in favour of independent national initiatives. This is a political break, in the same vein as Alexander Dobrindt's (CSU minister in the federal government) enunciations *À la AfD* (Dobrindt for instance declared, there be "an end to asylum tourism"). Now this rift has been opened up and it will not be closed by the achievement of this pragmatic agreement. Part of the CSU has begun to adopt an anti-EU course - not in order to fight for more social rights and equality, but in order to dismantle existing rights and to convert the EU into a "security community".

So the crisis of the government continues. Seehofer has already declared his intention to unilaterally carry out deportations if bilateral agreements do not work - regardless of the law. That his crusade against refugees has nothing to do with the supposed burdens provoked by their run to the Bavarian-Austrian border (the only border in question) is shown by the fact that most asylum seekers picked up by the federal police in 2017 had not entered across that border but across the Swiss-German border (into Baden-Württemberg) and via airports. And only 15,414 asylum seekers altogether were picked up through controls of cross-border traffic whereas 198,317 applications for asylum were lodged at the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF). The plain truth is that the vast majority of refugees are not picked up on the border - despite the so-called *Schleierfahndung* (special

random checks and investigations).

Seehofer's crusade does not contribute at all to controlling refugee outflows, demonstrating that his motives are entirely different. Even if his proposal had gained complete acceptance, the measures would have had only a symbolic effect, though a devastating one. But he brought the country to the brink of a governmental crisis. That this has been made possible in Germany – a country eager to preserve its political stability – is a cause of great concern.

The left should not be happy about this way a bourgeois government is disintegrating. It has always been a part of a right-wing strategy to create chaos and to destabilize in order to be able to strike even harder. A part of this strategy of the right is to throw its own administration into chaos and to render it incapable of rebuilding orderly circumstances. They are the creators of the chaos they claim to end.

The Orbanization of Europe

One cannot argue that these transit centres contradict the agreements the EU governments achieved in June. These explicitly stipulate the installation of hotspots in various EU countries in order to "relieve" the previous main destination countries. That such a course could prevail as the "European" line shows merely how successful the extreme right has become in participating in governments of EU member states or influencing such governments. But no state really wants to have such centres, for as long as the regulations for repatriation are not effective, i.e. as long as they have a purely voluntary nature, they threaten to become mass detention centres as is already the case in Greece. But the nearer these centres come to the centre of Europe, the more unbearable they will become and the more unacceptable to public opinion.

The success of repatriations depends on the approval of the states concerned. If this condition is not fulfilled, the construction of a

"European solution" will collapse like a house of cards and the pressure will increase further to take unilateral measures, i.e. to construct walls again between EU countries. The results of the EU summit do not end this danger, quite the contrary.

The logic of "We first!" was dominant at the June summit, only scantily covered up by declarations of intent on bilateral agreements. This logic could possibly lead to the annulment of the Schengen agreement, which regulates the visa-free access within the EU, with incalculable results on freedom of movement in Europe. In the end, the question will be raised whether cooperation is still a hoped-for goal or whether it will be replaced with a full-scale return of national particularism. This would be a gigantic step backwards with significantly negative results on democratic (and social) rights.

There are other developments contrary to a disintegration of the EU – e.g. the pressure to install a real military union or to continue to play a role in international commerce and finance. But these are not projects that go hand in hand with the preservation of democratic and social rights. Either way, these rights are acutely at risk.

The "4 freedoms" guaranteed in the EU treaties, especially the freedom of movement, are endangered, whereas the governments agree to build the fortress Europe by all available means, including military ones. Criminal regimes like the one in Libya or semi-dictatorships like Turkey are supported by billions of Euros to do the dirty work for the EU. But NGOs organizing sea rescue operations are criminalized and threatened with heavy fines or prison sentences. The union of values the German chancellor is supposed to fight for is nothing but a chimera.

The crisis of the nation-state ...

This is not only a crisis of the EU, it is a crisis of the nation-state as well. The EU eventually came into being because of the very necessity to

overcome the restrictions of the nation-state, but this took place in a way that did not overcome the nation-state. For the conservative concept of the state, the nation-state remains central and is still – despite all forms of integration in various sections and contrary to claims of many among the left – the basic principle of the construction of the EU. This principle leads to European integration where the interests of big capital and the big countries are met (commercial policy; the harmonization of industrial standards; financial policy) and where the repressive functions of the states, both internally and externally, are concerned.

But everything that concerns social regulations remains excluded, since it is to be exposed to unrestrained competition. It is obvious that thereby the inequality within the EU – and thus its potential for crisis – can only increase. But today there are many other problems that can no longer be overcome by the nation-state, like migration, like environment policy, management of resources, financial disorder, trade agreements and so on.

In the right-wing and conservative camp, the responsibility of member states for the misery of the EU is covered up by giving out the slogan: "We do not share! We keep our wealth for ourselves." For this reason there is no mutual bailout and no common refugee policy, and there are no common social standards. But this is suicidal. It not only endangers the gains of the workers movement but sometimes even capitalist interests. For this reason not only the left is disintegrating in these matters but also the right. On the other hand, Merkel and Seehofer have a lot of common positions in this matter....

And the helplessness of the left.

People rightly rebel against being more and more unprotected from capitalist rule and against the fact that political decision centres are transferred more and to a supranational level. But it is wrong to

rebel against the necessity of a European union (and an international understanding beyond that) and not against the necessity to break the dictatorship of capital in order to place such a union upon a foundation of solidarity. Many left people do not make this difference because they do not start from an international class standpoint but from a national one. Therefore they treat the EU as if it were a colonial power though in fact it is only an appendix of the existing nation-states.

We do not defend the institutions of the EU, but neither do we defend the nation-states for they are both parts of the bourgeois state apparatus. We defend democratic and social rights - that is something different. There remains an enormous task to find a third model. The model we have is the Commune. It is today more actual than ever before, and it would be positive to reflect more intensely on how to realize such a model on a European level and beyond.

Union of CDU and CSU - or separated paths?

Immediately after the German federal election, we had a debate in our ranks with some arguing that Germany has entered into a phase of political instability - like other European countries - and that this instability above all can be traced back to a destabilization of the parties of the CDU-CSU union. Eventually, the government crisis came faster than expected.

Commentators pointed out that Seehofer's tricks are not only due to a conflict with Merkel on the question of a European vs. national solution, but also due to obsession with his image compared to that of the chancellor during the Bavarian election campaign - this neurosis as its roots in the power struggle within the CSU. Seehofer's relenting at the last minute is supposed to be due to the fear in Bavaria that in case of a break of the coalition by the CSU the CDU could extend its range to Bavaria - even before the Bavarian elections. Now it

is possible that Seehofer will be made responsible for a defeat of the CSU in the Bavarian elections in October 2018 and that he will be ousted as the party's president.

According to an opinion poll held immediately after the agreement between Merkel and Seehofer, 54 per cent of the interviewees would have preferred a separate candidature of CDU and CSU in future elections. But with a breakup of the CDU/CSU alliance, the CSU would lose more than the CDU because it is too much a Bavarian party. What in the eyes of the general public and of the supporters of the CDU/CSU seems to be a conflict between CDU and CSU is in fact a deep split within both parties. Eventually, the Merkel line met with heavy resistance, even in her own party before a European solution seemed to be possible at the EU summit. According to an opinion poll 48 per cent of CSU supporters approved the Seehofer line, 49 per cent Merkel's position. Amongst the general public Merkel has more supporters: like Merkel, 69 per cent of German citizens want a European solution. Only a majority of supporters of the extreme right-wing AfD (88 per cent) favour Seehofer's position.

Presently, a breakthrough of the reactionaries within the CDU can still be blocked by the chancellor (and the party does not want to endanger the chancellorship). But the party leadership in Bavaria is led by a clique of rascals that do not hesitate to use slogans of the extreme right if this promises more power. They represent another type of politician, which up to now we have not been accustomed to in Germany, rather familiar within the Free Democratic Party (FDP), before that liberal party was outflanked by the AfD.

For the chancellor the conflict is not finished. It is more and more obvious that neither the agreement of Brussels nor the one in Berlin are any good. Merkel has given priority to the unity of the CDU-CSU alliance (and the continuation of the present government coalition) as far as to self-denial instead of a political clarification in her own party - but otherwise she would have possibly lost out. Thus her chancellorship will lead

to an open - possibly premature - clash within the CDU. The cards will be reshuffled with a view to the next federal elections at the latest, and presently the conservative right wing of the CDU seems to become stronger.

Thus in both parties of the CDU-CSU alliance, policy choices are on the agenda. It is probable that they will not immediately lead to a break within either of those parties. But they are likely to result in a further loss of supporters. On the margins, new formations could emerge which would be focused on winning support from a narrower sector of the electorate than the existing populist parties.

What the left should do

The SPD, but also the leadership of the parliamentary fraction of the party DIE LINKE, have shown a miserable image. They confined themselves to accusing the government of being incapable of governing! Fortunately the appeal (with a title that misses the mark) "Solidarit t statt Heimat" (Solidarity - not home country), with more than 14000 signatures was a sign that the left is resisting the rightward shift. Despite its wrong title, the appeal deserves a broad support.

But deeds must follow words. What could the deeds look like?

- We must strengthen the culture of welcome.

Each act of solidarity with refugees is an effective act against the rightward shift. Wherever it is possible, forms of civil disobedience should be expressed, and it would be positive to have a network of towns and cities according to the model of the Rebel Cities.

- We need escape assistants again

[36]. The NGOs that are engaged in sea rescue operations are under attack by the authorities and need political and material solidarity. There should be a campaign to support them. Already funds are collected to buy new rescue ships, because so many have been confiscated during

the summer. The possible programmatic basis of such a campaign could include such points as: legalization of escape routes; abolition of all centres for the concentration of refugees; decentralized accommodation; real measures for integration (flats, workplaces, education). The requirement of registration could be linked to such integration offers.

- In July there were demonstrations against the government and Seehofer

in several major German cities when the boat Lifeline was prevented from entering Italian and Maltese ports and the German government approved this. The captain of the Lifeline is Bavarian and has voted CSU for a long time. The demonstrations were called by an alliance called Seebrücke, this means sea bridge. The impetus of these demonstrations will continue this fall with a federal demonstration named "We'll come united" on September 29 in Berlin.

- **Strengthening anti-racist and pro-migrant networks in Europe.**

- **Campaigns that reach the plants and factories**- e.g. in the chemical industry against the land grabbing organized by the big corporations in Africa, robbing small farmers of their livelihood; or in the weapons industry for the suspension of arms exports and for arms conversion...

These are some proposals. More would be welcome.

French Guiana: the negative legacy of French colonialism

21 August 2018, by **Said Bouamama**

The Spanish colonizers gave it the name of Eldorado because of the legend of the "Golden King" describing a king paying homage to the gods by being coated with gold from head to toe. The result was a quasi-genocide of the six indigenous nations of the territory. They were replaced by slaves as shown by the characterisation "slave colony" appearing in the various colonization projects that succeeded each other from 1626, the year in which Cardinal Richelieu installed the first French settlements in this country. If the reasons for the French presence changed during the three centuries of French occupation, the social system remains until today characterized by a colonial relationship. The installation of the Guiana Space Centre in 1964 further strengthened this colonial structure.

The arrival of the first French settlers quickly translated into an attempt to enslave the natives and, faced with resistance, by their massacre. "The French upon their arrival slaughtered all the Indians or attempted to reduce them to slavery" says the philosopher Neuville Doriac. [37] This is evidenced by the massacre that took place in 1857 during the conquest of Cayenne. However, this violence of conquest

was not comparable with what happened in the rest of Latin America for reasons that the ethnologists Pierre Grenand, Françoise Grenand and Patrick Mengt summarize as follows by deconstructing the colonial myths produced to justify the French presence

"First myth: (contacts between whites and Indians have always been peaceful). Nothing is less sure... Understanding very quickly that the real intentions of the newcomers differed from their own, the Amerindians, for example the Galibi, fought fiercely. It was only their brutal demographic collapse due to the often-imported epidemics that imposed a change of strategy on them. Retreat, scattering in the forest and passive resistance became their main weapons... Then historical amnesia: (we did not massacre the Indians to take their land). It is true that the only attempted massacre perpetrated against the Galibi dates back to 1657... One must not lose sight of the fact that if neither systematic manhunts nor methodical destruction of villages were organized as elsewhere in Latin America, it is less because of kindness of soul than because Guiana never reached the stage of a true colony and that the

extraction of forest products could never be satisfactorily established... Where things went differently, as in the Antilles with the Caribs or in Louisiana with the Natchez, scruples were abandoned, and massacres took place. [38]

The arrival of the colonizers thus triggered a real demographic slaughter because of the epidemics it aroused. The fall in the number of aboriginal people is so important that it generates culturalist and racist theorizations, such as "internal wars", "a worn-out race", abuse of "Cachiro" (an indigenous beer), abuse of "cold baths", "malnutrition" resulting from "laziness", and so on. Deconstructing these explanatory grids, the geographer Jean Hurault says: "most of the authors were too imbued with civilizing ideology, Christian or secular, to admit that the contact of Europeans could be the very cause of the extinction of the Indians". [39] Estimated at between 20 and 30,000 at the time of the arrival of the Europeans, there remained only 1,200 in 1960. "These 1,200 people are the only representatives of some fifty nations that populated Guiana at the time of the first settlement of Europeans", says Jean Hurault. [40] Total disappearance did not occur

because of the retreat of aboriginal nations into the forest. This retreat was a survival strategy and a form of resistance, which was taken up later by runaway slaves.

Guianese climatic conditions, the carnage and the retreat into the forest of indigenous peoples quickly led to a close articulation between slavery and colonization. The first became in fact one of the conditions of the second. From 1652, the first slaves were mentioned in various documents and the first slave ship was unloaded in Cayenne in 1680. The demand of the settlers was considerable. It was evaluated as follows for Cayenne by a certain Périer des Varennes in 1702: "Cayenne possesses a lot of farmland that remains fallow for lack of negroes. These belong to 80 or 100 inhabitants, most of them are in destitution... It would be appropriate to transport 400 Negroes a year. [41] Ten years later, the governor of the colony relayed this request as follows: "The colony is failing for lack of negroes." [42]

The difficult conditions for landing in Guiana and the higher prices offered by the settlers of Santo Domingo and the French Antilles prevented this demand from being fulfilled and severely limited the number of slaves. In 1820, the secretary of the governor of Guiana established the following distribution of the population: "1,004 whites, 1,733 free people of colour, 13,153 slaves, 1,100 Indians." [43] The number of slaves was further diminished by the significance of marronage, against which punitive operations were organized. Resistance to slavery in the form of marronage was present in all the colonies but the topography of Guiana gives it particular importance: "under the Ancien Régime, desertion of slaves constituted a real plague in the colonies where the black workforce was used only for soil development and cultivation. However, the problem was even more acute in Guiana than in the West Indies, since they were made up of islands and the area blacks could move within was restricted, while in Guiana, a continental country, it was easy for them to reach the border territories of the French colony: Brazil, then a Portuguese possession, and Dutch Guiana." [44]

Many Maroons were content to reach the thick forests where they founded small self-sufficient communities. In addition to these Maroon communities there were more significant social groups made up of Maroons from Surinam. These groups constituted slave communities in the forest and attacked the plantations in order to recover weapons and liberate other slaves. In the early eighteenth century, the Maroons of Surinam were estimated at more than 5,000 people. After a long war against the Dutch army, they were forced to take refuge in French Guiana. The Djuka, Boni and Paramaka settled in "French" Guiana between 1750 and 1840. The arrival of several thousand free blacks strongly worried the French colony. After the abolition of slavery, the treaty signed between French, Dutch and Maroon chiefs recognised the Maroon communities and their territory of settlement. In 1962, the descendants of these Maroons were estimated at 1,000 for Bonni, 7-8,000 for Djuka and 1,000 for Paramaka. [45]

The face of Guianese society in the years following abolition was marked by this legacy: a quantitative weakness of the descendants of indigenous peoples and whites, a greater number of descendants of slaves (but minimal in comparison with the West Indies or Haiti), the presence of black Maroon communities, chronic underdevelopment of the territory. It was in this context that gold mines were discovered east of Cayenne. The lack of labour power resulted in the development of *engagisme*, a monarchist legal regime of quasi-serfdom. With the compensation of the slave owners, *engagisme* allowed a formal ending of slavery while maintaining a system of exploitation affecting former slaves and immigrants under a "contract of undertaking". The former slave who had become "engaged" was joined by new migrants of the same status to ensure the survival of the fortunes of the former slave owners in all the colonies. The historian Sudel Fuma proposes renaming *engagisme* as *servilisme* to better highlight the nature of the relationship between the "contractors". The author emphasizes the discriminatory nature of employment contracts in relation to

existing labour law, the violence exercised to compel the acceptance of the contract and the false promises made to have the "contract" accepted before concluding: "why *servilisme*? Because the workers concerned are not free and are subject to a system but are not slaves in the legal sense of the term. This concept applies equally well to the situation of the Indian, African and free *engage* from 1848 in the French or English colonies and clarifies colonial history by giving a real meaning to the real situation of the workers subjected to forced labour at that time." [46]

Two decrees (on February 13 and March 27, 1852) would structure *engagisme* for the French colonies. For Guiana, the development of this new servility was speedy. Here is the quantitative report prepared in 1864 by the Director of the Bank of Guiana: "in the space of twelve years, the Department of the Navy has successively brought to Guiana seven convoys of Africans, four of them recruited in the Free State and three of captives redeemed and returned to freedom, one of Chinese and five of coolies." [47] Apart from the former slaves, the main origin of those "engaged" was India with 8,472 people between 1855 and 1877 and Africa with 1,826 people. By this new "fixed-term slavery" (from 3 to 10 years) planters and gold mines found the necessary labour power and the new free workers were forced to moderate their claims for wages and working conditions as a result of competition from this indentured labour force.

Yellow gold, blue gold, green gold and black gold

It is common to hear about the absence of economic stakes for France in Guiana in order to deny the colonial character of contemporary Guiana. A simple look at economic history and Guianese resources refutes this assertion. Gold is the second export resource of Guiana today, after space activity (which accounted for 83% of total exports in 2014), with 50 million euros exported in 2006. The gold issue

accompanies the entire colonial history of Guiana. In a pamphlet which was significantly titled ("Gold Guiana" or the "Hen with golden Eggs") dated 1936, the curator of the Cayenne Library remarked that "the history of gold in Guiana is almost inseparable from the history of French colonization in this part of the South American continent, from the sixteenth century of the Christian era." [48] The author recalls that the first explorers sought in Guiana the town of Manoa, capital of the ancient Inca Empire. He stresses that the first farms were established as early as 1676 by Jesuit priests with Indian labour. The official starting point of the gold industry remains however the discovery of the deposits in the Arataye creek in 1855, of which the Director of the Interior at the time said: "A new era appears to rise on our country, and Cayenne will be before long a rival to California... Thus, it is now an established fact: gold exists in the interior of Guiana." The exploitation started immediately but without real capital investment and consequently a weakness of production, but substantial profits. "All the gold gathered to date - more than three hundred tons or five tons per year on average - comes from surface alluvials, not from mines properly so called; And our mineworkers are in short only navvies and claim stakers" says the author. [49]

The state of the technology, the weakness of investment (buyers merely supplying themselves from a multitude of small prospectors bearing all the costs) and the changes in prices on the world market explain a fluctuating and modest production until the 1970s. The improvement of extraction techniques and the sharp rise in the price of gold in the world market (as a result of the abandonment of gold/dollar parity) led to a revival of production and the entry onto the scene of big international industrial companies (Grupo Mexico with Mexican and American capital, Cambior with Canadian capital, WMC with Australian capital, La Source with French and Australian capital and so on). The results of the new industrial prospecting came quickly. In his report to the prime minister dating

from 2000, Christiane Taubira mentions a discovery by the Asarco company of 35 tonnes in reserves and 60 tonnes in resources at Camp Cañman, another by the Guyanor-Cambior company of 45 tonnes in reserves and 60 tonnes of resources in Yaou and Dorlin, and other promising but not yet exploitable discoveries. [50]

Subsequent discoveries confirmed the enormous gold potential of Guiana. The chair of the board of directors of the country's biggest gold producer, the Auplata company (exploiting the mines of Dieu Merci and Yaou), thus said in 2014 that Guiana is "the largest gold reserve in the world". [51] In the same period, the mining company Montagne d'or made public its project of industrial mining for 2022 with a production valued at 6.7 tons per year. However, this project of open-pit mines is fraught with consequences: deforestation (1,513 hectares of the Amazon rainforest) and massive cyanide spillage (46,500 tonnes for a period of exploitation estimated at 12 years). If President Macron has announced his support for the project, a protest movement is growing, in particular among indigenous peoples. The collective "Or de question" has organised public demonstrations and appealed through the courts for the cancellation of the operating permit. Industrial choices based on needs external to those of the population and concerned about immediate profitability without taking into account long-term effects are, let's remember, one of the first characteristics of colonial logic

In addition to gold, Guiana has an exclusive economic zone of 13,000 km² rich in fishery resources and in particular in shrimp resources. However, the sector remains largely under-exploited with production varying from 3,000 to 4,000 tonnes per year in the 2000s and falling from 700 to 800 tonnes in 2017. The destination of this production underscores the colonial dependence: 85% is exported to France and 10% to the French Antilles.

Guiana also has considerable wood resources. The Amazonian forest covers 8 million hectares of forest of which 7.5 million belong to the state.

However, the resource is largely under-exploited with a production of only 72 000 m³ of logs. A paradox typical of a colonial situation (where the priority of investments depends solely on profitability and not local needs), Guiana imported 17.6 million euros of wood products and exported 3.1 million euros in 2014.

Finally, the discovery of offshore oil deposits in 2011 by Total, which possesses an exclusive permit for exploration, has raised big expectations. Although the extent of the deposit and its reserves cannot yet be quantified, the existence of large hydrocarbon potential in the Surinamese-Guianese basin has been proven. The USGS (United States Geological Survey), a scientific agency of the U.S. government, estimates that this basin is second in the ranking of the most promising unexplored offshore oil basins in the world. [52]

Guiana maintains an economic structure dependent in its choices and its priorities on the needs of the metropolis. Exports and imports are made exclusively with the metropolis first, the other colonies in the West Indies and Europe thereafter. The commercial fabric is owned by the big béké families of Martinique (the Bernard Hayot Group, the Fabre-Domergue group, the Dormoy family and so on). The raw materials and construction industries are dominated by French multinationals (Bouygues, Eiffage, Vinci, Bolloré, Auplata, and so on). The two characteristics of a colonial economy are present: the exploitation of resources for the benefit of the metropolis and the monopoly of marketing for big metropolitan companies. The only specificity here is the use of the Caribbean bourgeoisie as an intermediate in the exploitation of the colony. To give only one example illustrating the absurdity of colonial logic for the Guianese people, we quote from a Senate report dated October 2017: "That raw materials imported from Brazil by Guiana must pass through Le Havre is stunning." [53]

As for the plight of the people of Guiana, it is enough to recall a few figures to understand that the local resources are not intended for them:

40% of those aged 15/24 are unemployed, only 12% have the baccalaureate qualification, the average annual income is less than 44% of that of the metropolis, the number of beneficiaries of the RSA work-welfare benefit is four times bigger than in France, consumer prices are 12% higher than in France, those of more expensive food products 45% higher and those of housing 20% higher and so on.

Geostrategy, space centre and “Dutch syndrome”

We have deliberately set aside for the time being the main economic activity of Guiana, the Guiana Space Centre (CSG) in Kourou and Sinnamary. A base for French and European launches commissioned in 1968, the CSG is both the biggest economic activity in Guiana and a key strategic issue for the European Union. The decision to set up the space centre in Guiana in 1964 was done at the same time and for the same reasons as that to carry out nuclear tests in Polynesia. Algeria's independence simultaneously deprived French colonialism of its nuclear testing ground in the Sahara and the Hammaguir base near Bechar where missile and rocket launch tests were conducted. Two sets of factors contributed to the choice of Guiana. The first related to geographical and climatic factors: Guiana is close to the equator and does not experience seismic and cyclonic hazards. The second was political: Guiana at the time was thinly populated and characterized by low economic development which limited both the risks of human disasters in the event of accidents and those (it was believed) of a consistent medium-term demand for independence.

These factors quickly give Guiana a special place in global competition for space activities. *Défense*, the review of the Institute of Advanced National Defence Studies (IHEDN) summarised as follows in 1991 the geostrategic issue of France's “Outre-mer” and the specific place of Guiana within it: thanks to the low latitude of Guiana,

France was able to develop, first for its own needs, and then in cooperation with its European partners, in the framework of the “European space agency”, the “Guiana Space Centre”. Of all the space rocket launch centres in the world, it is currently the best location, especially for geostationary satellite firing towards the east. Without Kourou, there would be no possible independent French and Western European space policies... It is known that the control of nuclear energy for civilian and military purposes, that the use of space and that the exploitation of the oceans will be the three essential sources of power for the twenty-first century... This [the Outre-mer] brings to France a triple opportunity to remain a great power. The first is to host, thanks to French Polynesia, the nuclear weapons testing centre furthest from populated areas in the world. The second is to own the best location for space shots in the world, with Kourou in Guiana ... The third is to have the third biggest world maritime domain offering marine and underwater wealth, as well as support points and a unique dimension. The combination of these three strengths is a major political and strategic interest that neither the United States of America nor the USSR possesses, nor any rising power.” [54]

These comments are still topical despite the disappearance of the USSR and the cessation of nuclear tests (which can always be restarted quickly if necessary). They are enough to underline the difficulties that the national liberation movements of the last French colonies have faced and will face. France uses the Guiana advantage in the relationship of internal forces in the European Union for leadership of the latter, with the result that the struggle is no longer between Paris and a colony but between France and the European Union. From 1975, with the creation of the European Space Agency (ESA), France's tilt to Europe was carried out. The ESA is responsible for launches inside the CSG with the launch of Ariane, the first specifically European launcher and the world leader in the commercial satellite market. “With the CSG, Guiana has become a technological showcase for France and Europe... This equipment

becomes essential for defence, meteorology, data transmissions, audio-visual systems and so on. The CSG... inserts Guiana in the technical-technological environment with a strategic position at the international level, especially since the world has only about thirty bases for launching satellites” according to a group of Franco-Brazilian geographers. [55]

For Guiana, the opening of the Space Centre is reflected in an economic imbalance known as the “Dutch syndrome”, one of the consequences of which is the strengthening of colonial dependence. The expression refers to the unbalancing effects of a new financial windfall (putting into operation of a new raw material source or in Guiana the huge investment linked to the space centre). Initially used to describe the consequences of the discovery in the Netherlands of a large natural gas field, the expression then widened to all the situations characterized by a sudden influx of new financial means. These effects can be summed up as follows: centring on the new sector at the expense of others, inflation linked to increased national income and demand, economic dualization between a hypermodern sector and atrophied sectors, the juxtaposition of wealth and poverty. The Dutch syndrome reinforces all the characteristics of colonial dependence. The space centre is not articulated to the whole of the local economy but appears as an appendage of an external economy.

Finally, the strategic character of the space centre leads to a consequent military presence. Officially there are 2,100 military personnel from the three armies who are permanently stationed in Guiana (in Cayenne, Kourou and Saint-Jean-du-Maroni). To this figure we must add the police force which numbered 920 in 2017. Officially their objectives are to ensure the security of the space centre, to monitor the borders with Surinam and Brazil to fight against illegal immigration, to fight illegal gold seekers and against illegal fishing. In fact, this military presence plays a deterrent function in the face of a social movement and a constantly growing independence movement.

Counteracting the independence movement by all means

As in all the old colonies, the aspiration for autonomy and then independence was almost non-existent when the colony changed status in 1946 to become a French department. As elsewhere, the aspirations that Guianas invested in departmentalization were soon to be disappointed. After decades of slavery, *engagisme* and sub-citizenship, departmentalization was sold as a promise of equality, as the end of the colonial relationship. Disappointment came quickly with the observation of a persistence of colonial dependence and economic and social inequality with the metropolis. The time of the balance sheet arrived in a context of world anti-colonial effervescence: the Vietnamese victory at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, the outbreak of the armed struggle in Algeria in 1954, the Bandung conference in 1955 and so on. It was in this context that the first Guianese nationalist organization was born: "Where Césaire uses the word resurrection, his readers see the words of autonomy, independence and revolution. This is the case with the Guianese students who created, in Paris, in 1955, the Guianese Committee for Social and Political Action, which would take the name of the Guianese People's Union (UPG, 1955-1965), the first nationalist and autonomist party in Guiana. For 10 years, the UPG opposed the politics of assimilation and disseminated anti-colonialist ideas in Guiana." [56]

Identifying with anti-colonialism, the UPG did not demand independence but autonomy. Severely criticizing departmentalization and assimilation, the organization worked for a reform of relations with the metropolis in an egalitarian sense. The barrage against the new movement was immediate on the part of the Gaullists. Despite its profession of autonomist faith, the UPG were attacked as "separatists", "anti-French" or "anti-white" notes the historian Serge Mam Lam Fouck. [57] The young nationalist movement was

quickly the object of colonial repression in the form of the expulsion from Guiana of its leaders. A specific Order on October 15, 1960 stated: "officials of the state and public institutions of the state in service in the overseas departments whose conduct is likely to disturb public order may, on the proposal of the prefect and without any other formality, be recalled automatically to the metropolis by the minister to whom they are responsible to receive a new assignment." [58]

Serge Patient, Bernard Linglin and Marius Milon were thus removed from Guiana under this Order. To the remoteness of the leaders was added the censorship of the nationalist newspaper and the dismissals of militants to destabilise them. A climate of pressure on militants was put in place causing fear and destabilization. The Order of 15 October 1960 directly struck a very limited number of autonomist militants... [but] it cooled much of the ardour, including among the non-civil servants says Mam Lam Fouck. [59]. The organization would not survive this ordeal. However, it had sown seeds of awareness that gave rise quickly to new and more radical structures.

The year in which the UPG disappeared was also that of the establishment of the Guiana Space Centre. The effects on Guianese national consciousness were paradoxical as described by historian David Redon: "The establishment of the of the Guiana Space Centre (CSG) on an area of 96,000 hectares would work both as an accelerator and a gravedigger for Guiana nationalism. Accelerator, as the expropriation of the 641 families of Kourou, Malmanoury and Sinnamary had immediate traumatic effects on people who had to abandon their lifestyles. The discourse on "guyanité" crystallized around the expropriation and disappearance of Malmanoury, giving body to nationalist, autonomist and independentist discourses. In contrast, the state could now assert the effectiveness of its assimilationist policy with the "progress" brought to the Guianese people by the CSG and its economic benefits." [60]

As in Guadeloupe, many nationalist activists became involved in the trade union struggle with the creation in November 1967 of the Union of Guiana Workers (UTG), which adopted at its founding Congress a Guiana flag and a motion for independence at its third Congress in 1973. The discourse was no longer that of autonomy but explicitly that of independence. The union base (which is at the same time a base among youth) of the pro-independence movement strongly worried the French government. The decision in 1973 to install the third Foreign Infantry regiment of the Foreign Legion (3rd REI) in Guiana witnesses to this concern.

They number several hundred men (reaching 1,000 soldiers in 1995) and the main mission is the protection of the space site. Already in 1962, the installation of a first contingent of the Foreign Legion had provoked a demonstration on June 14 called by the Democratic Guianais Front and several trade union organizations. [61] Prefect Claude Erignac reacted by violent repression with many wounded, arrests and prosecutions. It was the first time in the political history of Guiana that police forces were charging demonstrators. The astonishment was thus great says Mam Lam Fouck. [62] The installation of the 3rd REI awakened the memories of this colonial repression dating from barely a decade.

The second reaction of the French government to this radicalisation of youth and trade unions was a project to change the social structure of Guiana by a massive importation of migrants from metropolitan France. The so-called "Green Plan" project announced in 1975 had the official objective of developing Guianese agriculture. The project, in preparation since 1973, supported by Olivier Stirn, the secretary of state for the overseas departments and territories, announced an objective of 30,000 settlers over five years for a department which at the time had only 55,000 inhabitants. While in Guadeloupe, Martinique and Réunion, the French state organized the massive export of youth through the BUMIDOM (Office for the Development of Migration in the Overseas Departments), it tried here

to drown the Guianese people with settlers totally dependent on the French state. The candidates were promised concessions and aid for installation. If success was immediate in France (nearly 20,000 applications), it logically aroused the wrath of Guianese. The mass demonstrations were suppressed but the project was officially abandoned. Such a plan of settlement awakened in fact the old memories of settlement projects of the slavery era and in particular those related to Devil's Island.

The sociologist and anthropologist Marie-José Jamil summarizes as follows the reactions to the Stirn plan: "Designated then by its authors as "the overall plan for the development of Guiana", this project included an important "immigration" component which could not but awaken immediately old memories. The revival of the term "development" was sufficient to evoke the colonial period... Any massive immigration plan in Guiana also evokes, inevitably, the prison. The case is too well known for it to be necessary to expose it. I will therefore confine myself to recalling the principles and, first of all, the colonization by the penal colony laid down in 1850 by Napoleon III." [63]

The opposition to the Legion and the Stirn project catalysed Guianese consciousness, which was reflected in October 1974 by the creation of the Guianese Movement of decolonization (MOGUYDE) and the same year of the National Liberation Front of Guiana (FNLG). In December 1974, the pro-independence organizations were accused of the "Christmas" conspiracy with the arrest of 13 MOGUYDE independence activists, other pro-independence organizations (Jeune Garde, FLNG and the Guianese Socialist Party) and the UTG trade union. They are accused of "infringing the security of the state", preparing for attacks and kidnappings. Eight of them were expatriated to France and brought before the State Security Court. Another attempt to decapitate the independence movement. But this time the general strike triggered by

the UTG and the mobilization of the Guianese diaspora imposed the return to the country of the political prisoners. The charges against them were abandoned. The scenario was reproduced in July 1980 with the arrest and expulsion of four militants from the FLNG accused of setting fire to a fuel depot and an attempt to attack the police station in the centre of Cayenne. They were released without charge one year later.

It was in this context of repression and abusive arrests that an attempt at armed struggle was launched by the Revolutionary Caribbean Alliance (ARC) from 1983 to 1988. This organization, which demanded the independence of Guadeloupe, Martinique and Guiana, organized numerous attacks in the three colonies and in metropolitan France. This struggle ended with the amnesty Law of July 10, 1989 concerning all the attacks committed before July 14, 1988 following the proposal by the ARC to stop the armed struggle in exchange for the amnesty of its militants. The imbalance of forces was simply too significant for this form of struggle to be effectively enforced over time.

As the relationship of forces necessary to short-term independence was not present, the national idea reoriented itself towards a struggle against the consequences of colonization. [64] An epoch of great mass movements led by the UTG and supported by the pro-independence political organisations opened and has continued until today: a six day general strike in 1992; riots in Cayenne in November 1996 to demand education for all children; a few months later, in April 1997, new riots erupted after the arrest of four young people accused of attempting to burn the state prosecutor's home in the November 1996 riots; the country was paralysed by a vast social movement in November-December 2008 (roadblocks on all major axes, barricades, a general strike) in protest at the rise in fuel prices of fuels which became a movement against the high cost of living.

This last movement was so massive

and radical that the French state was forced to make major concessions. President Sarkozy announced 137 measures to reinvigorate economic development and financial aid to families of modest income to take inflation into account. Above all, the French state is aware of the real progress of the idea of national independence which has only grown in the course of all these conflicts. He proposed a referendum on the status of Guadeloupe but was careful not to formulate the question in terms of independence. Finally, the question in the referendum in January 2010 presented a false alternative: "Do you approve of the transformation of Guiana into an *oultre-mer* community governed by article 74 of the Constitution, with a specific organization taking into account its own interests within the Republic?" The No vote prevailed overwhelmingly but on the basis of majority abstention (51.84% of the vote and 2.33% of spoiled or blank ballots).

The same causes producing the same effects, a new social movement broke out in March 2017 and blockaded the entire territory for a month. The space centre was blockaded causing the postponement of an Ariane launcher. The conflict resolution agreement of April 21, 2017 provides for the release of 1 billion euros to improve access to care, security, employment status and justice.

If the current relationship of forces makes independence unlikely in the short term, the idea of independence idea has become largely prevalent among the population and especially among youth. While the demands today concern rampant insecurity and economic demands, they implicitly condemn the colonial model. The fight over the consequences leads inevitably to more or less long-term action against the causes: colonization. If the relationship of forces changes (under the impact of international events, the struggles of the Guianese people and repression and anti-colonial mobilizations in France) independence would be a concrete utopia in the short term.

Dynamics of an Interrupted Revolution

21 August 2018, by **Jeff Mackler**

That U.S. imperialism is intervening in Nicaragua today against the capitalist FSLN (Sandinista National Liberation Front) government of Daniel Ortega cannot be denied. President Trump has openly threatened to send U.S. troops. Over the past three years a few million dollars, \$4.1 million to be precise, has been openly sent by the CIA-controlled National Endowment for Democracy to various NGOs and other anti-FSLN groups. [65]

Every major U.S. newspaper today regularly blares shrill denunciations of the Nicaraguan government, demonizes Ortega, and quotes extensively from its sources in the Nicaraguan Catholic Church, the COSEP (Superior Council of Private Enterprise), and from some right-wing Nicaraguan student members of the capitalist-dominated Alianza Cívica por la Justicia y la Democracia (Civic Alliance for Justice and Democracy)“who recently visited a few of most virulent Heritage Foundation reactionaries in Washington, D.C. These included the anti-Cuban Revolution Senators Marco Rubio, Ted Cruz, and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, who currently lead a bipartisan effort to urge Congress to impose sanctions on Nicaragua. Similarly, Civic Alliance students met in El Salvador with representatives of the long-governing death squad ARENA party.

None of this is new, either with regard to U.S. policy in Nicaragua or anywhere else in the world. U.S. imperialism’s interventionist war budget exceeds \$1 trillion annually, perhaps much more since the accounting excludes figures for the secret operations of the CIA and other covert government agencies organized to defend and advance U.S. “national security” interests by any means necessary.

U.S. intervention takes a multitude of forms, depending on the specific

situation in each country. These vary from direct intervention via overt wars, as is the case today in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Niger, Somalia, Libya, and Yemen (The New York Times, March 15, 2018) to special operation wars. The scope of the latter was reported in a revealing article in the Sept. 24, 2015, TomDispatch.com by Nick Turse, a fellow at The Nation Institute who has written for The New York Times, the Los Angeles Times, and The Nation.

Turse states: “US Special Operations forces have already been deployed to 135 nations, according to Ken McGraw, a spokesman for Special Operations Command (SOCOM). That’s roughly 70 percent of the countries on the planet. Every day, in fact, America’s most elite troops are carrying out missions in 80 to 90 nations, practicing night raids or sometimes conducting them for real, engaging in sniper training or sometimes actually gunning down enemies from afar. As part of a global engagement strategy of endless hush-hush operations conducted on every continent but Antarctica, they have now eclipsed the number and range of special ops missions undertaken at the height of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.”

Turse summarized his case demonstrating the scope of this sophisticated and unprecedented covert U.S. war machine: “In the waning days of the Bush administration, Special Operations Forces (SOF) were reportedly deployed in only about 60 nations around the world. By 2010 [under the Obama administration]“J.M.], according to the Washington Post, that number had swelled to 75. Three years later, it had jumped to 134 nations, slipping to 133 last year, before reaching a new record of 135 this summer.” [Emphasis added]“J.M.] No doubt the figures under Donald Trump are similar.

To these more hidden forms of U.S. intervention and war, we must add the U.S.-imposed embargoes, blockades, and sanctions, as well as the now routine and deadly covert drone wars. And we might add to the list the crippling U.S.-dominated International Monetary Fund-imposed conditions that demand austerity as the price of usurious loans.

I cite all of the above only to make the point that U.S. intervention against its perceived “enemies” in Nicaragua, and indeed everywhere on earth, is the rule“not the exception. In response to all of the above, and doubly or triply so with regard to poor and oppressed nations, the U.S. antiwar movement must stand unequivocally and unconditionally opposed to all U.S. imperialist interventions.

U.S. hands off! Out now! Self-determination for Nicaragua and all other poor and oppressed nations! These demands are the precondition for any serious effort to build a U.S. antiwar movement capable of challenging and defeating the U.S. war machine and its record of mass murder, devastation, exploitation and conquest.

Socialists are not idle commentators

In this anti-imperialist context, however, each component of any successful U.S.-based united front, democratic, mass-action movement must be free to express its own views on the internal dynamics operating in each nation where any form of U.S. intervention is underway. I say this because serious revolutionary currents with forces in the U.S. and worldwide, including in Nicaragua, can never be idle commentators with perspectives limited to U.S. politics. Socialist internationalists aim at

building revolutionary socialist parties in every nation.

Hence, I present the views of Socialist Action with regard to Nicaragua today. But first a note on our credentials—on our standing to critique not only the policies of U.S. imperialism but the politics of the capitalist Daniel Ortega-FSLN government.

Beginning with the July 19, 1979, revolutionary victory of the FSLN over the U.S.-backed Somoza dictatorship and the events leading up to it, Socialist Action was among the central organizations that sought to construct a powerful and massive U.S. movement that demanded first and foremost, “No U.S. intervention in Central America and the Caribbean!

The times were propitious for such work. In addition to the defeat of Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza, who slaughtered 50,000 workers and peasants in the final months of his rule, the workers of Grenada and El Salvador were on the rise. Led by Maurice Bishop and his New Jewel Movement (Joint Endeavor for Welfare, Education and Liberation), Grenadian revolutionaries toppled the murderous, Mongoose Gang dictatorship of the U.S.-backed, Sir Mathew Eric Gairy regime. Gairy was knighted “Sir” by the British House of Lords for his role as essentially Great Britain’s loyal “independent” colonial administrator.

In El Salvador, guerrilla fighters were on the move to challenge the U.S.-backed and armed death-squad regime that was responsible for the murder of El Salvador’s Archbishop Oscar Romero and a group of visiting nuns from Cleveland, Ohio, as well as thousands of workers and peasants who opposed its murderous rule. In Guatemala, revolutionaries were challenging the U.S.-backed Rios Montt dictatorship, which had murdered an estimated 400,000 indigenous people!

In this context, and still fresh from the massive U.S. mobilizations against the U.S. genocidal war in Vietnam that murdered four million Vietnamese, the antiwar movement had become a powerful force in U.S. politics. Tens

and hundreds of thousands periodically mobilized against any U.S. threat of intervention in Central America to the point where the U.S. Congress was compelled to pass in 1982 the famous Boland Amendment to a House appropriations bill that banned military aid to the heinous Salvadoran dictatorship and to the Nicaraguan Contras, who sought to overthrow the then revolutionary Sandinista government.

During this period Socialist Action was prominent in every aspect of the rising antiwar movement. Our comrades were invited as prominent guests, representing the U.S. antiwar movement, to International Solidarity Conferences in Managua and Grenada. We were central to the periodic organization of national antiwar conferences in the U.S. that called major national mobilizations across the country. We met with, exchanged views with, and often interviewed in our press FSLN commanders including Daniel Ortega, Jaime Wheelock, Omar Cabezas, and Tomas Borge—to name a few.

The same collaborative relations were established with Grenada’s Prime Minister Bishop and other Grenadian revolutionaries based on our key role in founding the broad Grenada Solidarity Committee. We helped to organize national U.S. tours and speaking engagements for several of these revolutionary leaders. We helped win the support of significant sections of the U.S. labor movement for non-interventionist positions, including some dozen national U.S. trade unions. In the San Francisco Bay Area the mass mobilizations that we played a leading role in initiating included endorsements and contingents from all seven Bay Area Central Labor Councils and some 100 trade unions from the area.

Based on our direct experience in Nicaragua and regular contact with Nicaraguan leaders and activists and with access to a wide range of documents, speeches, visits and personal encounters, we were able to detail and record with precision the unfolding and always changing dynamics. Socialist Action produced two major books and countless articles expressing our views of the strengths

and weaknesses of the FSLN: “Nicaragua: Dynamics of an Unfinished Revolution,” by Alan Benjamin, in 1989, and “Assault on Nicaragua: The Untold Story of the U.S. —Secret War,” in 1987.

The latter includes an article by this author entitled, “Nicaragua/Contragate: Strategic Questions for the U.S. Antiwar Movement.” This was published before the sensational Iran/Contra congressional hearings that revealed the illegal U.S. funding of the infamous Nicaraguan “Contras” via CIA agents and their accomplices, who facilitated bringing crack cocaine into the U.S. in collaboration with the infamous drug-smuggling Colombian Medellin Cartel. Much of the proceeds from the sale of this cocaine was then funneled to the Contras. Additional covert Contra funding was obtained by the CIA from the secret sale, via National Security adviser Oliver North, of U.S. surfaced-to-air Tow missiles to the Iranian government and from funds secured from Zionist Israel and the Saudi Monarchy (See “Inside the Shadow Government,” by Daniel Sheehan, 1988).

In short, Socialist Action’s 10-year record of opposing U.S. intervention in all its forms afforded us a modest but important national and international platform from which we attempted to influence the course of events in the U.S. and in Nicaragua through direct contacts with the leading Nicaraguan revolutionaries based on our record of unconditional support to Nicaragua’s right to self-determination.

Socialist critique of the FSLN

And just what was our stand in relation to the FSLN leadership? While we considered Daniel Ortega and the FSLN’s central leaders “revolutionists of action,” that is, honest revolutionaries who desired important changes in Nicaraguan society, we recognized that they were fundamentally adverse to breaking with Nicaragua’s capitalist class—the major component of which, along with the Catholic

Church, also opposed the Somoza dictatorship, but for its own reasons. In this decisive matter, we were among the FSLN's harshest critics.

Nicaragua's capitalists began to break with Somoza in the years following the 1972 earthquake that leveled Managua, killed 10,000 people, and left 250,000 more homeless. They, along with the Catholic Church, especially objected to Somoza's stealing millions of dollars in relief funds from the U.S. and elsewhere. When they supported the FSLN-led 1978-79 uprising, Somoza's response was to send his army's helicopters to drop 500-pound bombs on their factories.

Somoza's 1978 murder of La Prensa editor Pedro Joaquin Chamorro sealed his fate, as the opposition capitalists soon after formed a series of political alliances with the FSLN culminating in the June 1979 Junta of National Reconstruction (JGRN) headed by five figures—Daniel Ortega and two others close to the FSLN; a leading capitalist, Alfonso Robelo, who later became a central Contra leader; and Violeta Chamorro, wife of the slain La Prensa owner and editor. Chamorro founded UNO (United National Opposition) and later similarly supported the Contras. She went on to defeat Ortega in the 1990 presidential elections.

The JGRN, a coalition capitalist (multi-class) government alliance, was originally pressed by the Jimmy Carter administration via its Special Ambassador William Bowdler, along with the heads of state of Costa Rica, Venezuela, and Panama, to add two additional capitalist representatives for a total of seven, in order to give the main representatives of Nicaraguan capital a majority. Somoza would leave, they agreed, taking with him Nicaragua's treasury, while his National Guard army would be fused with the FSLN's fighting forces—its head to be approved by the U.S. This would be followed, according to what became known as the "Carter Plan," by the convocation of a "government of national accord" whose representatives would be two-thirds capitalist and one-third FSLN. The plan was unacceptable to the FSLN, and often dubbed "Somozaism without

Somoza."

Somoza did depart, but his leading generals continued their mass slaughter in a final but unsuccessful effort to demolish the FSLN forces. In the final months of struggle, the FSLN organized an insurrectional general strike, at great cost, stormed the remaining Somoza bunkers in Managua, and completely defeated and captured Somoza's National Guard army.

On July 19, 1979, undoubtedly with the support and approval of the Nicaraguan masses, they moved to establish a governmental framework that gave them a political majority in the central institutions of the new state. But the FSLN's political majority was never matched by its control of the basic economic institutions of the post-Somoza state. Here, the old capitalist class ruled with impunity and with the assent of the FSLN:

â€¢ During the first six months following the July 19 victory, the heads of 15 of the 18 new government ministries were capitalists.

â€¢ Nicaragua's bankrupt banks and related financial institutions were "nationalized" but only to guarantee that most of the debts incurred by the Somoza government would be paid over time to various international banking institutions. A JGRN proclamation stated, "It is necessary to preserve the prestige of the country among the international financial centers by assuming the payment of the international obligations contracted by the private sector." This included a negotiated agreement with some 100 commercial banks to pay off in installments the Somoza government's \$1.6 billion debt.

â€¢ Nicaragua's major agro-export crops, the central source of its wealth, remained in capitalist hands.

â€¢ In regard to land reform, the FSLN government nationalized only Somoza's land, some 20 percent of the total. The rest largely remained in capitalist hands. In short, and shockingly, there was never a major land reform in the first decade of Sandinista rule and there has never

been one to this day. The majority of arable land remains in capitalist hands.

â€¢ The major and powerful capitalist alliance, the Superior Council of Private Enterprise (COSEP) established by the anti-Somoza elites, remains in place to this day and operates as the dominant force in Nicaragua's capitalist economy.

â€¢ Less than a month after the July 19 FSLN seizure of power, the JGRN decreed that all land and property belonging to the non-Somoza capitalists that had been "illegally" seized by insurgent peasants had to be returned to its former owners.

â€¢ Following the FSLN's coming to power, this anti-Somoza bourgeoisie controlled the commanding heights of the Nicaraguan economy—especially with regard to the agro-export sector. In 1982, 73 percent of all productive activity was in private hands. In agriculture, which accounted for 70 percent of all exports in 1982, 86 percent of Nicaragua's productive assets were in private hands. The economic facts in Nicaragua today differ little from what the FSLN established in 1979, whether the FSLN was formally in governmental power or not.

The figures above are not accidental. They reflect, as we shall see, the considered view of the FSLN leadership that capitalism - the domination of society by an elite ruling class of private property owners that control Nicaragua's land, banks, financial institutions, and foreign trade—and not the construction of a socialist society—is the only social system capable of meeting the needs of the people!

Cuba and Nicaragua: Social revolution vs. Capitalist Reform

A few years after Daniel Ortega's 1990 presidential election loss to Violeta Chamorro, the electoral representative of the political forces that backed the Contra war against Nicaragua, I visited revolutionary Cuba and had an opportunity to discuss the situation in Nicaragua with several Cuban leaders. They included the head of the Cuban

Communist Party's cadre school, who for 10 years had overseen Cuba's efforts to spread Cuba's revolutionary ideas across Latin America. He had been Cuba's liaison with Che Guevara when Che was sent to Bolivia to partake in the guerrilla effort in that country. His incisive comment on Ortega's election loss to Chamorro's UNO remains with me to this day. "You can't make a half a revolution," he stated.

His reference was to Cuba's 1959 revolutionary break with capitalism and its massive distribution of Cuba's land to its landless peasantry, as compared to the FSLN's maintaining the essentials of Nicaraguan capitalism intact, including the private ownership of land by Nicaragua's previous oligarchs and super rich. In Fidel Castro's words on this critical point, "We nationalized the Cuban capitalist class down to the nails in the heels of their boots." [66] In sharp contrast, here's what leading FSLN spokespersons had to say on this question:

Commander Tomas Borge, *New Left Review* (July/August 1987), said, "There is notâ€"nor could there be â€"an ideological project as clearly defined as the one that existed in Cuba. ... It is no accident that the [Nicaraguan] bourgeoisie has been given so many economic incentives, more even than the workers; we ourselves have been more attentive to giving the bourgeoisie economic opportunities than in responding to the demands of the working class. We have sacrificed the working class in favor of the economy as part of a strategic plan."

Francisco Pizarro, top economic adviser to the FSLN, in the French-language Fourth International magazine *Inprecor* (No. 185, July/August 1987): Taking the Cuban socialist road "would not only be naïve but also deeply irresponsible in the case of Nicaragua ... a profound program of expropriation of land, industry and commerce ... would be disastrous in a country whose economic structure is marked by the important weight of agricultural production and by an atomization of property in the countryside, in industry and in commerce."

FSLN Defense Minister Humberto Ortega, (see Francis Pisani's *Le Volca Nicaraguan*, 1984), said, "We cannot resolve at the same time the problems of national liberation and those of social liberation. We must first complete the stage of national independence and national liberation."

FSLN Minister of Agriculture Jaime Wheelock, (see Jaime Wheelock, "El Gran Desafio" ["The Great Challenge"], Managua, Editorial Nueva Nicaragua, 1983, p. 101): "It is important to understand that the socialist model is a solution for contradictions that only exist in developed capitalist countries. ... Even though we have socialist principles, we cannot effect the transformation of our society by socializing the means of production. This would not lead to socialism, rather, on the contrary, it could lead to the destruction and disarticulation of our society."

In truth, and notwithstanding the horrors perpetrated by the U.S.-backed Contra war against the FSLN government that took the lives of some 15,000 Nicaraguans, the FSLN's failure to distribute "land to the tillers" and its failure to nationalize capitalist property more generally had the effect of deeply alienating the Nicaraguan masses. In 1990, when the FSLN itself organized every aspect of the electoral process, it shockingly lost the presidency to the forces backed by COSEP, the Catholic Church, and the U.S. government!

While the FSLN ceded governmental power to its rivals, in the brief interim between its 1990 loss and the installation of the new government, a number of its central leaders in the infamous Piñata Affair seized the opportunity to enrich themselves by appropriating public buildings and major hotels, and establishing control over major logging, agro-industrial operations, and some banking institutions. In short, leading FSLN revolutionaries became capitalists!

In 1996 and 2001 Ortega lost his second and third bid for the presidency but returned to this post in the elections of 2006, 2011, and 2016. However, during this entire period the essential nature of Nicaragua's economy has been capitalist and

Nicaragua has remained the second poorest nation in the hemisphere.

It is true that the FSLN early on, and with the help and influence of the Cubans, did seek to introduce some critical reforms, including a national literacy campaign, the establishment of important women's and student organizations, a national trade-union federation, and improvements in health care. During the recent decadeâ€"relying only on oil-based funding assistance from Venezuela, as opposed to at the expense of Nicaraguan capitalistsâ€"the FSLN introduced some social programs aimed at providing direct assistance to the nation's poor. (The "asistencialismo" is now diminishing in proportion to Venezuela's ever-deepening economic crisis.) But as with all the other "pink revolutions" in Latin America, the essentials of capitalism remained intact, in time dooming the masses to a life of poverty and deprivation.

Nicaragua's wages are among the lowest in Latin America; its foreign-owned free economic zone sweatshop maquiladoras, as with everywhere else in the world, serve imperialist needs for cheap labor. The majority of the population is relegated to the "informal" sector of the economyâ€"that is, to selling trinkets and other petty commodities and food on the streets and elsewhere to eek out a minimum living.

Nicaragua's heinous law formally banning abortion includes a penalty of six years in prison for violators. It is a prime example of FSLN collaboration with the extreme right and the Catholic Church. When the political parties representing the latter introduced this reactionary legislation into the National Assembly, the FSLN freed its parliamentary representatives from party discipline. This allowed for enough FSLN "yes" votes to pass this reactionary legislation, among the most backward laws in the worldâ€"albeit to date, no one has been jailed for its violation.

I might add that the FSLN votes banning abortion paved the way for its newfound 2006 electoral alliance with the Catholic Church and its leading prelate, Cardinal Miguel Obando y

Bravo. This alliance returned Ortega to the presidency. Obando, who had travelled to the U.S. decades earlier to lobby Congress for aid to the Contras to overthrow the FSLN government, went on to be an FSLN supporter. He presided over Ortega's wedding to Rosario Murillo, today Nicaragua's Vice President. "I am a Catholic man," Ortega told a recent mass FSLN rally in Managua to boost support for his beleaguered government, and perhaps, to once again signal that the FSLN's alliance with the Catholic Church might well be re-established.

Our point here is to demonstrate once again that from the 1979 Revolution to this day, FSLN policy has been to govern in coalition with Nicaragua's capitalist elite. In more recent years, the "socialist" facade of revolutionary integrity has all but disappeared, occasional rhetoric notwithstanding.

Failure of the "pink revolutions"

Tragically, we must say the same with regard to all Latin America's "pink revolutions" over the past decade and longer. Upon coming to political power, the governments of Lula/Brazil, Morales/Bolivia, Kirchner/Argentina, Ortega/Nicaragua, Correa/Ecuador, and Chavez-Maduro/Venezuela, rhetoric aside, never contemplated a revolutionary break with capitalism.

Whatever differences distinguished one from the others regarding the implementation of sometimes substantial reforms were subordinate to the fact that in all cases the essential social structures and institutions of the capitalist state remained largely intact. "INTACT," again, means that the fundamental ownership and control of the commanding economic heights of the nation were to remain in capitalist hands; the land and natural resources, the key banks and financial institutions remain today in capitalist hands. With regard to key oil and natural gas resources, even these, albeit sometimes formally "nationalized," were weakened or nullified by many of the traditional "small print" or fake nationalization

agreements with foreign capital that guaranteed their interests.

Unlike the Cuban Revolution of 1958-59, in which the Fidel Castro leadership definitively broke with capitalism, none challenged private ownership of the banks and leading financial institutions. None challenged corporate ownership of the major media. None fundamentally broke with international capitalist trade organizations. None established a monopoly of foreign trade and none established any semblance of control by the working masses over the political institutions that governed their lives.

All of these "pink revolutions," with Nicaragua's tragically evolving to become perhaps the faintest shade of all, proved to be incapable of guaranteeing that the measures implemented to alleviate the terrible conditions endured by the masses for decades and longer would become permanent or institutionalized. All of these reformist regimes attempted to co-exist with capitalism, a fatal and impossible project that in time doomed them to inevitable retreat, if not devolution to the rule of the previous elites. Nicaragua was no exception.

Recent mass upsurge

Over the past three months, and following the FSLN's now withdrawn decree lowering pension payments by 5 percent and increasing taxes on the poor, we have witnessed massive mobilizations for and against the FSLN government. Most of the spokespersons for the anti-FSLN forces appear to originate from the right, indeed, in some cases from the most reactionary sections of society that look to the U.S. but who were previously aligned with the FSLN. In the absence of clear revolutionary socialist forces on the scene, this is tragically inevitable.

Undoubtedly, however, a huge measure of the mass alienation from the FSLN today is due to its own policies, not only its proposed pensions reductions and tax increases

but to its granting of important areas of land to private interests to facilitate an Inter-oceanic Canal, its delay in taking decisive moves to stem a series of raging wildfires, its violent response to initially peaceful demonstrations, as well as the overall grinding poverty of the majority of the Nicaraguan people.

Here, we admit to a lack of any precise knowledge as to the perpetrators of the violence that has marked the present protests. We have seen credible reports from FSLN supporters and from its opponents that some 300, perhaps 400, have been killed and many more wounded. While it is clear that the FSLN has a virtual monopoly of the institutions of repression and violence—the army and police—we are in no position at this time to determine the veracity of any assessments. Yet we have no doubt that forces backed by the U.S. as well as the capitalist FSLN government and its armed forces are fully capable of defending their interests with violence. We are not indifferent in this matter.

Again, we stand in opposition to any and all forms of U.S. intervention. It makes a difference to revolutionary-minded workers who replaces governments and institutions that stand as obstacles to revolutionary progress and what those forces put forward as an alternative. The "right to revolution," the right of the vast majority to seize control of their fate and build a new world, belongs only to the oppressed masses themselves.

In time we will learn more about how the tragic shootings and murders began. But this too is subordinate to gaining an understanding as to what interests the leadership of the contending forces represent. On this we are certain. Neither has presented a platform aimed at challenging any form of capitalist domination and exploitation. Undoubtedly, there are forces that fundamentally reject Nicaraguan capitalism, likely on both sides, but to date, they are isolated at best and their programmatic views remain largely unknown.

Both of the leading contenders for popular support have proven capable of mobilizing mass forces, whether

they originate from the deep discontent with FSLN policies or from FSLN supporters who see any challenge to the Ortega government as an inevitable social regression.

For now, however, it appears that the violent physical confrontations that have polarized the country for the past three months have receded and, perhaps, yet another round of reconciliation negotiations are on the

horizon. We have no reason to believe that today's major players, as in the past, are not fully capable of reaching agreements that once again subordinate the interests of the Nicaraguan masses to the rule of capital. We have no interest in such negotiations, other than to demand in the U.S. that imperialism keep its bloody and grasping hands off Nicaragua.

Needless to say, we are staunch advocates of the construction of a mass revolutionary socialist party in Nicaragua, a party organized independently of and against all imperialist interventions and against the rule of capital in Nicaragua itself. This must be a party that is deeply imbedded in the just struggles of the Nicaraguan people for a society free from capitalist plunder and exploitation.

Trump is still holding migrant children hostage

20 August 2018, by **Christopher Baum**

The Trump administration has failed to meet a federal court's deadline for reuniting immigrant children in its custody with the families that they were torn from under the government's policy of family separation.

On June 26, U.S. District Court Judge Dana Sabraw granted an injunction in a class-action lawsuit filed by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) on behalf of migrant parents affected by family separation. [67]

Under Sabraw's order, the administration was required to reunite all of the parents already affected by this policy with the children the authorities had taken from them. He gave two deadlines: children under the age of 5 were to be reunited with their parents by July 10, the remainder by July 26.

As of July 10, the government had reunited only about half of the children under age 5 affected by the order. Two days later, when the government announced its completion of this initial phase of reunifications, it claimed to have reunited only 57 children out of a total of 103. [68]

As for the July 26 deadline, a CBS/Associated Press report reveals that as of that date, the government

had reunited only 1,820 out of a total of 2,531 children between the ages of 5 and 17 — still less than three-quarters. [69]

In short, the government came nowhere near meeting either deadline, and hundreds of children remain separated from their families.

What do we know about the children who still haven't been reunited?

To begin with, it must be emphasized that we are dependent, for now, on the figures provided by the government itself. Whether these numbers are accurate, and whether they tell the full story, remains to be seen.

Different media outlets have reported these numbers slightly differently. For instance, the total number of separated children under age 5 has been given in some sources as 98, in others as 101, 102 or 103.

Bearing these limitations in mind, it appears that some 756 children remain separated from their families: 45 children under age 5, and 711 between ages 5 and 17.

The government has offered a number of reasons for not having reunited these children with their parents.

First, as has widely been reported, 463 parents from whom children were taken have apparently already been deported — without their kids. These cases are "under review," according to the administration's court filings, but the ACLU claims that "the government isn't even trying to reunite" these parents with their children. [70] [71]

In other instances, as CNN reports, "families weren't reunited because red flags such as criminal convictions came up in the parents' backgrounds." But the government has yet to produce any details to support these cases. [72]

As Wendy Young, president of the Kids in Need of Defense (KIND), a nonprofit providing legal representation to unaccompanied minors, observed to CNN: "The government should be held accountable for the mess it's made and offer detailed rationales for why they deemed [each] parent inappropriate to release to. I do not trust this government to make that decision correctly."

Young's skepticism is widely shared. "While we agree that some crimes

may make a parent unfit to be reunited with his or her child,” writes Stacy Sullivan of the ACLU, “clearly not all crimes do, so we need the details.” [73]

This is especially true considering the many ways in which U.S. laws and policies make migration itself a crime. [74]

A third category consists of 40 children for whom the government claims it has no parental information at all. As Sullivan notes, this situation is “profoundly disturbing,” and the ACLU has called on the government to “explain in detail what efforts are being undertaken to locate and make contact with the parents the government can’t find.”

The government has also cited well over 100 cases where parents have “voluntarily given up their right to be reunited with their children. This claim obviously requires closer scrutiny as well.

In a motion filed with Judge Sabraw on July 25, the ACLU described the “coercive and misleading manner” in which the government has been dealing with the parents of separated children. Of particular concern were situations where parents appeared to have been duped into signing away their right to be reunited with their children: [75]

[T]he evidence is overwhelming that parents have signed forms they did not understand. Some forms were distributed in English to parents who did not speak that language. Some parents with limited or no literacy were not told what they were signing. Still others thought they had signed papers stating that they wanted reunification. Parents who speak an indigenous language were at a particular disadvantage.

Given all this, the ACLU says, “it should come as no surprise” that many of the people listed by the Trump administration as having waived their right to reunification do, in fact, want their kids back.

This wasn’t the first time the government has been caught trying to deceive and coerce the parents of separated children.

On July 3, NBC News reported that the Trump administration had begun using a new Separated Parent’s Removal Form that gave parents only two choices: be deported without your child, or be reunited with your child and then we’ll deport all of you together. [76] [77]

Although the form indicates that it is intended for parents with “administratively final orders of removal,” Lee Gelernt, the ACLU attorney who is leading the class action lawsuit, told NBC: “We are seeing cases where people who have passed credible fear interviews and have pending asylum claims are being given this form.”

In other words, the government was trying to hoodwink people with pending asylum cases into abandoning their claims and agreeing to be deported instead “possibly without even being reunited with their children.

The ACLU brought this to Sabraw’s attention, and effective July 10, the government was required to post the following notice in ICE detention facilities: “You do NOT need to agree to removal from the United States in order to be reunified with your child. You may continue to fight your case. You should NOT be pressured to agree to removal in order to be reunified with your child.”

Nonetheless, as the July 25 filing shows, the government continues to argue that many of these parents did indeed voluntarily give up the right to be reunited with their children.

Even for those families who have been reunited, the ordeal may be far from over.

As NBC News reported on July 27, as many as 1,000 of the newly reunited families are now facing immediate deportation. [78] The report indicated

that Sabraw will consider the ACLU’s request for a seven-day stay of deportation to ensure parents are “given proper time to decide whether to be deported with their children or leave their children in the U.S. while the children pursue asylum.”

The choice is, of course, distressingly like that offered by the government on its “removal form.”

Worse still is the harm, some of it possibly irreparable, that the administration’s cruel policies have done to the families they’ve torn apart.

Sabraw’s original order of June 26 quoted from briefs filed in the case indicating that “separating children from parents is a highly destabilizing, traumatic experience that has long term consequences on child well-being, safety and development”: [79]

Separation from family leaves children more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, no matter what the care setting. In addition, traumatic separation from parents creates toxic stress in children and adolescents that can profoundly impact their development.

Strong scientific evidence shows that toxic stress disrupts the development of brain architecture and other organ systems, and increases the risk for stress-related disease and cognitive impairment well into adult years.

Studies have shown that children who experience such traumatic events can suffer from symptoms of anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder, have poorer behavioral and educational outcomes, and experience higher rates of poverty and food insecurity.

As another brief cited in the order summarized, “The psychological distress, anxiety and depression associated with separation from a parent would follow the children well after the immediate period of separation “even after eventual reunification with a parent or other family.”

It is too early to even begin to guess at the extent of the trauma that Trump has caused with his cruel and hateful policies. But we are already beginning to see tragic real-world confirmation

of the predictions.

The Wall Street Journal described the testimony of Dr. Jennifer Havens, director and chief of service for child and adolescent psychiatry at New York's Bellevue Hospital, talking about the approximately 300 separated children under the care of various social services organizations in the city:

Most of the children are resilient, Dr. Havens said, but there is a subset who have a significant disorder associated with the trauma of separation. Some show signs of major depression, which can lead to suicidal ideation or attempts.

One 6-year-old who had been separated from his family was so deeply traumatized that he might have appeared psychotic to a less-experienced mental health professional, Dr. Havens said. "But really what he was having was a flashback," she said.

Some very young children appear confused or don't recognize a parent upon reunifying, Dr. Havens said. Some of them had to attach to another caregiver.

The situation undeniably remains very grim. But we can and should draw inspiration from the many ordinary people who have chosen to stand up and fight against these horrors.

It was mass public outcry that drove Trump to issue his executive order on June 20, suspending the family separation policy. [80] The nationwide "Families Belong Together" demonstrations on June 30 showed even more forcefully the level of public outrage at the administration's immigration policies.

Grassroots organizing and action has also temporarily shut down ICE facilities, pressed various businesses and institutions to sever their relations with the DHS, called attention to local governments' lucrative facilities contracts with ICE and created crowdfunding organizations to provide support to migrants dealing with family separation. [81] [82] [83]

In an important victory, on July 29, the city of Philadelphia responded to mass protests by announcing it would terminate its information-sharing contract with ICE. [84]

Protests can even have an impact in the courtroom itself.

Hints of this can be seen Judge Sabraw's court order, issued a few days prior to the June 30 demonstrations: "Public outrage remained at a fever pitch," he noted in his introductory remarks, describing the response to Trump's executive order. [85]

Later, in Sabraw's description of the state of affairs as he was writing, he said, "This situation has reached a crisis level. The news media is saturated with stories of immigrant

families being separated at the border. People are protesting."

It would appear that Sabraw "appointed to the bench by George W. Bush" has, at the very least, taken note of which way the wind was blowing.

Even more striking were the remarks of U.S. District Court Judge Paul Crotty, another Bush appointee, in his ruling that freed Pablo Villavicencio, the Long Island resident who was handed over to ICE while delivering a pizza to the military base at Fort Hamilton in Brooklyn.

As Lea Ramirez and Lucy Herschel reported for Socialist Worker:

In ordering Villavicencio freed, federal Judge Paul Crotty questioned the "justice" of his being detained in the first place "and wondered out loud in court about how "the powerful are doing what they want, and the poor are suffering what they must."... [86]

That he would express the concerns he did is a sign of both how outrageous the Trump administration is behaving, but also the impact of protests, mobilizations and statements of solidarity by defenders of immigrant rights who stand up to ICE's terror.

It is clear that protests and mobilizations are having an effect. It's also clear that we are going to need even more of them.

July 31, 2018

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

The social origins of the uprising

19 August 2018, by Joseph Daher

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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Changes and Continuity: Four Decades of Industrial Relations in China

19 August 2018, by **Chris Chan**

The year 2018 marks the fortieth anniversary of the beginning of China's economic reform programme initiated in 1978. [87] The rise of migrant workers' strikes since early 2000s and the efforts of the Chinese government to rebalance and reregulate workplace relations have created fertile ground for labour studies and labour activism in China. One of the key debates in this scholarly/activist community concerns the extent to which labour relations and the 'labour movement' in China have changed, and where they may be heading. Pessimists highlight the structural power of the market and the ability of the authoritarian state to undermine worker solidarity and collective action, while optimists

envision the ongoing emergence of a strong and independent labour movement in China, supported by labour NGOs and international civil society.

In the midst of this debate, on 3 December 2015 there was a major crackdown on labour NGOs in Guangzhou and Foshan. Between 2012 and 2015, most of the affected NGOs had been active in assisting the collective struggles of workers by promoting collective bargaining. Some labour lawyers and academics referred to this new type of NGO as 'labour movement-oriented NGOs' (gongyunxing NGOs) to distinguish them from 'social service-oriented NGOs' (fuwuxing NGOs) and 'legal

rights-oriented NGOs' (weiquanxing NGOs) (Duan 2015; see also Franceschini and Lin's essay in the present issue). This crackdown was a major setback for Chinese activists who had worked to build a labour movement from the ground up. For scholars, by the time their studies on labour movement-oriented NGOs were published, these organizations had essentially ceased to exist.

Does this portend a gloomy future for Chinese workers? To respond to this question, I advocate a Marxian approach built on two observations (see for example Chan 2010 and 2012; Chan and Hui 2017). First, class struggle between capital and labour around the issues of production, which

is constrained by global political economy, defines the history of China's integration into global capitalism. Second, the state remains a contested terrain of class struggle in China. It is only through a worker-centred and historical approach that we can understand the rapidly shifting landscape in contemporary China, and what the future may hold.

Harmonious Labour Relations

Since the early 1990s, China has established itself as a 'world factory', with the cities in the Pearl River Delta (PRD) as its powerhouse. [88] Major ethnographic research conducted in the PRD has found that the politics of place and gender were often exploited by management to maintain class domination and despotism throughout the 1990s (Lee 1988; Pun 2005). But labour relations have undergone change in the new millennium. Politically, after President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao took office in 2002, a series of socioeconomic reforms were introduced in the name of building a 'harmonious society' (hexie shehui). Social challenges related to farmers, rural areas, and agriculture - the so-called 'three rural problems' (sannong wenti) - have since become a greater concern for the Party-state. Economically, since 2003, China has surpassed the United States as the country with the largest foreign direct investment inflow in the world. China's GDP also shocked the world, with an average annual growth rate of 10.5 per cent from 2001 to 2011 (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2012).

The dramatic changes in China's urban and rural economies since 2003 has given rise to a shortage of labour (mingonghuang) - a situation in stark contrast with the labour surplus (mingongchao) of the early 1990s. Within this context, rising waves of strikes and protests have taken place in the PRD since 2004. This unrest has forced the government to increase the minimum wage and introduce new labour laws, culminating in the 2008 Labour Contract Law. This law was intended to stabilise and regulate

labour relations by making written contracts a legal obligation for employers. Workers were entitled to double pay if their employers did not sign a contract with them and, after they completed two consecutive contracts or were employed for ten continuous years, the employer was required to give them a permanent contract. Employers had to pay severance of one month's wages for each year of service if they wanted to dismiss a worker. This was an important step to the formalization of employment relations for the migrant workers, who had previously existed in a precarious state (Lee 1988; Pun 2005).

Class Struggle Intensified

The global economic crisis of 2008 had a major effect on the Chinese economy. In 2009, China's total exports decreased by 16 per cent (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2010). Many factories in South China faced closure or bankruptcy, but the Chinese economy recovered quickly due to the government's huge stimulus investment in infrastructure and social spending. In 2010, the GDP growth rate returned to double digits (10.3 per cent). Concomitant with this economic revival was the reemergence of labour shortages. Against this backdrop, a more significant wave of strikes led by Honda workers in June 2010 attracted global attention. [89] These industrial actions gave impetus to the process of trade union reform (Chan and Hui 2014), and the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) began to promote a policy of wage bargaining and trade union direct election.

The next turning point for labour relations in China came in 2012, as President Xi Jinping took power. Unlike the Hu-Wen administration which emphasised harmonious society and pursued reformist social and labour policies, Xi's government has adopted a hard-line policy to pacify labour activism. The foundation of this political change has been the economic slowdown since 2012, with many factory closures and relocations. The GDP growth rate decreased from

10.1 per cent in 2011 to 8.1 per cent in 2012 and 6.7 per cent in 2016 - a situation that Xi has called the 'new normal' for the Chinese economy (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2016).

Since 2012, many factories announced their relocation plans with minimal or no compensation to workers. In response, workers increasingly took collective action. During this period, pension insurance became one of the main demands of migrant workers on strike. This demand was encouraged by the Social Insurance Law, in effect since 2011, and was also pressing because many migrant workers had reached or were nearing retirement age. The strike at the Yue Yuen shoe factory in Dongguan in April 2014 was the most influential collective action concerning pension issues (Chen 2015). More than 40,000 workers went on strike for more than 10 days, gaining global attention. The strike ended with the company agreeing to pay the social insurance owed to the workers (Chan and Hui 2017). Another successful case took place at the Lide shoe factory in Guangzhou in August 2014. Lide workers were able to receive compensation and social insurance before the factory's relocation with the help of the Panyu Migrant Workers Service Center, one of the major 'labour movement oriented NGOs' (Froissart 2018).

Since then, in the face of the economic slowdown, the Party-state has lowered the standard of labour rights protection. For instance, in February 2017, Guangdong province announced that the minimum wage now would be adjusted every three years, rather than every two years, in order to lower operation costs of enterprises. Thus, the minimum wage in 2018 would remain at the 2015 level (Caixin 2017). At the same time, police intervention in labour protests escalated, strikes that affected public order could be directly shut down, and worker leaders risked arrest. Wu Guijun, one of the leaders of a strike in Shenzhen in 2013, was detained for 371 days (Mitchell 2015). Labour NGOs were also targeted by the government. This had dramatic negative repercussions for the development of labour NGOs in China, with many organizations becoming

severely constrained in the ways they were able to support workers' collective actions.

The Future

The latest developments show that some labour NGOs seem to have reduced capacity to support workers in their struggle due to the shrinking political space for civil society – particularly civil society working in the labour sphere. But challenges to labour activism do not put an end to class struggle. Therefore, in order to understand the trajectory of China's labour situation there are two key points that must be considered.

First, workplace conflict is embedded within the capitalist production regime. Strikes and other forms of labour protests will not be eliminated without structural change in industrial relations. In an attempt to smooth over the contradictions and strengthen the existing system, in recent years the Chinese Party-state has made great effort to reform local trade unions, and to strengthen their capability to intervene in workplace conflict and promote collective bargaining. One example is the pilot project of the Shenzhen Federation of Trade Unions to establish community-based worker service centres and worker training programmes (Dou 2017). If these projects are successful, an authoritarian hegemonic labour regime will emerge in some sectors and regions, but at least workers will enjoy slightly better protections. If, on the contrary, the state-led reformist policies are not well implemented and detrimental working conditions remain, the workers' struggle will carry on.

In fact, the dramatic growth of the service sector in China has resulted in surging labour unrest in relevant industries. Workers' collective actions in the service industries have accounted for 21 per cent of all collective action cases, surpassing the manufacturing industries for the first time in the third quarter of 2016 (China Labour Bulletin 2016). Information about labour strikes and protests are generally more difficult to access. Still on May Day of 2018, the Global Times, an official Chinese

newspaper, reported that crane operators in the construction sector had launched protests across China demanding better pay and an eight-hour working day. In the city of Chengdu alone, at least 10,000 workers joined the protest (Yin 2018).

Second, regarding the role of NGOs, it should be noted that they are a tool, rather than the goal, of civil society in supporting workers. Historically, labour NGOs in the PRD were initiated by Hong Kong labour organizations, activists, and academics (Chan 2018). In the late 1990s and early 2000s, with the more relaxed policies of the Party-state, labour activists and intellectuals in mainland China began to establish their own organizations. In this way, the existence and organization of labour NGOs can be seen as emerging from a particular historical and political moment. As long as intellectuals and social activists maintain their concerns for labour issues, the measures they take to support the workers struggle can vary across time and space. For instance, eight university students from Beijing were detained or wanted by the government as they organized a reading group with workers in a university campus in Guangzhou (Chuang 2018). This instigated an enormous outpouring of support from Chinese scholars and other intellectuals. It illustrates that the struggle around labour rights between pro-labour civil society actors and the state is far from dead. It is ongoing, developing, and changing. Under a new political context, new strategies have been created to support workers and resist pressure from the state. â€

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August 10, 2018

[Made in China](#)

How European Workers Coordinated Massive Amazon Strikeâ€”And What Comes Next

18 August 2018, by **Rebecca Burns**

The work stoppage, which lasted three days at some facilities, was one of the largest labor actions against Amazon to date, and the first to receive widespread coverage in the U.S. media. But the strikes and protests in Spain, Germany and Poland were just the latest in an escalating series of actions against Amazon in Europe, where workers belonging to both conventional unions and militant workers' organizations are forging a transnational movement against the internet juggernaut.

In Germany, which is Amazon's second-biggest market after the United States, workers at the company's fulfillment centers waged the first-ever strike against Amazon in 2013. "In the beginning, it was purely about wages, about being able to pay for the cost of living," says Lena Widmann, a federal secretary and spokesperson for the German services union Verdi. "Now it's also about respect, and about being heard."

After the first strikes, Amazon began to give German workers regular raises. It also made improvements to

ventilation and lighting in some of its warehouses, and, in response to worker complaints about the physical and psychological toll of on-the-job requirements, added a "fruit day" with company-furnished fruit baskets.

But Amazon has refused to codify even these modest changes through a collective bargaining agreement. The union estimates that approximately 2,400 workers at six of the company's fulfillment centers in Germany participated in last week's three-day strike, out of about 16,000 that Amazon employs in Germany. Organizers will continue pushing to incorporate more workers in shop-floor organization, to contact new facilities that Amazon has opened in the past year, and, ultimately, to win a union contract.

"We're talking about a long fight aheadâ€”it's not going to be solved by Christmas, and our members are very aware of this," says Widmann. "But more and more people are joining the movement."

In a statement responding to the strikes, an Amazon spokesperson said,

"Amazon is a fair and responsible employer and as such we are committed to dialogue, which is an inseparable part of our culture. We are committed to ensuring a fair cooperation with all our employees, including positive working conditions and a caring and inclusive environment."

In 2014, Amazon began to open warehouses in Poland, where wages are lower and labor laws are laxer. A chapter in the 2018 book Choke Points: Logistics Workers Disrupt the Global Supply Chain describes working conditions in the Polish warehouses:

Most employees have to work standing or walking (some for several miles during one shift), and many jobs involve highly repetitive movements, lifting heavy goods and boxes, or pushing heavy carts. Amazon wants the warehouses running day and night. Therefore, workers in Poland have to work four 10-hour shifts per week, with an additional unpaid 30 minutes break. The shifts schedule changes every month from day shift.

Such a shift system and shift rotation disturbs workers' sleeping rhythm and leads to serious health problems. In addition, it makes it difficult to organise a private life.

To bring down the sickness rate, Amazon Poland hired a company in spring 2017 which checks whether workers are at home during sick leave. A worker who was dismissed because of a sick leave wrote: "At Amazon we hear about safety every day, about health, but the reality is different. Not everyone can keep up the race at Amazon. People are treated like machines. But even machines fail and stand still. We are not allowed to do that."

Moreover, Amazon's expansion into Eastern Europe threatened to undercut the effectiveness of strikes being waged by German workers. So in 2015, rank-and-file activists Germany and Poland held the first of what became a series of cross-border meetings of Amazon workers. Polish workers have organized within Inicjatywa Pracownicza (Workers' Initiative), a radical trade union that uses the black sabo-tabby as its logo. [90]

The birth of Workers' Initiative in 2004 was a "reaction to the crisis of the Polish official union movement - to its bureaucracy, passivity and links with the anti-worker government," Magda Malinowska, a member of the group, tells *In These Times* over e-mail. Since then, Workers' Initiative has organized in the logistics industry as well as the healthcare, education and culture sectors.

Polish labor law imposes a restrictive bar on strike actions"more than half

of an entire workforce must participate in a strike vote"but Polish Amazon workers have carried out a series of slowdowns to coincide with ongoing strikes in Germany. [91]

"We [did not want to be] used as scabs, with health and safety laws and our rights neglected, so that Amazon could ignore the strikes in other fulfillment centers," says Malinowska.

Through its "safe package" actions, Workers' Initiative has carried out what are effectively work-to-rule strikes, leafletting employees to remind them of the risk of injury from Amazon's speed-ups.

"We want to draw the attention of all employees to work above all safety, in accordance with health and safety regulations, and not under pressure from the employer to 'beat shipping records,' because they will not get any rewards for their dedication," says Malinowska. She adds that since warehouses opened in Poland, shipping targets have increased several times.

Coordination between Amazon workers in different countries"taking place through cross-border meetings of rank-and-file workers, as well as the labor federation UNI"has played an important role in ramping up strike action elsewhere in Europe. [92] [93] When Italian Amazon workers first went on strike in November 2017, they were joined by Verdi members for a two-day work stoppage during Black Friday. [94] Soon after, Amazon signed its first-ever collective bargaining agreement with Italian unions, which introduced new scheduling protections and wage

increases for overnight shifts. [95]

The call for a Europe-wide strike during Prime Day was issued by Spanish Amazon workers, who first struck in March at the country's logistics center in Madrid. [96] The Spanish labor union Confederación Sindical de Comisiones Obreras (CCOO), which is the majority union for Amazon workers at a national level, declared the strike a "complete success," with a reported 98 percent of the 2,000-person workforce taking part. [97]

"We know that Amazon is using its logistic network in Europe to counter the effect of our respective strikes," wrote its authors. "We in Madrid believe that only if we struggle together will we gain recognition for our demands. Similarly, only with a joint action at a European level will workers organize in those places where there is no union representation yet."

In addition to strikes and slowdowns in Spain, Germany and Poland, Amazon workers in Great Britain marched over the weekend in a festival celebrating the birth of trade unionism, holding signs reading "We Are Humans, Not Robots." An estimated 87 percent of U.K. Amazon workers have back or neck problems, according to a survey by the trade union GMB.

"Amazon is a global company and uses global tactics," GMB official Mick Rix told *El Pais*. "We have to do the same." [98]

[July 28 2018]

[In these times](#)

Her Majesty, Aretha

18 August 2018, by **Kim D. Hunter**

Towards the end of her life, the unchallenged Queen of Soul went back to performing primarily religious music. But in one sense, Aretha

Franklin never really left gospel, just blended it with a secular, not so sublimated eroticism, ecstasy by any other name.

The tug-of-war in African American culture between sacred and secular music is almost as old as the blues itself. Ironically, it's been pointed out

that changing a gospel song to a secular song is often as easy as changing the word “God” to the “baby” in a song because there’s no serious musical difference between much of R&B and gospel. Aretha along with other great African American artists such as Sam Cooke, Little Richard, James Brown and the Staple Singers made that all too clear. Her mother’s death when she was still a child caused her to seek solace in church where she was raised.

She was from the last of a generation to make “crossover” from sacred to secular music at a time when such a move was still a bit controversial in the Black church community. But virtually no one was able to so skillfully and successfully blend the joys of earthly love with a heavenly sound. One of the many tributes summed it up best by saying “Aretha could take you to church even when she was talking about a no good man.”

The first piano chords of “I Ain’t Never Loved a Man,” her pioneering recording on Atlantic Records after the eclectic early years at Columbia, are as iconic as any every played, and as fine an example of no daylight between gospel and blues as can be

had. That piano is followed by Franklin in deep, soulful lament. The lyrics are about a ne’er do well lover. The tone is pure Sunday morning blues in the church.

That was an early hit before she covered Otis Redding’s “Respect” and turned it into a blockbuster. Singing as a woman of unabashed power, Franklin transformed the song from a request for respect into a demand. Later on, she would team up with Annie Lennox to record an overtly feminist song, “Sister Are Doing it for Themselves.” But “Respect” was one an early high points in an illustrious, award laden career where she would stamp material and old familiar work with her unique talent.

From the 1970’s Spirit and Dark, another deft unique blend of gospel and funky R&B, to her work with the “Three Tenors,” Aretha Franklin commanded the stage with power and presence.

Of course, those of us in Detroit felt a special bond with Aretha not just because she was raised here in her father’s iconic New Bethel Baptist Church, but because just as she never

really left gospel music, she also never really left Detroit. She lived in the city proper for decades after becoming a superstar and when she returned for shows, she frequently hired Detroit musicians to accompany her, a testament to her loyalty and the pool of Detroit talent that nurtured her.

She was also nurtured by her very gifted father and civil rights leader Rev. C.L. Franklin. Just as Pops Staples of the Staples Singers guided his family from sacred to secular music, so too, did C.L. Franklin approve and guide his daughters Carolyn, Aretha and Erma into careers beyond pop music outside the church. He even helped them navigate the often treacherous waters of record label contracts and relations.

But Aretha was the one to take what she found in a great Black Detroit church along with her natural talent and become the embodiment of sacred and secular or as others have put it, the “majesty of the blues.”

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The evolution of the regime of President Daniel Ortega since 2007

17 August 2018, by **Éric Toussaint**

[99]

What Daniel Ortega succeeded in doing between 2007 and 2018 is reminiscent of what Mexico’s Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) did during the 1960s and 1970 (*see the box on the PRI regime*): defend the interests of big capital, open the economy more to major foreign corporations, and maintain good relations with the IMF, the World Bank and other multilateral entities, while maintaining the support of a number of popular organisations over

which it has very strong influence, and by maintaining a policy of minimal social assistance (financial and material support for the poorest citizens, but without intervening structurally on the causes of poverty), all of which was enabled by an international economic situation that was favourable to exportation and by aid from Venezuela. Like the PRI in 1968, Ortega did not hesitate to use violence against social protest. But, proportionally to the size of the population, in 2018 he did it on a larger scale than had the PRI. Like the

PRI at that period, Ortega still has the support of several anti-imperialist governments (Cuba, Venezuela, Bolivia) and a part of the Latin American Left. How long can that last? That will depend on several factors: the scope of the economic crisis, which is reducing the manoeuvring space for the policy of distributing crumbs to the poorest segment of the population, the ability of the social movements and the radical Left in Nicaragua to overcome their disorientation and disgust, the brutal repression, the discredit to

Sandinism and socialism resulting from the caricatural nature of the regime of Daniel Ortega and Rosario Murillo, and the ability of the international Left to overcome its perplexity.

The PRI regime in Mexico

The PRI, which came into existence in 1946, had succeeded, starting in 1950-1960, in co-opting and diverting what remained of the Mexican revolution of 1910-1920 and the major social advances achieved during the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas between 1934 and 1940: nationalization of oil and of the railways, expropriation of 16 million hectares from the big foreign or national landowners and the redistribution of the land to the native indigenous communities for their collective use, and the victory won over the banks – primarily in the USA –, reducing the public debt by 90% (see Éric Toussaint, *The Debt System* [100]). The PRI monopolized power and surrounded itself with satellite parties. It controlled the trade unions and the public service, along with most farmers' organizations. It controlled all the organs of the State, a part of the strategic industries and the means of mass communication. It engaged in very harsh repression during the student protests of 2 October 1968, resulting in the Tlatelolco massacre. The exact number of dead due to that repression has never been revealed. Serious sources estimate it at 300. The PRI government eventually recognised some thirty deaths, but that number is not convincing. As part of the repression of 1968, the PRI had hundreds of leftist militants eliminated in a generalized wave of disappearances in order to stay in power. It used paramilitary groups to organize the repression and perpetrate executions. Beginning in the 1980s, it gradually eliminated many of the social advances that still existed from the period of 1910-1940. As a State-Party, it has adopted the recommendations of the Washington Consensus, massively privatized the public sector and begun an intensive liberalization of markets in Mexico.

Despite the repression, the PRI government benefited from an embarrassed silence on the part of several governments and parties of the Left in Latin America until the 1990s since it had interests that deviated from those of Washington in certain significant areas.

To understand the complex nature of the policies of the PRI since it has been in power and its specific relations with the Left in Latin American, it is worthwhile to consider a few examples. The "third-worldist" president Echeverría (1970-1976) broke off relations with the Pinochet dictatorship and welcomed hundreds of persecuted Chilean militants. He also offered asylum to leftist political activists from Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil. But at the same time, Echeverría (who was also a collaborator with the CIA) was the first to massively apply the policy of forced disappearances in order to eliminate Mexican *guerrilleros*. But progressive policies such as providing asylum for leftist exiles from Latin American led a part of the Left to refrain from criticizing the PRI regime. Accordingly, when the human-rights activist Rosario Ibarra (whose son was "disappeared" by the PRI regime in April 1975) took part as a member of the Eureka Committee in the meetings of FEDEFAM (*Federación Latinoamericana de Asociaciones de Familiares de Detenidos-Desaparecidos* – Federation of Associations for Relatives of the Detained-Disappeared), she was harshly criticised by mothers of *desaparecidos* in the Southern Cone (Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, etc.), especially Chileans, who refuse to include Mexico in the list of regimes who practiced forced disappearances. The Chilean members did not want the regime of President Luis Echeverría to be mentioned, in part because it provided asylum to leaders and members of Popular Unity who were fleeing the Pinochet dictatorship. Later, the Mexican government was among the first to recognize the Sandinista regime that had overthrown the Somoza dictatorship. It also supported the process of negotiations between the guerrillas in El Salvador and the regime in place there. The Mexican government had also allowed Fidel Castro and his comrades, including Raul Castro and Che Guevara, to train in Mexico before launching their expedition against the Batista regime in November 1956, leaving the Mexican coast aboard the yacht Granma. The Mexican regime defended the Cuban regime against the USA after the victory of the revolution in 1959.

The PRI government of President Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988 to late 1994) repressed the Zapatist uprising beginning in January 1994. The PRI's power monopoly began to break up with the tragic events of the earthquake in 1985, which hit the City of Mexico very hard. The society was forced to organize itself in the face of government inaction during the catastrophe, which marked a new social and political awareness. The decisive break-up of the PRI's monopoly became evident with the election for governor of Mexico City in 1997, when Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas (the son of Lázaro Cárdenas) was elected governor as candidate of a party opposed to the PRI.

The PRI returned to power in 2012. In July 2018, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, an opponent of the PRI and leader of Morena, a centre-Left group, was elected president.

Let us return to what happened between Daniel Ortega's victory in the November 2006 election and the

beginning of his presidential term in 2007. In the words of former guerrilla commandant Mónica Baltodano: *"With Ortega's arrival in the presidency in 2007, a tendency that had been becoming more and more clear was patently manifested. The economic pragmatism shown by the FSLN with respect to privatizations and neoliberal policies was fully displayed. That initiated a new phase in which Ortega entered a rapprochement process with the other pillar of national power: the heads of big business grouped under the Superior Council of Private Enterprise (COSEP) umbrella. That was when the symbiosis was initiated between Ortega and big national capital. I call it a symbiosis rather than an alliance because what defines the nature of the current regime is that its main mission is to create or strengthen the market economy conditions, buttressing big capital, while handing out crumbs to the poor to keep them pacified. [...] That economic power group has a community of interests with big national capital. It's not an alliance for tactical reasons as some believe, warning the big business leaders to be careful for fear they'll be knifed in the back one day. No, no, no, what they have is a symbiosis of interests. Ortega and his group are with big capital because they themselves are now an important capitalist group and the government represents its community of interests with the traditional oligarchy and transnational capital."* [101]

Daniel Ortega refused to challenge the legitimacy of the debt claimed against Nicaragua and renewed agreements with the IMF

Already after the victory of the revolution in July 1979, the Sandinista leadership had decided not to question repayment of the debt contracted by the Somoza dynasty. And yet that debt met both criteria for considering it odious and refusing to repay it: it had not benefited the nation, and the creditors were aware of that fact since they were directly complicit with the corrupt Somoza regime. [102] And an aggravating factor, although one that is not indispensable for qualifying the debt as odious, was that it had served to finance a dictatorship that was

guilty of crimes against humanity.

The debt that was later accumulated by the three rightist governments that succeeded one another between 1990 and 2007 served to finance neoliberal counter-reforms, privatizations, and attacks on the economic and social rights of the population. What's more, it could have been demonstrated that this debt had supported corruption, in particular during the term of office of Arnoldo Alemán (1997-2002). Daniel Ortega, once elected president, could have - had he wanted to - taken inspiration from the president of Ecuador, Rafael Correa, who had also been elected in late 2006. Correa had set up a debt audit commission in July 2007 with broad citizen participation (including representatives of social movements that were highly critical of him, such as CONAIE and Ecuarrunari). The task of this commission was to identify the portion of Ecuador's internal and external public debt that was illegitimate and illegal. Based on the work of the audit commission, in November 2008, Ecuador's government unilaterally suspended repayment of a portion of the debt that had been identified as illegitimate and illegal. Through this process, Ecuador had scored a victory over the creditors in 2009. We should add that in May 2007, Ecuador had expelled the permanent representative of the World Bank. It had also requested that the IMF leave the facilities it occupied within the central bank buildings and had decided not to enter into any further loan agreements with that institution. We should also point out that Bolivia, followed by Ecuador and Venezuela, had decided to leave the ICSID (International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes), the World Bank's arbitration entity.

Daniel Ortega took a completely different attitude - he did everything in his power to maintain good relations with the IMF and stated that he would pursue the reforms it was demanding. He committed to achieving a primary budget surplus in order to continue repaying the debt and reduce the budget deficit. His choice of that option required him to reject a legitimate demand of the country's public-service workers for an increase in their wages, which

were and still are particularly low, including in education and health-care. [103]

Daniel Ortega increased the number of free-trade treaties

In 2006, when the FSLN was in the opposition, Daniel Ortega, as its principal leader, persuaded his parliamentary group to vote in favour of the CAFTA free-trade treaty with the USA. This marked another turning point in the FSLN's orientation, since prior to that point the party had accused the government of President Enrique Bolaños of subjugating Nicaragua to Washington's economic interests. The approval of this treaty by the FSLN MPs was accompanied by support for changes in a whole series of laws to conform to the prior conditions imposed by the USA. Other free-trade treaties were approved with the FSLN's support: a treaty with Taiwan (which entered into force in 2008), one concerning Central America with Mexico (2011) and another between Central America and the European Union (2012).

Daniel Ortega opened Nicaragua more widely to the interests of foreign companies in the areas of agribusiness, mining and fisheries

The Observatory of Multinationals in Latin America (OMAL), based in the Basque country and oriented clearly toward defence of the peoples' interests, has conducted in-depth studies of the compromises made by the Daniel Ortega government regarding multinationals, which extended the efforts made by his predecessors in that direction.

Mónica Baltodano makes reference to this and adds her personal experience. The Bolaños government's relations with the Spanish energy transnational Unión Fenosa, she says, were "tense." Bolaños had in fact filed twelve actions against Unión Fenosa and the courts had ordered fines against the Spanish company. But, Baltodano says: "[...]the Ortega government resolved all that. In November 2007, ironically while Ortega was in the Ibero-American Summit in Santiago, Chile, unleashing a virulent discourse

against transnationals, Unión Fenosa included, Bayardo Arce [a trusted associate of Daniel Ortega, a former member of the national leadership who profited greatly from the piñata, ET] was in the Moncloa Palace in Madrid, meeting with Unión Fenosa's corporate management. Based on the "Protocol of Understanding between the Government of Nicaragua and Unión Fenosa," which included guarantees of all kinds for the latter and was given the rank of law in Nicaragua's National Assembly on February 12, 2009, all pending trials, demands and fines were wiped out with a swipe of the pen. Later came still other laws, always to Unión Fenosa's benefit. While what we remember is Ortega's constant diatribe against it, Nicaraguan government relations with it were never as fluid as they were with Ortega in office."

Baltodano adds that under the presidency of Daniel Ortega, privatization of the energy sector, and therefore of Nicaragua's natural resources, increased, benefiting the multinationals, and in particular those in which Ortega himself owns stock. She points to the appropriation, supported by the government, of "the country's main mineral exploitations" by the company B2Gold, headquartered in Canada, [104] with dramatic consequences for the environment and for the local communities. She also denounces the deforestation perpetrated by the "lumber mafias" through concessions granted by the government.

Mónica Baltodano describes in detail how the multinational Pescanova succeeded in making lucrative deals under the Ortega government: "A lesser known example is the fishing exploitation operated by the Spanish transnational Pescanova. Spanish environmental researcher MarÁa Mestre published a report in a December 2010 issue of *Diagonal* on how Pescanova has functioned in Nicaragua after arriving in 2002 with the acquisition of *Ultracongelados Antártida, S.A.*, Spain's largest seafood cooking plant, which owned a third of a Nicaraguan shrimp farming company operating in Chinandega. From there Pescanova began expanding its shrimp rearing and

processing, raising shrimp larvae in laboratories and continually expanding its fish farming area. By 2006, Pescanova had 2,500 hectares in concession, and two years later, now under the Ortega government, it had doubled that, controlling 58% of the surface granted in fishing concessions. Between January and April 2009 alone, it increased its ownership to 82% of the total surface granted in concessions, although not all of that was put into production." [105]

The Interoceanic Canal

This two-centuries-old project was reactivated by the government of Daniel Ortega. On 14 June 2013, the National Assembly of Nicaragua approved, by a vote of 61 to 28, a bill which grants a concession for a renewable term of fifty years to the Chinese consortium HKDN Nicaragua Canal Development. The estimated cost is 50 billion dollars, or 41 billion euros. Construction began in 2015 and was to be completed in 2019, with the canal to open in 2020. But the project has been suspended since the Chinese company has gone bankrupt and its owner has disappeared.

The project is opposed by environmental scientific groups. There is a serious risk of pollution of Lake Nicaragua, which is vital as a freshwater reserve for biodiversity and for the local population, which drinks the lake's water and uses it to irrigate agricultural land. In terms of social impact, 25,000 persons are to be displaced by the project.

Total prohibition of abortion entered into force in the criminal code in 2008

As mentioned in the preceding article, in 2006 the Sandinista parliamentary group, hand in hand with the conservative MPs, voted in a law totally prohibiting abortion. It was under the presidency of Daniel Ortega, who refused to call the measure into question, that the prohibition was included in new criminal code that entered into force in July 2008. There are no exceptions whatsoever to the prohibition,

including cases of danger to the health or the life of the pregnant woman or pregnancy resulting from rape. Amnesty international says in its report [106]: *"The high level of teenage pregnancies in Nicaragua means that many of those affected by the revised laws are girls under 18. The repeal of the legal provisions allowing for therapeutic abortion endangers the lives of women and girls and puts medical professionals in an unconscionable position."* Before the adoption of the new criminal code, "therapeutic" abortion (in case of danger to the health of the pregnant woman or pregnancy resulting from rape) was legal and considered legitimate and necessary, dating back to a law adopted in 1893 under the government of the liberal Zelaya, and which was an initial result of changes that began as early as 1837. A government that represents its people's interests would have further advanced the legislation by extending the right to an abortion (for example, authorising a pregnant woman to decide on her own regardless of the causes of the pregnancy, and by eliminating the conditions that required three practitioners to agree on interrupting the pregnancy and the pregnant woman to obtain authorization from her husband or close family). Instead, Ortega decided to take an overwhelming step backward.

This retrograde legislation is accompanied by serious attacks on organizations defending women's rights, who have been among the most active in the opposition to the Ortega government. In particular, the autonomous women's movement (MAM - *Movimiento Autonomo de Mujeres de Nicaragua*), strongly mobilized against the abortion ban, is now being targeted by the authorities. Feminist movements have been the victims of administrative, police and judicial repression. In order to gag them, Daniel Ortega and Rosario Murillo have ordered them to join the women's movement that is aligned with the regime. In another very troubling measure by the regime, Murillo has made a point of denouncing the autonomous women's movement and the support it enjoys abroad in its struggle for the right to abortion as being "the Devil's work."

The use of religion

Daniel Ortega and Rosario Murillo systematically make use of references to the Catholic religion, constantly proclaiming that God is at their side. The regime headed by the presidential couple has caused a profound ideological backslide. In the rest of this text, "God," "Devil," "Faith" and "Divine Justice" are capitalised because that is how they appear in all Murillo's and Ortega's writings.

Speaking of the changes the FSLN has undergone under the leadership of Daniel Ortega and Rosario Murillo, Mónica Baltodano writes: *"[A second change that should be analysed is the one that has brought the Sandinista Front] from rationalism to religious fundamentalism. The revolutionary program involved respect for religious beliefs but promoted laicism. The 1987 Constitution established that the State has no official religion and that public education was secular. And what do we have now? The use and abuse of grassroots religiosity and its constant manipulation to strengthen the Ortega-Murillo family power project. The state institutions are operating as reproducers of religious beliefs to emphasize that everything that happens in the country is 'God's will,' thus establishing that Chayo-Ortegaista authority [that is, of Rosario Murillo and Daniel Ortega, ET] comes from divine will, just as in the old absolutist monarchies the power of the kings came directly from God. This divine link, according to the official discourse, makes Nicaragua 'blessed and prosperous.' As a result of this model, religious hierarchies legislate, churches determine, civil authorities promote religious beliefs and all state and municipal institutions are full of religious images, symbols and messages."*

With Rosario Murillo, references to God and the Devil go back a long way. I found an excerpt from a piece she wrote in 1991 as head of Ventana, the cultural supplement of the Sandinista daily Barricada. In preparation for the first Congress of the FSLN, she wrote *"Within the Front, one finds Sandinistas and non-Sandinistas. Millionaires and the destitute. Souls of God and souls of the Devil [...]."*

Yes, gentlemen, the Sandinista Front is currently a front, and as a front, where one finds anything and everything, it is currently a shit-pile.” [107] Later, Murillo abandoned this offensive characterization of the Front as a heap of excrement, but on the other hand she introduced into all her speeches a Manichean, religious-fundamentalist, conservative, obscurantist representation of events and people.

In the speech Rosario Murillo gave on 19 July 2018 on the occasion of the celebration of the 39th anniversary of the victory of the revolution, she constantly called on Faith and the grace of God, denouncing the diabolical actions of the demonstrators who protest the policies of the regime of which she is co-leader.

The following day, she continued in the same vein in a declaration on Canal 4 television, which is owned by one of her sons: *“We know that there are institutions which will be capable of recognising the crimes of those who have caused so much pain, so many deaths, so much suffering, so many aberrant, diabolical crimes in our Nicaragua. And we trust in Justice, and also trust in Divine Justice.” [108]*

She continued later: *“This people of*

God, because the Nicaraguan people are God’s people! Few peoples in the world show so much Faith and so much Devotion, with such a strong relationship with God. And we Catholics, with the Virgin Mary, with so much [...] Faith.” [109]

In the same speech, she opposes the people to the women and men who are struggling for decriminalization of abortion in the following way: *“A people who have defended life in all its forms, from the mother’s womb... From the mother’s womb! Whereas many of them pretend to be conducting civil actions, when in fact there is nothing civil about them because they are criminals, they have marched in the streets of Managua, demanding Abortion. Committing an offence against life! That is the truth.” [110]*

She then describes the demonstrators who have been protesting since 18 April 2018 as the real perpetrators of the hundreds of deaths mourned by the people: *“...the People know it, they know who has caused death; they know, because we know, how amongst themselves, because of their conflicts caused by their ambitions, for their conflicts caused by their culture of drugs, with which they have sought to terrorize the country, these are drug users, alcoholics, individuals linked to*

all sorts of crimes and delinquency. The People know that they caused death among themselves and then blamed the Government.” [111]

The previous day, 19 July 2018, during the big rally held by the regime, Daniel Ortega had gone just as far in this Manichean and inquisitorial reasoning. He had claimed that the protestors engaged in diabolical and satanic practices. He stated that the terrorists tortured people “satanically” (sic!) at the barricades! [112] He literally said that the protesters are “terrorists” and “putschists” who are totally “satanized.” He called on the Catholic bishops to “exorcize” these “Devils” or “demons” (the terms Ortega uses to designate the demonstrators) and chase out the Devil who has taken possession of them. Ortega claimed that they burn corpses near the barricades and dance around them. He called on the bishops to respect God’s word and not support the demands of the dissident demonstrators that the presidential couple resign.

[Link to the first part here:](#)

[113]

Translated by Snake Arbusto

Cadtm

Successful youth camp survived the heatwave

16 August 2018, by Åge Skovrind

The camp was hosted by the Danish Socialist Youth Front (SUF), an independent revolutionary youth organization supported by the Danish section of the Fourth International and by the Red-Green Alliance. It was only the second Youth Camp on Danish ground, the first one in 1998 is remembered particularly for the rainy and windy weather. This time, the framework was an almost excruciating heatwave, only interrupted by a single thunderstorm on the last evening - but well-prepared organization ensured

that all activities including the last night’s sleep were already moved inside, so delegations did not have to take their buses home encumbered with wet tents!

The camp is international, in terms of participation but also because it is prepared commonly by delegations from European youth organizations linked to the Fourth International. So, the programme was similar previous years.

Danes make their mark

However, the host country obviously sets its mark on the camp. Generally appreciated were the excellent facilities at the sports centre and the efficient organizing. Comprising nearly 100 participants, the Danish delegation was by far the largest, while the delegations from Southern Europe are usually the largest. Possibly, that meant a bit less

revolutionary shouting and fewer wild parties than at previous camps.

“Some years the focus was very much on the situation in France because they used to have the most participants. But this year, we were many more from Northern Europe than normally, and that creates another dynamics,” said Ina Degn Woods, member of the SUF leadership

She thinks that the event was rather successful. A few more participants, especially from the other Nordic countries, would have made the camp even better. She is convinced that many of the SUF members have gone home with a much wider understanding of and interest in international politics.

From ecosocialism to feminist self-defense

Every day had a general theme: ecosocialism, feminism, racism and the extreme right, LGBTIQ+, labour/education and revolutionary strategy.

In the morning, there were educational meetings translated into Castilian, French, English, Italian and Danish. In the afternoon, a huge range of workshops offered the possibility to elaborate on certain aspects of the theme of the day. Participants reported on struggles and challenges in their countries. Some workshops

had a practical content, for example a course in feminist self-defense. Others were about building networks and planning of concrete activities as for instance Ende Gelände on 25-29 October, a blockade against the extraction of lignite in Eastern Germany.

There were spaces for women and for LGBTIQ+ people and, as a new space, for racialized people too. Of course, time could also be spent for rest, play, game, hanging out in the bar or just talking to new and old friends. In the evenings, there were a women’s party, an LGBTIQ+ party and general discos on other days.

Kahlos

Snacks and drinks were sold in the bar for kahlos, the currency of the camp, with exchange rates according to the purchasing power of each country, in order to ensure a fairer cost of living. After having read about this unique currency in a newspaper, a local coin collector even visited the camp to buy kahlos for 25 euros!

The participants organize the camp themselves. Every day, the delegations from the different countries met together to discuss their participation, while the coordination of delegation leaderships met to evaluate and update the programme. Participants took responsibility for practical tasks such as security, cleaning and running the bar. A group of older volunteers from Denmark ensured vegetarian meals - including home-made bread - throughout the week.

The camp was covered extensively by mainstream media - radio, television as well as newspapers, many from a positive angle, while others chose to focus on use of violence in the political struggle.

More than 75 per cent of the participants were 25 years old or younger. The two youngest were only 14 years old, both from Denmark.

Majority participating for the first time

A survey of the participants showed that 43 per cent were women and for more half it was their first international camp. Two thirds of the participants were not members of the Fourth International.

The week ended in a high mood with songs and battle cries at the final rally. Special thanks went to Penny Duggan who represented the leadership of the Fourth International in the preparation of all former camps but decided to stop this year. It has been a continuous source of inspiration and enthusiasm in her political engagement, she told the audience.

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Traditionally, the final rally announces the location of next year camp. However, there is not a final decision, but the delegation from France announced that they would propose to their comrades to host it in 2019.

Britain: the newest ‘Pacific Island’ paradise?

16 August 2018, by **Dorothy Grace Guerrero**

Quite rightly, many think this move is ridiculous as we are nowhere near the Pacific. The idea of Britain joining the partnership defies the logic of what is a regional trade bloc. It appears to be

a desperate act by a desperate government that is making the majority in this country feel more and more apprehensive each day by its perplexing Brexit plans.

The CPTPP is a modification of the original Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which the US withdrew from in January 2017. It aims to reduce market barriers as well as foster trade

in the Asia Pacific region, and establish rules in new areas, such as e-commerce. The bloc has a combined market for 500 million people and a combined gross domestic product (GDP) of £7.6 trillion or approximately 13.5% of the global economy. [114] It currently has eleven member countries, including Mexico, Japan, Singapore, Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Malaysia, New Zealand, Peru and Vietnam. So far, Mexico, Japan and Singapore have ratified the agreement following its conclusion in Tokyo in January this year. The others are still in the process of doing so.

According to Fox, the UK's inclusion in what he called a "historic deal" will "put the UK at the heart of the world's fastest-growing regions."

Old wine in a new bottle

Trade campaigners in countries covered by CPTPP opposed the original TPP and they see no reason why they should now support the revised partnership. Most of the original TPP text remains intact in the new deal, while the provisions that the US prioritised were altered or suspended in the new agreement (which does not include the USA). Two-thirds of the thirty CPTPP chapters are identical to those in TPP. Many elements resemble its counterpart the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), which we in Global Justice Now and our allies in continental Europe and the US opposed.

What remains in the CPTPP are the brutal chapters that have strong and binding arbitration mechanisms at their core. [115] These are:

- Faster and smoother customs procedures, including self-certification of shipments that will make trade more seamless. This is a hallmark of all free trade agreements (FTAs). As we have seen in the past, big business and investors immensely benefit from free trade while marginalising small farmers, businesses and workers. For CPTPP, this means enhanced market access to key developing country

markets, especially for the big players.

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- Provisions that allow businesses to compete for government contracts in other countries;

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- Facilitation of e-commerce firms through rules that ensure the free movement of data across borders;

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- The much-disliked investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) that allows foreign investors to take governments to court for actions they deem "unfair" or "unjust";

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- New rules for state-owned enterprises and monopolies to enable private businesses to compete fairly with them in international trade;

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The most significant revisions in the new partnership were in the investment and intellectual property (IP) chapters, which were formerly championed by the US but were not supported by the other members of the earlier TPP. For example, in the Investment Chapter, the ability to litigate disputes under investment agreements and investment authorisations by investors will be more limited in comparison to the original provision in the TPP. In particular, this concerns mining and oil investments.

The provisions favoured by the US in the TPP have been modified, removed or suspended in the CPTPP. This includes the shortening of the length of patent protection for innovative medicines and the copyright periods for written materials, and the narrowing of technology and information protections. These changes and US withdrawal could affect US pharmaceutical companies in CPTPP countries. The 22 provisions on extended patent and trademark rights from TPP that were suspended in the CPTPP were of high concern to the US.

However, despite the alterations, the IP chapter still contains the most advanced and detailed standards on intellectual property in a trade agreement to date. It provides extensive protections to companies operating abroad from having their inventions and innovations stolen and for them to retain their monopoly and

control.

Trump has withdrawn from the TPP as part of his America First policy, which is to depart from decades of championing multilateral trade as he sees that *his country* is losing from it. Alongside this he has launched unilateral tariff measures targeting China and threatened other trade partners like Germany. [116] This stance has gained Trump support from some leaders of trade unions in the US, but it is not the alternative to free trade we need. [117] His withdrawal from TPP could also simply be because TPP was strongly advocated by previous US president Barack Obama, which seems to be Trump's policy pattern.

It was rejected then, it must be rejected now

Before this massive free trade zone can be realised, it will need six of the eleven signatory countries to ratify the agreement. Once this is achieved, it will enter into force after 60 days. The CPTPP removed the previous requirement in the TPP that signatory nations' combined GDP must represent 85% of the bloc's GDP to pass. The US accounted for about 60%, hence Trump's withdrawal scuttling the original deal.

In Japan, big debates were sparked by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's efforts to revive the TPP and for Japan to champion it after the US withdrew last year. Opposition parties argued that there is very little difference between the original TPP and the new CPTPP. [118]

The proponents of new mega-trade deals are on a charm offensive to overcome opposition from social movements and NGO campaigners. The European Union is negotiating FTAs from Asia to Latin America which now include human rights and environmental protection provisions in their Preambles. However, adding human rights and democratic clauses will not offset the effects of the neoliberal offensive at the core of these new mega-trade deals.

As observed by Manuel Pérez-Rocha, associate fellow of Washington-based Institute for Policy Studies, the CPTPP is using the same tactic. He said, "like in the Mexico-EU FTA, these chapters will serve no purpose. The added chapters on the environment, development, small and medium enterprises and women in the CPTPP are as toothless as the labor and the environmental side agreements of NAFTA." Pérez-Rocha also said that "as mentioned by Mexican trade minister Guajardo, particularly in the case of Mexico, the TPP would insulate Mexico's privatisation projects from future governments like in the case of Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, Mexico's newly-elected

president."

On the other side of the Pacific, social movements and campaigners in Asia are also continuing their challenge to the CPTPP and pressuring their governments not to sign the trade deal. According to Joseph Purugganan of the regional organisation Focus on the Global South, "there is nothing progressive about the CPTPP. The agreement retains most of the toxic elements of the TPP that people's movements across the region have rejected." He further asserts that "at the center of this rebranded mega FTA is the corporate agenda which will undermine people's rights and sovereignty".

We should also fight this toxic agreement here in the UK. In trade deals the powerful always win. If the UK joins the CPTPP, it will be the second biggest economy in the bloc and will facilitate bigger roles for British trans-national-corporations in the economies of the developing countries in both regions. The UK surely is not a Pacific island, and it will not be good for it to be seen as a parasitic island by those whose livelihoods and living standards will be negatively affected by this partnership.

(23 July 2018)

[Global Justice Now](#)

Workers say no to Vietnam's 'Special Exploitation Zones'

15 August 2018, by **Angie Ngoc Tran**

Why now, given that the idea of these three special economic zones was "old news", having been announced in May 2017? It turns out that lack of transparency about the details of the Draft Law "made available only before a vote in the June 2018 session of the National Assembly" had triggered these massive protests.

Only once the details became clear did protests begin in earnest. The protesters pointed to the risks of losing national sovereignty to China, alleged to be the key beneficiary of the Special Administrative and Economic zones scheme. While China is not mentioned in the 53-page Draft Law, the geopolitics of these three zones, spread from north to south, suggests otherwise: Văcñ ??ñ (Quang Ninh province, bordering China), B?c Văcñ Phong (Khanh Hoa province, ashore of the South China Sea), and PhĂ° Qu?c island (Kien Giang province, near the Sihanoukville Special Economic Zone in Cambodia, dominated by Chinese-Cambodian investment). Visas are to be waived for "citizens of the neighbouring country

[China] sharing the border with Vietnam in Quang Ninh" (Article 55, Section 4), and for "citizens of the neighbouring country [Cambodia] sharing the border with Vietnam in Kien Giang province" (Article 57, Section 3). Who else would stand to benefit the most from both economic and administrative control over land, air, and sea lanes from these three zones?

Indeed, why introduce more economic zones when Vietnam already has 18 economic zones, offering tax breaks and low rents, and which still have open spaces for foreign investors? A careful review of the text of this Draft Law reveals many ambiguities and raises grave concerns for the wellbeing of the Vietnamese workers and the environment for them, their families, and society at large.

Here are some reasons for my concerns.

First, the list of 131 approved businesses and industries for these three zones are not "green, high-tech,

and knowledge-based" as stated goals; rather, they are completely the opposite. Technology transfer is mentioned only once in the 53-page draft law. Instead, hotels, tourism, casino, gambling and assembly work are prominently promoted in all three zones. Logistical controls over air, rail and sea transports are consistent with ongoing Chinese efforts to completely control the sea lanes in the Pacific Ocean.

New routes will be open to foreign airlines to fly directly to Văcñ ??ñ (bordering China) at discounted fees (Article 55); cargo containers can enter B?c Văcñ Phong and get access to any port in Vietnam (Article 56); foreign owners of property in PhĂ° Qu?c (near Chinese investments in Cambodia) can keep secrets and manage their property using "international customs" (Article 57). Especially worrisome are the approved toxic industries on the list of 131 businesses (Appendix IV) such as military weaponry, chemical weapons, explosives, mines, dangerous cargos, serpentine (materials to make

asbestos), radiation, nuclear energy, toxic waste treatment and imported industrial scraps.

Other approved businesses allow imports and exports of protected and endangered species listed on the appendices of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES; Appendix IV). Moreover, Appendix V (Toxic List) approves 16 additional industries that are highly toxic (such as nuclear power, metallurgical and metal ores using toxic chemicals, chemical fertilisers, leather tanning, recycling waste, and coal gasification). How can any work safety and environmental monitoring take place in these high-walled enclaves (Article 3), when the owners (the Vietnamese government and foreign investors) can keep secrets on these zones as they see fit (Article 13)?

Second, ambiguities and conflicting stipulations on privileges in these zones might prevent Vietnam from fulfilling ILO labour conventions promised in free trade agreements (FTAs). Especially important are ILO Conventions #87 (freedom of association), #98 (collective bargaining), and #105 (abolition of forced labour) required by the EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (Chapter 15, EVFTA- [119]) and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (Chapter 19, CPTPP [120]). These FTA labour provisions are to be considered in the Labour Code Revisions to be submitted to the National Assembly by May 2019. [121]

For instance, the exception clause in Article 5, Item 5 of the Draft Law states that if there were a conflict between international conventions and higher privileges offered by this Draft Law to foreign investors or corporations with foreign investment (a common practice by Chinese investors using Vietnamese fronts), this law will take precedence. However, Article 5, Item 6 states the opposite. This ambiguity will create problems in implementing this lawâ€”benefiting foreign investors, and weakening the unions that

represent and protect workers' rights. Third, foreign investors will have maximum control over their interests. Article 46, Item 2 permits them to recruit labour, exempts foreign experts/workers from permission to work for longer periods of time than in other zones in Vietnam, and uses their homeland laws and customs to govern their workers/employees (Article 6). What if these laws and customs contradict the rights and benefits of the Vietnamese workers? Overall, these privileges support a global pattern of Chinese migration to places where there are Chinese investment projects (such as Formosa company in Ha Tinh, Central Highlands bauxite, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and South Africa).

Fourth, Vietnamese workers will have ambiguous or no protection for their rights and interests guaranteed in the Vietnamese Labour Code. Article 6, Item 1 mentions "the minimal rights of workers in the labour contracts" based on Vietnamese laws, but Article 46, Item 4, Point B and C give the Chairmen of these zones total discretion, such as to determine the "minimum wage" for these three zones (Article 46, Item 3). Who can guarantee that this level would not be lower than the national Minimum Wage law which is already not liveable? The chairmen also have the discretion to determine the levels of social insurance contributions and other social support for workers (Article 49). These ambiguities can release foreign investors from compliance with social insurance contribution for assembly workers in these zones.

While this Draft Law does not rule out the application of existing Vietnamese labour laws (such as the Labour Code, Trade Unions, and Social Insurance laws), failure to mention these requirementsâ€”as implemented in other export processing zonesâ€”breeds ambiguity and weakens the role of the Vietnamese General Confederation of Labor (VGCL) to represent workers' rights in their own country. A Deputy Director of the Institute for Workers and Trade Unions warned: "The VGCL's operation is confined to doing what is prescribed in the law instead of doing

what the law does not prohibit. Therefore, anything which is not clearly stated in the law is difficult for the VGCL... Union leaders are confused and fearful and do not know how to deal with problems which are not specified or ambiguous in the law." [122]

There are more loopholes in this 53-page Draft Law which give foreign investors virtual carte blanche control in these three "autonomous" zones. The Vietnamese workers and their children will be exposed to all types of toxic materials (Appendices IV and V) without protection by the VGCL nor work safety rights afforded to them in their own country. The promotion of casinos in these zones causes great concerns, knowing damages caused by the Boten casino in Laos (developed in 2003 and shut down in 2011 by the Chinese government) to the local residents.

In sum, casinos and toxic industries are not "high-tech, green, and knowledge-based." The ambiguities that promise "minimal rights for workers" will not engender sustainable development and technology transfer in Vietnam. The National Assembly should listen to their citizens' concerns in their deliberation of this Draft Law. If this law is passed, unchecked toxic industries and ambiguous union protection will endanger generations of Vietnamese workers and their families and the environment for everyoneâ€”since pollution does, of course, drift.

Examples from other ASEAN and South Asian countries (such as Boten casino, Myanmar's Kyauk Pyu Special Economic Zone's destroying local residents' livelihoods, and the most recent Sri Lanka's loss of their strategic Hambantota Port to China's ownership for 99 years) should alert Vietnam to these risks. [123] [124] It should thus act in concert with these countries. Finally, solidarity with civil society organisations and global labour movements is needed to guard against the "race to the bottom" on workers' rights.

18 Jul, 2018

New Mandala

An authentic revolution in 1979

15 August 2018, by **Éric Toussaint**

The FSLN played a fundamental role in the victory of an authentic popular revolution in 1979

In the years that followed, the health, education, housing, freedom of expression and organization, and labour rights in both town and country and the living conditions of a large portion of the popular classes improved significantly. Banks along with a number of industrial and food corporations were nationalized. This resulted in great domestic enthusiasm and a really important international support. Tens of thousands of volunteers from all over the World (mainly from Latin America, North America and Europe) arrived in Nicaragua to help in the work brigades, to contribute to the improvements in health, education and housing and to prevent the revolution from becoming isolated.

At the beginning of the 1980s, Nicaraguan big capital, big multinationals present in the region (food industry, mining, etc.), US imperialism and its vassals (such as the “socialist” regime of Carlos Andrés Pérez in Venezuela or dictatorships as in Honduras) formed a coalition to try to put an end to this extraordinary experiment in social liberation and renewal of national dignity. They found it necessary to contain the spreading of such tendencies which became very vigorous in the 1990s. In fact, social revolt was rampant in the region, in particularly in Salvador and Guatemala where revolutionary forces close to the Sandinistas had been active for decades. Neither did Cuba hesitate to defy Washington and the American dominant classes by bringing its support to the Central

American revolution.

The Contras

The revolution’s enemies at home and abroad created the Contras, a counter revolutionary army that aimed at overthrowing the Sandinistas. They obtained so much fire-power that they had the capacity to hit the revolution very hard and prolong the conflict until 1989. It was financed, trained and advised by Washington, who presented the Contras to the international community as a liberation army. What’s more, US forces mined the ports, an act condemned in 1986 by the International Court of Justice at The Hague. The US ceased forthwith to recognize the competence of the International Court of Justice.

In spite of social and democratic achievements, the policies of the Sandinistas quickly showed their limits. The agricultural reform, so long awaited by so many in rural Nicaragua, was quite insufficient: the authorities took too long to redistribute land and property titles to small farmers. It was among these small farmers who were disappointed by such reticence that the Contras developed a social base. The majority of the urban population took part in the revolution whilst feelings were more mixed in the rural areas.

“Direction: Command”

Of course, the primary cause of the difficult situation with which Nicaraguan society had to cope was the imperialism of the US and the local elites who wished to maintain their privileges and continue to exploit the people. But the policies of the Sandinistas themselves also played a part in the failure to extend,

consolidate and develop the revolution. Among the causes that originated among the leaders were their authoritarian tendencies, expressed by the slogan “Direction: Command”. This meant that the Masses should await orders from above to apply the revolution. This advice sapped the Masses’ revolutionary ardour.

The way the war was conducted was also cause for concern. The left of the FSLN (particularly through the magazine Nicaragua Desde Adentro) criticized Humberto Ortega, the head of the army and Daniel Ortega’s brother, for forming a regular army equipped with expensive heavy tanks, unsuitable against the guerrilla methods of the Contras. The conscription of the country’s youth in order to reinforce the army was also badly perceived by the population.

The Sandinista government introduced a structural adjustment plan

As from 1988, the Sandinista leaders introduced a structural adjustment plan that degraded the conditions of the poor without affecting the rich. [125] These policies very much resembled the usual conditions imposed by the IMF and World Bank while at the same time, under pressure from Washington, the two institutions had suspended their aid to the Sandinista authorities. These adjustment policies were very much criticized by certain tendencies within the FSLN because it burdened the popular classes with the adjustment effort.

I remember well the reply by Omar

Cabezas, [126] revolutionary leader and member of the Sandinista Assembly, in a public gathering in 1989 when we asked him how it was possible that the Sandinista government could apply a structural adjustment plan just like an IMF plan. The gist of his reply was that a structural adjustment plan is like a kalashnikov or a FAL rifle, it all depends on who's doing it. If it's the revolutionaries that are doing it then it's fine. We certainly cannot be satisfied with this kind of answer.

The export-oriented extractivist model with low wages is maintained

Actually the Sandinista leaders conceded a lot to the employers, especially concerning wages, which remained very low. The argument that was used to vindicate this policy was that Nicaragua had to export as much as possible on the global market and that in order to be competitive it had to squeeze wages. Few or no measures were taken to move away from the export-oriented extractivist model with low wages. If they had really wanted to break away from that model that depends on competitiveness on the global market, they should have gone against the interests of the capitalists that still dominated the export-oriented extractivist industry. They should have supported the small and medium-sized producers who supplied the domestic market.

They should have supported the small and medium-sized producers who supplied the domestic market

In 1989 the FSLN government reached an agreement with the Contras on putting an end to fighting, which was of course a good thing. It was presented as the victorious outcome of the strategy that had been adopted. Yet it was a Pyrrhic victory. The Sandinista leadership called a general election in April 1990 and felt certain they would win. Election

results struck the Sandinista leadership with an amazed wave of panic: the right had won because it had told voters that if the FSLN won, fighting would resume. The majority of the people wanted to avoid further bloodshed [127] and thus reluctantly voted for the right. They were hoping for an end to war for good. Some were also disappointed by the FSLN government's policies in the countryside (deficient agrarian reform) and in cities (negative consequences of the austerity measures enforced by the structural adjustment programme begun in 1988) though Sandinista organizations could still rely on a lot of support among young people, workers and civil servants, as well as among a significant number of farm labourers.

The Sandinista leadership expected to reap 70% of the votes in the April 1990 elections, so it was flabbergasted, as it hadn't perceived the growing discontent in a large portion of the population. This illustrates the gap between the majority of the people and a leadership that had become used to giving orders.

The orientation of the Sandinista leadership was mostly determined by Daniel Ortega and his brother Humberto.

The *piÃ±ata*

After the victory of the right, a significant part of the estates formerly expropriated from the Somozistas after the 1979 victory were appropriated by a few Sandinista leaders, who consequently became very rich. This process was called *piÃ±ata*. Those who organized the *piÃ±ata* accounted for it as meeting the need to secure assets for the FSLN against a government that might want to confiscate the Party's assets.

They claimed that it was better to turn them into private property owned by trustworthy people such as themselves. In fact, quite a lot of those historical leaders acquired the mindset of the *nouveaux riches*.

The Sandinista Army after the defeat in the April 1990 elections

The Sandinista leadership, with Daniel and Humberto Ortega at its head, negotiated the transition with Violeta Chamorro's new government. Humberto was still General in Chief of a starkly reduced army. The most left-wing members of the army had been dismissed, under the pretext that they had supplied missiles to the "Farabundo MartÃn National Liberation Front" (FMLN), which was still attempting to bring about a general uprising in Salvador. In the context of presidents Gorbachev [128] and Bush [129] coming closer together, Soviet authorities had denounced the fact that SAM 7 and SAM 14 missiles that had been supplied by the USSR [130] to the Sandinistas had been passed on to the FMLN and used to shoot down US army helicopters operating in El Salvador. [131] Four Sandinista officers were imprisoned on an order from Humberto Ortega with the following explanation: "Blinded by their political passion and guided by extremist arguments, this small group of officers flouted military honour and the Institution's and Military Command's loyalty, which is the same as flouting the sacred, patriotic and revolutionary interests of Nicaragua." [132]

This led to strong criticism from the Workers' National Front (which included Sandinista trade union organizations), from the Sandinista Youth as well as from a number of FSLN activists. Moreover a left-wing faction of the FSLN disapproved of Humberto Ortega remaining head of the army under a right-wing presidency instead of joining the political opposition to the new regime and leaving his position to his deputy, who was also a member of the FSLN.

The FSLN and the

Chamorro government

Only a few months after Violeta Chamorro started her mandate as president, a massive protest movement spread throughout the country in July 1990. Managua and other cities were covered with Sandinista barricades and the trade unions launched a general strike. This resulted in a compromise with Violeta Chamorro's government, which was forced to withdraw some measures, but the Sandinista grassroots was disgruntled at the FSLN leadership having halted protest actions. Later, the Front's leadership gradually made concessions to Chamorro, accepting the dismantling of the public banking sector, the reduction of the public sector in both agriculture and manufacturing, the end of the State's monopoly on foreign trade. Chamorro also organized the cleansing of the police force and incorporated former Contrás into it. This police force was in the front line to repress social protests in 2018, along with paramilitary militia, about which more will be said below. Chamorro did not directly tackle the army, in the context of the co-existence agreement with the FSLN leadership. Now in the opposition the Sandinistas committed themselves to disarming the people.

In July 1990, Managua and other cities were covered with Sandinista barricades and the trade unions launched a general strike

The first six months of 1991 were marked by a radicalization of the FSLN leadership, under the combined pressure of Sandinista trade union leaders and of actions initiated by the grassroots movement that wanted to stand up for the revolution's achievements. We can only stand in awe in front of the degree of self-mobilization of the popular masses, who, determined to resist, adopted various forms of struggle: land occupation, occupation of plants, worker-managed production, general forms of struggle (strikes, marches, barricades) addressing various sectors. Young people's dynamism was an essential factor.

Some of the Sandinista leaders, however (not members of the national leadership but rather former Sandinista ministers such as Alejandro Martínez-Cuenca) openly mention the need for a 'co-gobierno,' a kind of conditional external support to Violeta Chamorro's government, and support the policy enforced by the International Monetary Funds, for to some extent it can be perceived as in line with the policy followed by the Sandinista government from 1988. [133]

The first FSLN Congress in July 1991

The first FSLN Congress, held in July 1991, still displayed the movement's great vitality and the leadership submitted a text in which it criticized the deficiencies in its own agrarian policy in the 1980s and the verticality in the way it functioned. [134] A token of this radicalization was that the Sandinista MPs left parliament for an unlimited period to protest against neoliberal reforms and the offensive of the right.

However, in the run-up to the 1996 elections Daniel Ortega initiated a shift to the right.

Daniel Ortega's sharp right turn in 1996

During the 1996 electoral campaign, Daniel Ortega bent over backwards to reach out to the upper classes, showing he had been converted to the benefits of the market economy and moderating his discourse towards Washington. The right-wing candidate Arnoldo Alemán won the elections with 51 % while Daniel Ortega only gained 38 % of the votes. Sergio Ramírez, former member of the National Directorate that broke away from the Sandinista National Liberation Front to start the Sandinista Renovation Movement, got no more than 0.44 % of the votes.

According to Monica Baltodano, former FSLN activist: [135] "The confrontations at the heart of the Sandinista Front between 1993-1995 [Author's note: of which one of the outcomes was the foundation of the Sandinista Renovation Movement] convinced Ortega and his inner circle of the importance of controlling the party apparatus. This came to a head at the Front's 1998 Congress, where what was left of the National Directorate, the Sandinista Assembly and the Congress of the Front began to fall apart. They were replaced by an assembly where most of the participants were leaders of popular organizations faithful to Ortega. Eventually even this assembly ceased to meet. At that point, there was a significant fracture. It was by then obvious that Ortega was drifting ever further from left-wing positions and was centering his strategy on broadening his power-base. He sought power for power's sake.

From then on, to increase his power, he embarked upon a series of alliances. The first one, with President Arnoldo Alemán, resulted in the constitutional reforms of 1999-2000. The central proposition of the alliance with Alemán consisted of reducing by the percentage required to win the elections to 35%, sharing the posts of all State institutions between the two parties and guaranteeing the safety of properties and companies belonging to the leaders of the FSLN. In exchange, Ortega gave Alemán assurances of "governability". It was the end of strikes and industrial action. The Sandinista Front stopped opposing neoliberal policies. Organizations whose main leaders became elected Members of Parliament in the ensuing years or integrated the structures of Ortega's circle of power ceased to resist or struggle". [136]

In other words, at the end of his mandate, Arnoldo Alemán made a pact with Daniel Ortega so that they could have more loyal representatives in the institutions thereafter. Thus they strengthened their presence in such institutions as the Electoral Council, the Court of Auditors and the Supreme Court.

Daniel Ortega lost the presidential

elections in 2001 with 42 % of the votes against Enrique Bolaños, former Vice-President of Arnoldo Alemán, who gained 56 %.

Daniel Ortega made a pact with Arnoldo Alemán, one of the main right-wing leaders

The Alemán-Ortega Pact was triggered by the decision of Enrique Bolaños, now president, to lash out at his former team-mate Alemán by supporting his indictment for corruption and the subsequent conviction of 20 years imprisonment. In 2003, Daniel Ortega saw to it that the men he had placed in the judicial system arranged preferential treatment for Alemán, allowing him to serve out his sentence in house arrest.

Later, in 2009, two years after his election as president of Nicaragua, Daniel Ortega gave his support to the Supreme Court's decision to quash Alemán's conviction and release him. A few days later Alemán returned the favour by ensuring that the parliamentary group of the Liberal Party he led voted for the election of a

Sandinista at the head of the National Assembly.

In 2005, Daniel Ortega reconciles with the ultra-conservative Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo, converts to Catholicism and marries in Church

In 2007 Daniel Ortega won the presidential elections by making pledges to several major enemies of Sandinismo. Daniel Ortega had won over Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo, who had fought hard against him as he had fought hard against the Sandinista Revolution throughout the 1980s and 1990s, to the extent that he had openly supported the Contras. To improve his relationship with the reactionary cardinal, Daniel Ortega apologized for the way the Church had been treated during the revolutionary process. He converted to Catholicism and asked Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo to officiate at his marriage to

his companion Rosario Murillo in September 2005 [137] (in French).

In 2006, Daniel Ortega gave his support to the adoption of an ultra-reactionary law totally prohibiting abortion

In 2006, Daniel Ortega supported the total prohibition of abortion

In 2006, a few months before the elections, the FSLN's parliamentary group, led by Daniel Ortega, gave their support to the adoption of an ultra-reactionary law totally banning abortion, including in cases where the pregnant woman's health or life are in danger or where the pregnancy resulted from rape. This legislation came into effect with the new Penal Code in July 2008, under the presidency of Daniel Ortega. Previously, "therapeutic" abortion (in case of danger to the woman's health or when the pregnancy resulted from rape) had been authorized in the country since 1837. [138]

[Cadtm](#)

"The patriarchal system weighs on the political structures"

14 August 2018, by Franck Gaudichaud

Why does the right to abortion remain in a marginal position in South America?

It is one of the most restrictive regions in the world in terms of the right to abortion: 90% of South American women live in a restrictive context of the right to self-determination of the body. The patriarchal system is very important, and it weighs on the

political structures. Overall, the situation is repressive, with extreme cases such as in El Salvador or Nicaragua, the most radical regarding the criminalization of abortion. Conversely, Cuba decriminalized abortion as early as 1965 and Uruguay legalised it in 2012. Even in the most advanced countries on the issue, there are problems of law enforcement and doctors refuse to practice abortion. It

is a continent of inequalities of gender, race and class. In Chile, girls in good families practice abortion quite easily: they are hospitalized for "appendicitis" ... girls from the lower classes do not have access to these very expensive and illegal operations.

Is the current political situation favourable to an evolution of women's rights?

In Brazil and in several countries, there is a tendency to the return of right wing parties. Since the institutional coup against Dilma Rousseff, the right has made agreements with the evangelical church. There is clearly a threat to the right to abortion, which is already very limited: abortion is legal only in cases of rape, danger of death for the mother or anencephaly of the foetus. It is on the moral and ethical plane that the South American political and religious conservatives advance their pawns. Since 2017, under the leadership of former President Michelle Bachelet, Chile has finally passed a law that allows conditional abortion (danger for pregnant women, unsustainable fetuses or the result of rape). This was done at the price of Homeric battles in Parliament, despite the interventions of the Church.

What role does the Catholic Church play in the abortion debate?

There are big differences between countries, but the weight of religion is

growing stronger. In Chile, the law is there but the Church has obtained a right of conscience for Catholic doctors who can refuse to practice abortion. There is even a right of institutional conscience: Catholic hospitals or university centres may refuse to apply the law as institutions. In Brazil, for example, you cannot be president if you do not get along with the evangelists. They are an indispensable reservoir of votes and, with their television channels, they represent a media strength of tens of millions of viewers, which has direct effects on debates around abortion.

What is the position of Pope Francis on the bill in Argentina?

The Pope has always said that he wanted to avoid commenting on the political debates in his country. Even though he has spoken repeatedly against equal marriage or against the right to abortion. It is an indirect way to support the Argentine Church in this fight. In this sense, he is in line with the Popes and the doctrine of the Catholic Church. But he did not speak specifically about the Argentine case.

If the law is validated by the Senate, can we expect a social and feminist wave on the continent?

We are witnessing an evolution, there will be no turning back. With what is happening right now in Argentina, in Chile with the feminist demands or in Mexico with the group of activists against feminicide, we are facing a phenomenon that traverses the whole of Latin America. From the Argentine movement “Ni una menos” (“Not One Less”) born from the assassination of a young woman in 2015 to the green scarves of the pro-legalization of abortion movement, the new generation activist emerges and are located in a much broader societal movement. We see grandmothers supporting their granddaughters who are demonstrating. If the Senate votes for the law, it will be a conquest of the feminist movement and the victory of a project that was carried out under the pressure of the street. This advance will have an impact on the whole region because the political influence of Argentina is significant.

Whither Korea

13 August 2018

[139]

Declaring Peace in an Unending War

The meeting between South Korean President Moon Jae-in and North Korean Leader Kim Jong-un took place April 27, 2018. That day, the two Korean leaders issued the Panmunjom Declaration for Peace, Prosperity and Unification on the Korean Peninsula, in which the leaders “solemnly declared before the 80 million Korean people and the whole world that there will be no more war on the Korean Peninsula and thus a new era of peace has begun.”

The statement, fashioned in abstract terms, was said to be a kind of road map for denuclearization talks between the United States and the DPRK. Then, on June 13, the on-again, off-again meeting between President Trump and Kim Jong-un finally took place in Singapore.

Although these meetings have captured the media’s attention and earned President Moon a favorable rating among South Koreans (and international media), these peace maneuvers are in fact unsustainable and can never guarantee permanent peace. Instead, the situation in the region has become extremely dangerous amid increasing tensions between imperialist powers, particularly the United States and

China.

In the absence of a worldwide workers’ revolution, we cannot begin to expect a lasting peace on the Korean Peninsula. More importantly, the various peace treaties stem from the expansion of “dirty trade” among the ruling classes of North and South Korea and of the imperialist powers (United States, China, Japan and Russia). This trade is based on the exploiters’ interest in stabilizing the Korean Peninsula and expanding their profits.

South Korean

Capitalists' Plan for the North

Lee Jong-seok, senior adviser of the inter-Korean summit and former South Korean Minister of Unification, praised the North Korean workers at Kaesong Industrial Complex for their 100% literacy rate, high level of discipline and "diligence" rated among the best in the world. Lee said DPRK workers are "South Korean workers without unions," exemplifying South Korean capitalists' perspective on denuclearization and inter-Korean relations.

South Korean capitalists do not oppose inter-Korean rapprochement; they generally support it, whether implicitly or explicitly. They regard the North Korean working class as fodder. DPRK workers speak the same language, have not waged any class struggle for decades and lack independent organization. The full and open opportunity to exploit North Korean workers can serve as a potent weapon against the South Korean working class, increasing the rate of exploitation by oppressing the more disobedient ones.

South Korea's approach to North Korea can thus be described as establishing a prospective internal colony.

New pressures will likely be placed on South Korean workers through the use of subcontract orders (i.e., Original Equipment Manufacturer deals), the transfer of production bases to the North and the development of large-scale production facilities in inter-Korean border areas that employ low-wage North Korean workers. These would be useful means of suppressing a generation of young workers in the South, who in the coming decade would otherwise probably earn higher wages (thanks in part to a low birth rate in the South) and gain the confidence to organize themselves. Furthermore, North Korea's abundant mining resources, such as iron, tungsten, molybdenum and magnesite used to produce high-tech devices and systems, could reduce the costs.

The advancement of inter-Korean

relations opens up opportunities for South Korean capital to penetrate the enormous market in China. Breaking from its dependence on shipping, South Korea's trade with China via railways traversing North Korea would speed up transport and reduce logistics costs threefold. Using cheap labor in the North to export products to China, as well as to Russia, would maximize this effect.

We can also expect massive investment opportunities in social overhead capital (SOC) and infrastructure in the process of the DPRK's primitive accumulation. For example, the cost of modernizing railways and roads in North Korea is estimated at 150 trillion won (US\$150 billion), matched by expected investment opportunities in the electricity sector. The share of South Korean companies in the electric power industry is already surging by over 40 percent. Steel and construction capital are salivating over future demand in the North, which is increasingly seen as a prospective oasis for South Korean capital, which has searched in vain for suitable investment markets after recently experiencing a sharp fall in investment rates.

Thus, improving inter-Korean relations and economic cooperation would allow the Korean capitalist class to achieve a variety of goals, including an increase in the rate of profit, the opening of new markets, heightened exploitation of South Korean workers and the sweeping exploitation of North Korean workers.

In this way, Korean capital sees inter-Korean problems as an opportunity to relieve the catastrophic crises that it faces and will face in the future. South Korea's approach to North Korea can thus be described as establishing a prospective "internal colony."

The North's Plans

In exchange for nuclear disarmament, the North Korean capitalist class seeks to draw a promise of security from the imperialist powers surrounding the Korean Peninsula, especially from American imperialism. But the North Korean capitalists are

not foolish. To them, the guarantees of a new arrangement must not only be etched in politics and diplomacy, but also in economic terms. They are clearly aware that if the material lives of North Korean workers who have fallen to the bottom do not improve, the regime will eventually collapse.

So far, North Korean rulers have placed most of their social resources and capabilities in military power and nuclear weapons. For them, nuclear power is practically the only "fruit" of North Korea's social capacity. Their current strategy is to use the nuclear program as crucial collateral to expand trade with imperialists—thereby obtaining a base for economic growth (electricity, rails, roads, ports)—and to shift the country's capacities toward capital accumulation (not unlike the Vietnamese reforms and the Chinese open-door policy).

Hundreds of billions of dollars would be necessary for such an undertaking, which is what the DPRK desperately requests in exchange for abandoning nuclear energy. But who will invest these billions? Negotiations for nuclear dismantlement, which have taken place several times over the decades, have repeatedly failed because the United States refused to pay and demanded total nuclear dismantlement—no railways or power lines in exchange.

Perhaps counterintuitively, this has reflected U.S. imperialism's weakening economic power. After WWII and during the Korean War, the burgeoning U.S. empire had enough power to "support" a postcolonial South Korea. But the U.S. imperialism of 2018 is not that of the 1940s and 1950s. This old and infirm imperialism lacks the economic capability to embrace the DPRK rulers' requests. The United States today can only survive by brutally exploiting weaker countries. Even faced with the golden opportunity to expand its political influence in the DPRK, U.S. imperialism cannot bear the cost.

But South Korean capital may be able to accomplish what U.S. capital cannot. The South has become economically powerful enough to meet the demands of the North Korean

ruling class, despite some foreseeable challenges. The crisis of South Korean capitalism—a huge surplus capital and declining rate of profit—has pushed the country's capitalists to look to the colossal project of economic investment in North Korea. Cheap labor power, abundant minerals and the potential for massive markets in North Korea, China and Russia are seductive enough for South Korean capital to consider the task.

If the U.S.-DPRK summit is the “political stage” for North Korean nuclear disarmament, then the inter-Korean summit is the “economic stage.” As the Moon Jae-in government promises to make such investments on behalf of the South Korean capitalist class, the current deal is being made.

By trading nuclear power for economic support, the North Korean ruling class seizes the opportunity for primitive accumulation, seeking to build a strong enough economic base to overcome major threats to its political system. Besides new foreign investment, the other decisive means for the North's ruling class to mobilize is the country's workers—who will be ruthlessly exploited as part of the regime's plan to rapidly accumulate capital. As can be seen from the example of the Kaesong Industrial Complex (KIC), which provided a large-scale labor force for South Korean capitalists, the NK ruling class will guarantee miserably low wages and use the remains for accumulation.

In short, the North Korean government will play the role of “human resource intermediary” between South Korean capitalists and North Korean workers. The commission for this mediation is sure to be tremendously high, and it will be used as primary capital for the development of North Korean capitalism.

Let's take the case of the KIC. In February 2016, North Korea's Minister of Unification Hong Yong-pyo stated, “Seventy percent of workers' wages in KIC go into the [North Korean Labor] Party Secretariat, and this money is used for nuclear development.” But the government takes 100 percent, not 70 percent.

After the North Korean government receives wages in dollars from South Korean companies, it pays the North Korean workers with North Korean money or in kind, at a very low rate. Former U.S. ambassador Alexander Vershbow has even argued that the KIC actually plays a role in funding North Korea's nuclear development, since the KIC's workers do not directly receive wages from Korean companies. But Hong Yong-pyo and Vershbow did not mention the North Korean government's role as a labor-power intermediary, which it plays by brutally repressing unionization and strikes.

Both the North and South Korean capitalists assume that the North Korean government will freely exploit and repress the North Korean working class to no end. This is a very dangerous calculation.

The KIC can be seen as a tiny fraction, or foreshadowing of the so-called planned “economic cooperation” between the Moon Jae-in and Kim Jong-un governments. The North Korean government's intermediary role will be greatly expanded. But there will be a departure from the past: the enormous profits extorted from North Korean workers through economic cooperation will be used not for nuclear development, but for primitive accumulation in the North.

The ROK government and Korea Railroad Corporation (KORAIL) estimate that the costs of restoring and modernizing the Gyeong-eui, Dong-hae and Gyeong-won rails (for uninterrupted service to China) would be cut in half if the North Korean government provides free labor. They arrived at this calculation from the following: In various areas, South Korean capital will draw profits by investing capital in North Korea, paying only the minimum wage to North Korean workers; the North Korean government then takes the extraordinary profits for capital accumulation funds. In addition, some profits will be collected regularly from South Korean capitalists by the North, in exchange for passage through their territory. Through these sorts of tariffs from China and South Korea, they will try to gain the means of capital accumulation. According to their

calculations, capitalists on both sides of the DMZ [Demilitarized Zone that separates North and South Korea] could make huge profits and break out of their respective crises.

But these projections presuppose an infinite, joint exploitation of the North Korean working class. Both the North and South Korean capitalists assume that the North Korean government will freely exploit and repress the North Korean working class to no end. This is a very dangerous calculation.

Chinese capitalists are also creating plans that do not conflict with those of the North Korean capitalists. The Chinese rulers have no choice but to agree to establish a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula at the moment because they want to avoid a nuclear crisis. China appears to be alienated from the current flow of events, but we can expect China to be the most influential player in the long term.

What will happen if an inland economic network that runs from South Korea, through the North and into China, and, as a result, China's economic power grows to challenge the United States? Chinese capitalists believe that this enormous economic influence would be paired with decisive influence on the rulers of both Koreas.

Therefore, although it appears that the Chinese state capitalist bureaucracies have given the United States the upper hand in its initiatives on the Korean peninsula, they can be sure that their interests will improve naturally with the smooth expansion of the economic link between the two Koreas.

Of course, unlike the expectations of Chinese state bureaucrats, the reality will be very complicated and contradictory. The reform and opening of North Korea will go along with the utmost utilitarian calculations, as in the Vietnamese model. The North Korean ruling class will likely pursue utilitarian relations between China and the United States, swinging back and forth like a pendulum. In the process, the United States and China will compete fiercely for control of the Peninsula, bringing crisis to the region in various forms. This would ultimately

become the crisis of global capitalism, expanding the unresolved crisis on the Korean Peninsula beyond the region.

The North Korean capitalists are now convinced that it is time for them to be bold, taking advantage of the various contradictory interests of Korea, the United States and China. It is a great opportunity, perhaps the only opportunity, to stabilize the North Korean state capitalist system.

For or Against the Current Peace Process?

What should be the attitude of the South Korean working class toward the agreement to end the war, the peace treaty and the declaration of denuclearization? Ultimately, we do not oppose these aims. But we approve them only conditionally.

First, these various peace treaties can have only a temporary and limited effect, because real peace on the Korean Peninsula can never be achieved without cutting the roots of imperialism and capitalism, which lead to the threat of war. True peace on the Peninsula can be achieved only through the international unity of the working class and the revolutionary action of eliminating capitalism based on this unity—not through peace agreements between capitalists.

Second, we conditionally approve the peace agreement only in terms of advancing the unity between workers in both Koreas, and the development of the working class' power to struggle.

At present, the workers of the two Koreas and the worldwide working class have not reached the stage of unity and revolutionary preparation to end capitalism at once. In this situation, peace provides more favorable conditions for the total unity of the working class, compared to the condition of war, which forces the working class to point their guns at each other. More opportunities for communication may make it possible for once-isolated segments of the working class to better understand

each other and unite.

The denuclearization, expansion of North-South exchanges and the peace agreement will provide the chance for revolutionary advancement within the working class of both Koreas.

Unlike the hopes of the North Korean capitalist bureaucracy, the North Korean system, punctured everywhere by economic cooperation, will be unable to prevent the awakening of the North Korean working class. North Korean workers will become increasingly aware of the regime's backwardness and the vicious oppression with which it rules, wiping out the illusions that the North Korean rulers have imposed through external containment and media control. They will realize quickly that their suffering is not solely caused by U.S. imperialism but by the oppression, exploitation and incompetence of the North Korean rulers.

Of course, the North Korean rulers will try to stabilize the system and consolidate control by attracting public support à la Park Jung-hee (the former South Korean president who took power through a military coup in 1963), with speedy industrialization and economic development through economic cooperation and the opening of North Korean markets. But things will never happen according to their expectations, because North Korea's rulers will try to absorb the fruits of economic growth for the rapid accumulation of capital, forcing high rates of exploitation; the fruits of economic development will not return to the North Korean working class quickly.

As a result, the growth of awareness, consciousness, enthusiasm and resistance of the North Korean working class will not keep pace with changes in living conditions, which will improve very slowly. The North Korean regime will be shaken by this gap, as the struggle, resistance and independent organization of the North Korean working class will spread.

Moreover, the North Korean hereditary system and state organization is too old and rigid to cope with rapid economic changes, and will collide everywhere with the

demands of emerging capitalists, who are rapidly growing in accordance with private capitalization. This results in a struggle for leadership between the old and new bureaucracies among the North Korean rulers. The unity of the North Korean ruling class will face risks from time to time. And this crack in the North Korean ruling class, coupled with the growing resistance of the working class, is likely to bring great upheaval to North Korea.

Resolving the inter-Korean conflict will have a great effect on the advancement of the South Korean working class. After the fall of the South Korean Park Geun-hye government in 2016, the Moon Jae-in administration, seeing itself as a descendent of the candlelight protests, has put various democratic policies into practice.

But workers increasingly ask, "Why is there no change in the lives of workers? Why is it that poverty, inequality, irregular employment, layoffs and instability still determine our realities? Why is power in society still monopolized by capitalists? What is democracy today?"

Marx and Lenin were correct to argue that workers' movements should support bourgeois democratic revolution and the advancement of bourgeois democracy, not because something revolutionary will automatically result. The more bourgeois democracy is completed, the more it cannot transcend fake democracy unless it abolishes capitalism; workers' democracy can be achieved only through the realization of socialism. Following the government of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun, the government of Moon Jae-in today plays a historic role in proving this point.

The expansion of inter-Korean communications will declare bankruptcy on nationalism. The Korean working class will learn that *peace and cooperation* on the Korean Peninsula is no more than the cooperation between the ruling classes of the two Koreas for the exploitation of the working class, and that the two Korean capitalists nations will strengthen the oppression,

control, division and exploitation of the working class.

It will be revealed clearly to workers that the *prosperity of the nation* is no more than the prosperity of the ruling class of the two Koreas, and the prosperity of working class can be achieved only through the unification of the workers in both Koreas, and the unification of the working class around the world. This will undermine the illusion of nationalism and the illusion of bourgeois democracy, which has been the decisive obstacle to the development of vigorous class struggle.

What will emerge as an alternative for the workers' movement when these fantasies are stripped away? A revolutionary awareness of workers' internationalism, that is, the union of the working class all over the world, including the working class of the two Koreas, and awareness that the fundamental problem lies not in democracy or national division, but in capitalism.

And finally, there will emerge an awareness of socialism as the only alternative to capitalism. The historical mission for socialists and militant workers in South Korea is to promote this alternative.

Two Prospects

We are passing through vile times. Trump, an imperialist gangster, is emerging as a Nobel Peace Prize nominee. Moon Jae-in has referred to Trump as a contributor to peace in Korea, stating, "We can take peace, and Trump can take the Nobel Prize." It shows the weak position of a South Korean capitalist government, which can gain only temporary peace through its obedience to the U.S. imperialist government.

In addition, the imperialist powers of the United States, China, Japan and Russia, along with the South and North Korean capitalists, all share a common interest: intensifying the exploitation of the working class on the Korean Peninsula. The rulers of the two Koreas are hiding behind the curtains of inter-Korean exchanges and peace and seeking the prosperity and stabilization of the capitalist system of the two Koreas by collateralizing the sacrifice of the working class of the two Koreas. Will the events proceed according to their wishes?

There are other prospects. As the tensions between the two Koreas and the threat of war temporarily decrease, it will become clear where the real problems are to all the working class. The capitalist system of exploitation, once hidden behind the fog of democracy and nationalism, will reveal itself more clearly. This will open up possibilities for working-class unity and the chance for joint struggle against the rulers. Thus, we will open the way for socialism on the Korean peninsula.

Which of the two prospects will come true? Nothing is decided. Only the unity and struggle of the working class will determine the result. In the meantime, South Korean workers are forced into the vanguard of building unity between the workers of the two Koreas. North Korean workers, who have not had class struggle in recent decades and have not had the right to organize independent organizations, need time to play a role.

First, the Korean working class needs to actively intervene in the current phase with the following demands: "Open up all borders for complete inter-Korean exchange! Ensure that all workers on the Korean Peninsula are

free to travel and have the freedom to get a job! Let all South Korean companies that directly or indirectly employ North Korean workers apply South Korea's minimum-wage policy! Pay all wages to North Korean workers directly! Ensure freedom of thought, freedom of assembly and freedom of speech, both in North and South Korea! Ensure that North Korean workers are free to form trade unions and political parties!"

The struggle to support the North Korean working class and to promote the unity of the North and South Korean working class is also effective in protecting the rights of the South Korean working class. Unlike the expectation of the South Korean capitalist class that North Korean workers are "South Korean workers without labor unions," the North Korean working class should rise as workers who struggle with unions, so that the South Korean workers can also resist the pressure of the *race to the bottom*.

The barriers of bourgeois democracy and nationalism are rapidly collapsing. The capitalist class seeks to establish a capitalist kingdom on the ruins of nationalism. But, through the struggle for solidarity between the workers of the two Koreas, they can take a precious opportunity to advance to socialism under the banner of total unity of the international working class, staring capitalism in face.

In these circumstances, we conditionally approve the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, the end of the war and the peace agreement, with no illusions. We declare, however, that we cannot stop there, but must push forward for internationalism and socialism on the Korean Peninsula!

[Left Voice](#)

"It Really Comes Down to Empowering the Working Class"

12 August 2018

This September, New York voters will have a chance to nominate another member of Democratic Socialists of America for political office. In Brooklyn, twenty-seven-year-old Julia Salazar is running for New York State Senate on a platform of single-payer health care, housing as a human right, protecting public schools from privatization, expanding collective bargaining rights, and ending mass incarceration and deportations. [140]

Jacobin's Meagan Day sat down with Salazar to talk about the failures of the Democratic Party establishment, the difference between socialists and progressives, and how democratic socialist candidates can stay accountable to the working class once they win office.

MD : How did you become a socialist?

JS : My family immigrated to the US from Colombia when I was a baby, and my mom ended up raising my brother and me as a single mom, without a college degree and from a working-class background. My family wasn't at all politically active, but my mom really had a chip on her shoulder and developed pretty conservative reactionary politics, so that was what I was exposed to growing up.

I started working when I was fourteen in a grocery store, and worked through high school in the service industry, and became increasingly aware of this cognitive dissonance I had between the political worldview that I was exposed to and my own self-interest. As someone who survived on social benefits, these things appeared increasingly at odds with each other.

I went to college at Columbia and I worked as a domestic worker, taking care of kids, cleaning people's apartments. [141] It was through a combination of the political education

I received at college paired with my own development of class consciousness that eventually I came to identify as a socialist.

MD :When did you get involved in activism?

JS :My earliest experience was organizing my own building. I lived in a building in Harlem that was owned and run by an abusive and neglectful management company that wouldn't adequately heat the building in the winter, failed to make urgent repairs that were necessary to make tenants' apartments livable. I was twenty-one with no legal training, and I went on the city's website and determined we could legally withhold our rent. So I talked to my roommates and my neighbors and we organized a rent strike. [142]

We withheld our rent for three months. Finally, the management company took us to housing court. I showed up at housing court with a thick manila folder documenting conditions in the building. And we actually won concessions from the landlord. But of course, the management company did not invite me to renew my lease, and it was not a rent-stabilized unit, so they raised the rent and forced us out. To me, however, that experience exemplified and drove home the need for systemic change.

MD :How do you define democratic socialism?

JS :Broadly speaking, what it means to be a democratic socialist is to have a vision of a world where everyone is taken care of. We're fighting for a society in which people are valued over profit, in which everyone has access to the things they need not just for basic survival but to thrive. [143] In my campaign this translates to specific shorter-term policy positions including universal single-payer healthcare, expanding the rent stabilization system statewide and enacting universal rent control, ending cash bail and policies aimed at

eliminating mass incarceration, and so on.

MD: What distinguishes a democratic socialist from a progressive?

JS: A democratic socialist recognizes the capitalist system as being inherently oppressive, and is actively working to dismantle it and to empower the working class and the marginalized in our society. Socialists recognize that under capitalism, rich people are able to "through private control of industry and of what should be public goods" to accumulate wealth by exploiting the working class and the underclass. Functionally, this perpetuates and exacerbates inequality.

A progressive will stop short at proposing reforms that help people but don't necessarily transform the system. For example a progressive might advocate for forcing landlords to do necessary repairs on buildings. But unless you advocate for universal rent control and frankly, eventually, the abolition of private property "though that's not my campaign platform because it's not very realistic" what you're actually doing is just kicking the can down the road.

What it means to be a democratic socialist legislator is to push for changes that will have positive material effects in people's lives, but which also bring us closer to a truly socialist economic system.

MD: It sounds to me like you're saying a progressive and a democratic socialist may overlap on some key policy proposals, but for a democratic socialist the goal is empowering the working class to win further fights against capitalism, whereas for progressives it's often more palliative.

JS: Yes, it's like harm reduction "that's how I would describe it.

MD: What have been the primary

failures of the Democratic Party establishment to date, and whose interests does the party serve at present?

JS: Take the commentary we've seen in the last week, since Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez beat Joe Crowley in the Democratic primary in her congressional district in New York. [144] The dominant centrist liberal wing of the Democratic Party is completely out of touch with what the majority of registered Democrats " actually want, and the policies that actually resonate with them. I think what we're seeing is that the constituents of the Democratic Party have a much bigger political imagination than the party establishment, whether at the federal level or in local machine politics.

So the main problem is a lack of political imagination, approaching every dispute from a position of compromise instead of from a position of readiness to fight for the working class and marginalized.

MD: What do you think the prospects are for socialists in transforming the Democratic Party into a fighting force for working-class people? Can it be realigned, or is it merely a tool at present for building independent socialist politics?

JS: I definitely think the latter. My feeling is that Democratic Party realignment is at best a laudable secondary goal, not a primary goal. Ultimately, the two-party system de facto disenfranchises people, and I can't see the Democratic Party ultimately being a vessel for the democratic socialist revolution, so it would be silly and shortsighted for democratic socialists to put a lot of effort and resources into that project.

MD: But then on the other side, you have people saying socialists should only run outside the Democratic Party. What's your answer to them?

JS: They should tell that to the over 150,000 people in my district, who are living in fear every day of being displaced from their homes, and who

are registered Democrats in a state with closed primaries. It's unquestionably strategic here in New York " though not everywhere, I should add " to run as a Democrat if you want to seize power as a leftist. To mobilize people around socialist politics you have to engage Democratic voters, and you can't do that in any meaningful way without running on the Democratic Party line in my district.

I recently supported DSA (Democratic Socialists of America) member Jabari Brisport, who ran as a Green Party candidate. His district is different from mine. I think it would be great if we could all avoid the Democratic Party line, and I think it's still an important question for people running under different circumstances, but if I were to try to do that in this district, I highly doubt people would notice much less vote for a third-party candidate in the general election.

MD: Is the goal of a socialist campaign primarily to win office and to legislate, or is it to build a movement and spread a message? If it's the latter, how do electoral politics achieve that goal uniquely?

JS: The goal is to build a movement. Otherwise, long term, we are just reformists. And part of building that movement is demonstrating our power, demonstrating to other people we want to bring into the movement that the movement is growing and viable. We also need to send a message that in order to build this movement, we must radically defy the systemic efforts to alienate and isolate us from each other. Communicating that is one of the most important components of a campaign like mine.

Additionally, it's important to actually successfully elect candidates who can enter the legislature and fight for policies that will actually transform the lives of working-class people. Election is a short-term goal, while the long-term goal is to build a movement, but the two are not mutually exclusive. The way people respond to these races " for example, in the case of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the way people have responded to a democratic socialist working-class

Latina being elected in the Bronx to the federal government " can have a huge impact on the movement, on a national scale.

Democratic socialist electoral campaigns energize people to become involved in the socialist movement in the US. And while I think Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez is to the left of Bernie Sanders, and I am to the left of Bernie, there's no doubt that his campaign generated an incredible amount of interest in socialism. When I canvass and mention democratic socialism, people primarily identify it with Bernie, because he popularized the concept through his electoral campaign.

MD : What is the nature of your involvement in DSA, and how integral is DSA to your campaign?

JS: DSA is absolutely integral to my campaign, particularly our field operations. I've been actively involved in NYC-DSA for almost two years. I'm on the organizing committee of our chapter's Socialist Feminist Working Group, I used to manage the chapter-wide calendar and do a lot of administrative work, and I've been involved in multiple branch campaigns.

It was largely DSA members " one of whom is now my deputy campaign manager " who persuaded me to run. DSA's national electoral strategy has informed our own campaign strategy, and DSA members have been volunteering for the campaign since we launched in April. So DSA has played a critical role in this campaign from its inception.

MD: What do you make of the teacher strike wave? Is this a new dawn of labor militancy, and if so what accounts for it? And what's the role of organized labor in fighting for a socialist world?

JS: The strike is the most powerful tool that organized workers have against the boss. So to see workers striking in huge numbers, and in "right-to-work" states pre-Janus, is deeply inspiring. [145] The socialist movement needs to be led by the working class, so when we see workers coming together in solidarity

across the country to strike, it's meaningful for the socialist movement. Furthermore, labor issues are related to all other issues facing the working class, like health care, and it was awesome to see that highlighted during the teacher strikes.

A true socialist movement is only going to become reality via the working class taking power, and wielding the power we currently have. In New York State, public sector workers don't have the right to strike because of the Taylor Law. [150]

Unfortunately, already in December it was not amusing anymore. At that point one of the parties in the governing coalition - right-extreme VMRO - explained that the Convention was about letting in Iranian transvestites, teaching sex change, an international conspiracy against the Bulgarian nation and other nightmares that haunt the conservative mind. [151]

Someone might say - I, for one - that to go against such a stance by quoting legal documents, statistical data and scientific definitions is to siege a castle with candies. Yet that is what a part of the defenders of the Istanbul convention have done with stubborn consistency. They got stuck in the legalities of the matter and at the end no expertise, communication techniques or protest mobilisation helped. Not truly realising how alien their technocratic lingo of human rights sounds to the Bulgarian public, the NGO elite and liberal intellectuals refused to play by the rules of their opponent even in this debate. Their unswerving faith in the constructive debate and legal order mislead them irreversibly.

Part of the defence of the Istanbul convention went even further. "Opinion leaders", inconsequential political figures from the more liberal elitist right as well as guardians of the legal order and the European idea, who to this day swear by the civilizational values of Europe, blame the 'mentality' of the "average Bulgarian" who is as if 'preconditioned' to beat his woman, and explain to the 'lowly folks' what "gender" means. Those who took up such strategy embodied the

tremendous failure of the defence of the Istanbul Convention as a whole, more so than its other proponents armed with dry technocratic lingo.

Every time the defenders blamed the opposition of "uneuropeanness", the latter had two safe options - either to say that they did not want "Eurogay values" (an old narrative that springs up time and again - the last time when there was a panic that paedophilia is to be legalised); or if they are more sophisticated (like some politicians) to follow the discourse exemplified best by VMRO MEP Angel Dzhambazki: [152] [153]

"I want the Bulgarians, as the heirs of an ancient European civilisation and as people who have a significant cultural and historical contributions, to be a part of the Western European Union of values. [...] Do you know why the propaganda against the EU is effective? Because it points at the stupidities. [...] Because the liberal elites are incapable of a proper response, as they teach disordered models to their own societies, they distort the feelings and will of the people to fight, to survive."

The same approach was adopted by "the first party to put the emphasis on the membership of Bulgaria in the European Union" - the Union of Democratic Forces (SDS). [154] For them, "thanks to the strong family traditions, thanks to the values taught by the Christian faith, the Bulgarian people and spirit survived five century of Ottoman slavery and half a century under the chains of communism-atheism. We cannot easily turn our backs to those values and to support the beginning of their erosion through the acceptance of one document."

In this regard, every argumentative looping that it is Christian to adopt the Istanbul convention became meaningless from the get-go. [155] Not only because of arguments as the aforementioned, but because of the position of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and of the active campaign of US-sponsored evangelical organisations that continues to this day through a series of small, but well organised protests in front of central state institutions, demonstrations such as the "March for the family" and

various media channels. [156] [157] [158]

Every time the defenders of the Istanbul Convention claimed that it would deliver a salvation for the sinful character of the "Bulgarian" - otherwise, supposedly a non-European by nature and thus prone to barbarian behaviour - the opposition had three safe options: 1) to claim that "more domestically violent" societies had adopted the Convention (thus it is not about prevention); 2) to explain that Bulgaria has a decent enough legal framework and if needed, we could better it ourselves; but 3) to promise they would never succumb to external pressure and to allow meddling with the state's sovereignty. [159] [160] The last one was the decisive argument of the Bulgarian President Radev (by constitution the embodiment of the national unity), who claimed that it is strictly the decision of the Bulgarian state and that it should not be taken away by mysterious foreign agents. [161] Thus between startling demophobia of the elitist right and the warm populist embrace of the nationalists of all political creeds and parties, it is not surprising that more people preferred the latter. [162]

Every time the defenders of the Istanbul Convention got bogged down in explanations of the meaning of the word "gender" and claimed that in the document's texts there was nothing about a third gender, the opposition had at their disposal the vast systemic propaganda, spreading out from the US to Russia, that dated back to the early 1990's to today: a profoundly foreign invention that for less than a year took over sovereign Bulgaria as well. [163] The key term, "gender ideology", that denotes every assumed "passed down" action to change the traditional gender roles and relations was used by all sorts of prominent political figures and commentators and even ended up in the arguments for the decision of the Constitutional Court from 27.07.2018. [164] According to the Court, the Istanbul Convention contradicts the constitution. Possibly according to those judges, the conspiracy is not unimaginable. Some kind of a definition from the books of western scholars against the popular intuition

that a mighty foreign power is against traditional life. Well, the domestic powers rose to defend the population. And succeeded.

Today, exactly seven months after their first position regarding the convention, VMRO are celebrating the victory as theirs. [165] Kornelia Ninova, the Chair of the Bulgarian Socialist Party and currently elected Vice President of Socialist International forgot women's struggles, to which her own party decades ago and Ninova herself just two years ago, have contributed, declaring that she was happy. [166] And justifiably – she and all others in the opposition camp against the Istanbul Convention did not have to defend themselves or to engage actively, they only had to wait. The Constitutional Court's decision proclaimed formally that there was no point for the struggle to continue.

What should be (or have been) the issue

In this struggle there was simply no space for two critical perspectives that could have possibly shifted the balance of power.

On one side, almost nobody mentioned that the Convention of the Council of Europe on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (a decent legal document that could have actually synchronised the Bulgarian legislation's existing framework that safeguards women and children), is a politically and socially problematic document. As Zana Tsoneva commented, "the convention is filled with the neoliberal spirit of the so-called carceral feminism or the mobilisation of the repressive institutions of the state in the tackling of the gender-based violence and inequality. However, interpersonal violence cannot be addressed with state violence." [167] That is an aspect which could yield a more productive and noticeably less polarised debate. Unfortunately, the actual qualities of the Istanbul Convention were not the subject of discussion outside the snide remarks

of the opposition that they would have supported this nice document were it not for the "gender" issue. At the same time even the moderate right that supported the convention did not manage to go beyond their defensive position.

On the other side, there was no debate on the conditions that produce violence, which consequently had to be mediated in international treaties. There were no concrete discussions beyond violence. There were hardly any questions about the traditionally subservient role of women and children, and where that occurred (predominantly in the discourse of NGO's and their mobilisations), the rhetoric was quite bland and it talked down to the general public. There were no debates on the use of minorities as second-hand people – of sexual and gender minorities as scapegoats for every conservative populist or for the ethnic minorities for their cheap labour. There was no talk about the all-encompassing inequality and alienation in the Bulgarian society, where people living in poverty-stricken neighbourhoods, cities and families with a broken social fabric cannot afford the luxury of protecting each other. Mariya Ivancheva and I attempted to talk about all this in January. [168] Unfortunately, by that point we already knew it was too late. The public discourse had long silenced any mentions of the dire problems of inequality and exploitation as material and not a civilizational or mental problems and their exclusive role in propelling class and gender violence. On the rare occasions when those topics show up in media, they appear as statistics (from Eurostat, for instance) and nothing more. Bland data, which part of the defenders continue to use with the blind trust that statistics can change the public opinion. The problems mentioned are not something new, they are not in the programmes of parties or experts, apparently they do not deserve attention – and that is a point of depressingly wide agreement between the two camps.

The groups opposing the Istanbul Convention took a stance for "the people", however conservative and problematic it may be. That is still a

novel approach that most people have not experienced in their lives as political beings in post-1989 Bulgaria. Conversely, the more vocal and aggressive defenders of the Istanbul Convention with the stale inertia of their anti-communist roots and /or their inevitable relations with the neoliberal order/, clung to the rhetoric of the West against the East, Europe against non-Europe, democracy against non-democracy, the enlightened elite against the simpletons. It is time to admit that they lost.

The moment was carefully chosen, including the delayed session of the Constitutional Court. The parliament is off for their summer holiday. [169] In autumn the MPs will be able to quietly rearrange on the ideologically cleansed board. Conservative elites proved that they are now better in the game of public debate than their liberal opponents and expectedly gained more of the public's trust that they can now trade in their inter-party and interpersonal squabbles. GERB, the ruling party of Prime Minister Boyko Borissov, who formally supported the Istanbul Convention have no interest in facing up to everyone else and now, more than ever, will fit loudly in the conservative rhetoric of the dominant political discourse. This was a sentiment shared by the political vultures of the current leadership of BSP, which led them to easily betray the women struggles (even in their nominal form).

After Friday any topic regarding equality between people in whatever regard in Bulgaria will be even more difficult. The losers are not only women or minorities, but everyone whose labour or bodies are exploited.

At the end, it was always about an ideological battle with a tremendous stakes, under which smoulders the old struggle between groups with disparate social, cultural and economic capital and incompatible interests. This international legal document was only the concrete occasion for the scandal, that could have happened in other forms and at another point in time. It was never about the Istanbul Convention. In fact, such a convention never existed.

The troika leaves, its misdeeds remain

7 August 2018, by **Tassos Anastassiadis**

Triumph of the Greek bourgeoisie

But this latter, estimated at 301 billion euros in 2009 (126% of GDP) has actually, with the troika, exploded a little more, to reach 325 billion (178%) in 2018 (not to mention the private debts created). An undeniable success!

The end of the troika does not mean an end to its misdeeds. On the one hand, the "undertakings" have been given until 2060 (!) And the "reforms" produce effects, which are not only "structural" (for example, the new cut in pensions programmed for 2019 by 1% of GDP, a drop that could go up to 18%!). On the other hand, there is the continuation of "reforms" already programmed and "freely agreed", in terms of selling off public space, competition, greater flexibility at work and so on.

The petty institutional game, classic for the EU, between the authorities in Brussels and the national authorities, took a very acute and even dramatic character in Greece in 2015, when the blackmail appeared in all its brutality on the political scene. The European TINA triumphed for the greatest enthusiasm of the bourgeoisie - especially Greek: the "reforms" were not in danger, the workers could continue to be unpaid, underpaid, flexible, without rights and obedient.

This victory of the Greek bourgeoisie, with the help of Brussels, also dealt a

political blow to the left. Not only for ideological reasons - with the fact that the one who acts as the most faithful executor of Brussels in the government still proclaims himself as "left2" ... - but also because at the strategic level the reflection could very easily deviate from the social and class issues, towards technical or institutional aspects, notably the euro. Thus, the break with the euro could become the new gadget of those who, until now, had deluded themselves about democracy or the "rationality" of the European bourgeoisie! Most of Syriza's leftist divisions, especially the Popular Unity / LAE, have moved in this direction, which is in truth a headlong rush.

Nationalist drift on the left

The new "Initiative 1-1-4" of the Popular Unity / LAE, which is an axis for a "national liberation", is programmatically purified of any reference to working class politics and even annoying words like wages, pensions, etc., in favour of the "saving of the fatherland", of the competitive bourgeois, in alliance with properly nationalistic and Christian forces. This sovereignty is no longer an innocent excess of language: it becomes dangerous and even reactionary, especially when the victorious bourgeoisie is always demanding more. This was the case with the suspicion of a recognition of the Republic of Macedonia by Greece,

which was enough to mobilize the masses, the nationalist left protesting against the "treason" of the rulers in the pay of Europeans or Americans! Not to counter or flirt, and even to participate sometimes, in this resurgence of a nationalism hostile to its neighbours, is more than a shame: it is about a complete political disorientation, in a conjuncture where the Greek bourgeoisie takes offensive initiatives, especially against its eastern neighbours, with even the risk of war.

But the alignment with the "nation" - rejected and denounced by some anti-capitalists and anarchists - against Macedonians, Turks, Europeans or Americans - and more rarely the Russians - propelled by the dominant Stalinist legacy, does not respond to the social needs created by neoliberal "reformism". Basically, this may be the main reason that undermines the credibility of sovereignism - except for the extreme right, which is still threatening. Because the proletarian layers of the new model created by the troika, young people, refugees and immigrants, but also some of older people thrown out of the workplace, have nothing to do with a "nation" that identifies itself with the European wild west: everyone for themselves! Their problem is literally vital, in a cannibal labour market where their labour power becomes no more than a commodity, a capital, whose realization (in salary, in retirement or in service) is not even ensured by the social rules but depends only on the market itself and its wild forces.

Nicaragua's Popular Rebellion Stoppedâ€”For Now

6 August 2018, by **Dan La Botz**

President Daniel Ortega's government has succeededâ€”for nowâ€”in stopping the Nicaragua's popular rebellion after four months of the most severe repression, including killings, kidnappings, and torture of the regime's opponents by both the police and paramilitary forces.

During the months of June and July the Ortega government dispatched police and paramilitary forces to take the university campuses, towns and cities such as Masaya, and Managua neighborhoods held by the opposition, killing dozens of people, kidnapping others, wounding scores, and arresting and torturing many. The best estimate is that more than 300 have been killed and thousands wounded, but no hard numbers are available. [170] Ortega's renewed offensive against what were at first largely peaceful protestors has succeeded for the moment in paralyzing the opposition, though the country continues to seethe.

During the last few months, in addition to violence, Ortega used a variety of other tactics to defeat the movement. To combat the business class with which he has collaborated since the 1990s, Ortegaâ€”who through three recent presidential terms had no interest in land redistributionâ€”sent his followers to seize and occupy some lands held by his wealthy opponents, most of whom make their money in agriculture. Ortega also lashed out at the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, with which he had an alliance for many years, but which is now on his enemies list because of its support for the opposition. He has called Nicaraguan Catholic leaders co-conspirators in a “coup” aimed at overthrowing him.

Ordinary citizens and working people

who joined the democratic protests and then what became a popular and peaceful rebellion are being fired from government jobs, and a number have been arrested, accused of “terrorism,” and jailed. For example, doctors and professors of medicine in the public universities and hospitals are being fired for participating in anti-government protests. The students who were among the first to protest have borne the brunt of the violence throughout, dozens being killed, wounded, or tortured. As former Sandinista Oscar Ren   Varg  s put it, “The government is trying to decapitate the social movements by arresting local leaders and anyone who has criticized the [government's] violence against the people.” We are in the “Pinochet phase of the regime,” [171] he said referring to the military dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet of Chile from 1973-90, who imprisoned and murdered hundreds of leftists associated with the former government of Salvador Allende, which was overthrown by the 1973 coup that Pinochet led. There could hardly be a stronger condemnation of a government by a Latin American leftist.

Following up on the months of violence and the suppression of the opposition, as the government's mopping up operation against its opponents went on, Ortega used the July 19 anniversary celebration of the 1979 revolution against the Somoza dynastic dictatorship to mobilize his supporters, though many attended out of fear of being fired from government jobs or attacked by his paramilitary forces. In reality, Ortega's masked paramilitary thugsâ€”whom he refers to as “voluntary police”â€”have become for the moment his principal source of power. As in so many other parts of the world, we now have

government by a dictator and his gangsters. Still, most Nicaraguans appear to remain opposed to Ortega and the government's repression of the rebellion. The recent events have created a whole series of economic, social, and political problemsâ€”interruption of agricultural production, the collapse of tourism, and international condemnation of the regimeâ€”that will not easily be resolved. The popular rebellion may only have been a rehearsal for a revolution, but only time will answer that.

The Ortega Regime: Neoliberal Dictatorship

How did things get to this point? The Daniel Ortega government, as I have explained in my book *What Went Wrong? The Nicaraguan Revolution: A Marxist Analysis*, has its roots in the revolution of 1979 that overthrew the Somoza dynasty. Modeling themselves on Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, and the Cuban Revolution, Ortega and the other leaders of the Sandinista Front for National Liberation (FSLN) who overthrew the Somoza dictatorship wanted to create a new one-party state that controlled absolutely both politics and the national economy, but both the U.S.-backed Contra (counter-revolutionary) war against the FSLN government and divisions within Nicaraguan society made that impossible.

The threat from the United States of continued war drove Nicaraguans in 1990 to vote for the opposition coalition of Violeta Chamorro, who became president. Daniel Ortega first formed an alliance with Chamorro's

son-in-law Antonio Lacayo, and then gradually made peace and then formed a de facto partnership with Nicaragua's corrupt Liberal and Conservative parties, with the country's capitalist class, and with the rightwing head of the Catholic hierarchy, Miguel Obando y Bravo. From the 1990 election until 2006, Daniel Ortega and his conservative allies were the powers behind the throne, wielding enormous power during the presidencies of rightwingers Arnoldo Alemán and Enrique Bolaños.

Finally in 2006 Ortega succeeded in winning election to the presidency once again (he had served as president during the war in the 1980s). He consolidated his hold on the government, taking control not only of the presidency, but also of the legislature, and the Supreme Court, as well as controlling social organizations and NGOs, and buying up television stations. Ortega imposed neoliberal economic policies aimed at attracting and maintaining domestic, U.S. and other foreign investment by suppressing maquiladora labor unions and keeping wages low. Nicaragua became integrated into the U.S.-dominated North American economy, selling half its products to the United States. At the same time, Ortega established a partnership with the U.S. government, collaborating with the U.S. military, U.S. Navy, and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency. Nicaraguan continued to be dependent upon U.S., Venezuelan, and other international aid, but still remained one of the poorest countries in Latin America. Changes were made in the Constitution to permit Ortega to run for a third consecutive term, and with the traditional political tools of fear and favors, he won election again in 2011 and then 2016 with his wife Rosario Murillo as his vice-presidential running mate.

The Resistance

Ortega had for years harassed his political opponents, sending his FSLN thugs to beat them when they campaigned against his party. He also worked to discredit and to destroy independent social movements, especially the feminist movement.

Large-scale opposition to Ortega began in 2014 with his plan to build an interoceanic canal financed by a Chinese capitalist. Farmers and environmentalists began to protest against the canal; on several occasions police confronted and beat some of them. When in April of this year Ortega announced a reform of social security, both business groups and pensioners objected, and the latter took to the streets to protest. When the elderly protestors were pushed around by police, students came out to join them. Ortega's forces then shot some of the students, and a few weeks later when mourning mothers led the Mother's Day demonstration, Ortega's police and paramilitary fired on them too. The Catholic Church attempted to organize a national dialogue, but Ortega stonewalled the discussions, while the opposition had become intransigent in its demand that he and his wife-vice-president step down.

The Nicaraguan popular rebellion of this spring and early summer developed as a broad multi-class movement—"students, retirees, farmers, working people and businesspeople, religious and lay people"—a broad democratic movement that lacked a common political program. The strongest organization with the clearest political ideas—"fundamentally conservative, pro-capitalist ideas"—is COSEP (Consejo Superior de la Empresa Privada en Nicaragua), the leading business organization. The Catholic Church is also powerful, though it is historically divided into the conservative hierarchy, a theology of liberation current led by some university professors and parish priests, and the mass of pious believers. Students created several organizations, but they have had a tenuous existence because of the government persecution of student activists. Now it seems that some students have begun to sort themselves out politically and a student "left" could be emerging, [172] though exactly what they think is still not clear. The farmers' movement has been largely limited to those fighting to defend lands directly affected by the proposed transoceanic canal.

There do exist social

movements—"environmentalists and feminists"—among the educated middle class, but because of government persecution over the last decade or more, they remain small and marginal to the society as a whole. Because Ortega's FSLN controlled the industrial and agricultural unions, there is virtually no independent labor movement. While there is no independent working class movement, working people have been very active in the opposition movement. Two left opposition groups with social democratic politics do exist, the Sandinista Renovation Movement (MRS) and the Movement to Rescue Sandinismo (MPRS), both of which broke with Ortega and the FSLN years ago, but they never succeeded in finding a following among the increasingly alienated and politically apathetic public. And because Ortega's FSLN has discredited the idea of socialism and repressed rival democratic socialist currents, it is not surprising that aside from the MRS and the MPRS there is no left to speak of in the movement. The result is that the popular rebellion has been a democratic movement fighting against dictatorship, but its constituent members have failed to create clear political programs. There is, however, the possibility that the democratic struggle could open up a social struggle that would create a new left, while in any case many believe that even a more democratic bourgeois regime would be superior to Ortega's dictatorship.

The popular rebellion's activists occupied university campuses, barricaded themselves in Managua neighborhoods, and fortified their villages and towns. Opponents set up something like 150 roadblocks throughout the country, bringing the economy to a virtual halt. They also organized at least two general strikes that paralyzed the country for a day or more. Whenever possible they took to the streets again and again in massive protest demonstrations against the government, marching even as sharpshooters fired on them, killing dozens. Attacked by the police and paramilitaries, some opponents fabricated weapons or took them from the police and fought back. So the violence continued until Ortega's police and paramilitaries eventually

succeeded in stopping if not entirely eradicating the largely peaceful rebellion. [173]

International Actors

The popular rebellion and its violent suppression, which had interrupted the economies of all of Central America and raised the specter of revolution or reaction, led international actors to become involved. The United States government, which has dominated the Caribbean and Central America since 1900 or earlier had been happy enough with Ortega until quite recently. U.S. organizations such as USAID and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), and no doubt the CIA had for decades, of course, worked in Nicaragua as they do everywhere in the world. It would take a few months, however, before President Donald J. Trump's State Department began to see the rebellion against Ortega as an opportunity perhaps to establish an even more pliant government, though it did so gradually and cautiously.

In May, messaging on Twitter, Vice-President Mike Pence condemned the Nicaraguan government's violence, but only demanded that the Ortega government protect its citizens and their rights. [174] Speaking at the Organization of American States on June 4, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said:

In Nicaragua police and government-controlled armed groups have killed dozens, merely for peacefully protesting. I echo what Vice President Pence said in this very building on May 7th: "We join with nations around the world in demanding that Ortega Government [respond] to the Nicaraguan people's demands for the democratic reform and hold accountable those responsible for violence." The United States supports the work of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and what it is doing in Nicaragua, and strongly urges the Nicaraguan Government to implement the recommendations issued by the commission this past May 21st. [175]

Still there was no general condemnation of the Ortega government, only a call for reform. The United States appeared to support the call made by Nicaraguan business and the Church for early elections.

Ironically the Trump administration behaves as if it were a defender of democracy and freedom. Trump's government issued a general condemnation of the regime did not come until late July, and even then simply called for an end to violence, for dialogue, and for fair elections:

The United States strongly condemns the ongoing violence in Nicaragua and human rights abuses committed by the Ortega regime in response to protests. After years of fraudulent elections and the regime's manipulation of Nicaraguan law - as well as the suppression of civil society, opposition parties, and independent media - the Nicaraguan people have taken to the streets to call for democratic reforms. These demands have been met with indiscriminate violence, with more than 350 dead, thousands injured, and hundreds of citizens falsely labeled "coup-mongers" and "terrorists" who have been jailed, tortured, or who have gone missing. President Ortega and Vice President Murillo are ultimately responsible for the pro-government parapolice that have brutalized their own people.

The United States stands with the people of Nicaragua, including members of the Sandinista party, who are calling for democratic reforms and an end to the violence. Free, fair, and transparent elections are the only avenue toward restoring democracy in Nicaragua. We support the Catholic Church-led National Dialogue process for good faith negotiations. [176]

The Trump administration limited sanctions to personal sanctions against Ortega, Murillo, and Francisco D  az, head of the national police, [177] and to a revocation of the visas of Nicaraguan government officials and their families. [178]

While the Trump administration's public statements remained mild, there is no doubt that the U.S. State Department, Republican Senators and

Representatives, and rightwing organizations were deepening their contacts with conservative elements in Nicaragua and exploring political alternatives to the continued rule of Ortega. The Republicans put forward and the U.S. House of Representatives passed a resolution criticizing the Ortega government. [179] Republican members of Congress invited Nicaraguan students to meet with them in Washington while the students were there to speak before international organizations and human rights groups. All of this is, of course, standard practice of the U.S. government, which works everywhere in the Americas (and for that matter throughout the world) to shape international developments, even if it did not initiate them and cannot control them.

In response to the U.S. government's pressure, Daniel Ortega gave an interview to Fox News, the one TV channel that Donald Trump always watches, no doubt with the goal of speaking directly to the U.S. president. [180] Ortega denied that the government had been violently repressing its citizens and claimed that on the contrary it was the popular rebellion that had unleashed the violence and attacked "Sandinista families." Historian Alejandro Benda  a suggested that Ortega's goal was to convince Trump that if his government fell there would be chaos in Nicaragua and possibly more migrants to the United States. Trump, however, did not tweet any response to Ortega. [181]

The Organization of American States (OAS) debated Nicaragua and passed a resolution, sponsored by the United States and several Latin American nations, that similarly called on the government to protect its citizens, to enter into dialogue, and to hold early elections. [182] Members of the European Parliament passed a non-legislative resolution on May 31 denouncing "the decline in democracy and the rule of law in Nicaragua over the last decade, as well as increased corruption, often involving relatives of President Daniel Ortega." The resolution passed by 536 votes to 39, with 53 abstentions. [183]

The United States worked to

coordinate the international responses to the Nicaraguan crisis, but it appeared to aim principally at a gradual transition through early elections. [184] Early elections would give the United States time to work with conservative parties and business groups in Nicaragua to construct a political coalition and find a conservative candidate for president who would serve U.S. interests. The aims of the Nicaraguan business class, the Church hierarchy, and the United States government happen to coincide, but they do not represent the interests of the students, pensioners, farmers, environmentalists and feminists, and working people fighting for democracy.

The Popular Rebellion and the Left

The Nicaraguan popular rebellion has been the subject of a debate between the democratic left, which has supported it, and the neo-Stalinist left, which has backed the dictator Ortega. Kevin Zeese and Max Blumenthal wrote many articles, sent many tweets, and gave many interviews in which they alleged that the United States had orchestrated an attempted coup in Nicaragua. They and other authors like them offered as evidence the historical record of U.S. imperialism in Latin America (which is indisputable) and the long-term and well-known role of U.S. agencies such as USAID and NED in attempting to strengthen conservative forces, and they quoted the words of rightwing Republican representatives and suggested with no actual proof the existence of a CIA plot. What they did not do was discuss the actual nature of the Ortega government and its authoritarian and conservative policies; in fact they seemed to know little about recent Nicaraguan developments. [185]

Many of my generation, the generation of 1968, who supported the Nicaraguan revolution of 1979 (as I did), may have found these arguments appealing, reflecting as they did the situation forty years ago, but not only do they have little factual or logical

merit, but they are based on a specious reasoning that denigrates ordinary people and idolizes strongmen. Such arguments are based upon three fundamental suppositions:

1) Nicaraguans and other Latin Americans cannot have legitimate grievances against the “Leftists” governments and would any case be incapable of creating their own movement, so they must be manipulated by some other force;

2) the United States masterminds and controls all political developments in Latin America from Argentina and Brazil to Venezuela and Nicaragua, and it is the real force behind any apparent popular opposition;

3) existing “anti-imperialist” governments (Russia, Syria, Nicaragua), whatever their character, must be supported against the world’s only imperialist nation, the United States.

These arguments can only appeal to those who have no understanding of the complexity of international political developments, of a world where, for example, people can organize themselves, a left can develop critical of a so-called leftist government, and the United States, powerful as it is, cannot always call the shots. That these authors provide shameful support for an authoritarian, capitalist government murdering hundreds and wounding thousands of its citizens is not surprising, given their support for Vladimir Putin’s regime in Russia, Iran’s theocratic dictatorship, and Assad’s dictatorship in Syria. Zeese and Blumenthal represent what writer Rohini Hensman has called a neo-Stalinist current that came out of the left but now has little that is even vaguely leftist about it. [186]

Fortunately, the international democratic left has rallied in defense of the Nicaraguan people’s rebellion. Noam Chomsky spoke out against Ortega’s “authoritarian” government on Democracy Now. [187] Dozens of leftist intellectuals and political activists principally from Europe and Latin America signed a statement strongly condemning the Ortega governments and containing these

demands:

The unconditional release of all political prisoners; the transfer of information from the authorities to human rights organizations about the real situation of the persons declared missing; disarmament of the paramilitary army organized by Ortega and his government; an independent international investigation into the various forms and facets of repression, with appropriate sanctions; the constitution of a transitional government “with a limited mandate,” leading to free elections; and the end of the Ortega-Murillo government. [188]

The international democratic and revolutionary left by and large shares the view presented in this article, that Nicaragua has experienced a popular rebellion against a dictator, and that the Ortega government should be condemned and the popular movement supported.

Conclusion

While the popular rebellion developed in their homeland, many Nicaraguans rallied to support it, but now some fear that that solidarity with their compatriots may put them in danger. There are 5,300 Nicaraguans living in the United States who have Temporary Protective Status (TPS), which provides them with temporary residence and work authorization. The Trump administration plans to end TPS for Nicaraguans in January 2019. If Nicaraguans return to their country in January 2019, all of them will face a potentially dangerous situation. Some who have been supporting the rebellion from here may also face reprisals when they return, which, based on recent experience, might include imprisonment, torture, or worse. We as socialists should support the Nicaraguan community in the United States should it call for an extension of Nicaraguan TPS.

The first stage of the Nicaraguan popular rebellion of 2018 has ended, and whether or not there will be a second stage depends upon many factors: Ortega’s ability to keep the movement down, the ability of the movement to regroup and reorganize,

the role of the U.S. government in attempting to shape a new government to its liking, and our ability to show solidarity with the

Nicaraguan popular movement. Our positions should be clear:

Ortega must go. The U.S. must keep

out. The popular movement must be supported.

<http://newpol.org/content/nicaragua...>

Construct an internationalist anti-capitalist project

5 August 2018, by **Franco Turigliatto**

European Union: anti-capitalist viewpoints

This has strengthened an ever-greater detachment from/rejection of the European Union and the very idea of unity of the European continent, which has nourished the development of nationalist positions (for some the return to a mythical age of national sovereignty), many of them profoundly reactionary, racist, xenophobic and even fascist.

Xenophobic critique of the EU

This is what explains both the severe defeat of the Democratic Party, which had become the most significant interpreter and manager of the interests of the big bourgeoisie, and the electoral victory of the Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S - Five Star Movement) of Di Maio and the Lega led by Salvini. These parties present themselves as the defenders of national sovereignty while strengthening their links with the most reactionary governments in Europe, but above all by waging (in particular interior minister Salvini, with the agreement of the M5S) a reactionary campaign against migrants, the chosen scapegoats for the difficulties experienced by large sectors of the population to which the government has no response.

The critique of the European Union comes then from the right, associated with the migrant question which is, for the moment, the dominant theme, eclipsing even the question of the euro

which was recently so central to the debate on Europe. It must unhappily be noted that this foul racist campaign has won support: it poisons the whole of society, dehumanising a part of the population and produces indifference in relation to the ongoing tragedy in the Mediterranean, opening the way to future regressions of democracy.

A government at the service of the national bourgeoisie

Although having different bases, the M5S and the Lega are the expression of sectors of the petty and middle bourgeoisie, but with close relations to leading employers' groups (above all the Lega, which for some years has administered the most developed region of the country, Lombardy). If this government has been able to exist, it is because in certain important ministries, there are people who enjoy the trust of the neoliberal establishment; the finance law being prepared is closely in line with the European treaties. If the former government was distinguished by the gifts it presented to the big enterprises and the banks, the national sovereignty claimed by the current government has the goal of distributing wealth differently inside the bourgeois class to salvage enterprise groupings who are struggling to cope with international competition.

Against this government, there have not yet been responses at the level required, even if there have been social struggles for the defence of jobs and partial mobilisations of solidarity with migrants.

Constructing a social and political alternative

To construct a social and political alternative, the task incumbent on the forces of the left, involves knowing how to simultaneously fight EU austerity policies, the pseudo-liberal Europeanism of the Democratic Party (now in opposition), linked to significant sectors of the bourgeoisie, and the actions of this right wing racist government, without forgetting the nationalist and reactionary regressions at work within society.

Numerous social and political forces to the left of the Democratic Party have in the past supported the process of European unity, starting from a position which accepted the institutional framework of the EU, while demanding a reform of the treaties in social and democratic sense.

This had no result since the rejection of austerity policies has only been defended at the electoral level, with the ability or the will to construct the necessary social resistance. This approach to the EU still remains in some sectors, even if a force like Rifondazione has radicalised its

position, saying that it is necessary to disobey the European treaties by rejecting their directives.

Reject the trap of neo-sovereignism

Other forces, however, starting from the denunciation of the capitalist and anti-popular character of the European treaties and the need to exit the euro and the EU, now have a neo-sovereignist position: they deem it necessary to recover a full national and monetary sovereignty; they no do

not see the need for a process of construction of an alternative for working people on the continental scale, and they envisage on the contrary the formation of an undefined Mediterranean zone whose class contours are to say the least uncertain.

As for us, we think that the EU is a tool of the European bourgeois classes to impose their domination and the exploitation of the labouring classes, to destroy the social conquests established after the Second World War, and thus must be fought against. But we also believe that it is necessary

to build an alternative project at the European scale, an internationalist and anti-capitalist project which can be credible and realisable by involving the hundreds of millions of workers present on the European continent. A project founded on the rejection of austerity policies, the construction of mobilisations, solidarity of struggles at the European scale, solidarity with migrants and the fight against the borders which divide workers and peoples. A project advocating the democratic self-organisation of the exploited as indispensable tool for building a genuine social and political alternative.

Imran Khan's Pyrrhic Victory

5 August 2018, by **Lal Khan**

However, it's not only due to the manipulations and intimidations of the deep state's pre-poll rigging that the PML and other parties lost the elections. There was a genuine PTI vote bank, based on disillusioned youth suffering from the curse of unemployment and social neglect. Imran Khan's main political rhetoric has been to 'end corruption' - something that he portrays as the fundamental cause of all the ills affecting Pakistan. He has used it to create hatred against his obscenely wealthy rivals within the ruling class - targeting only the Sharif clan.

And yet there is no dearth of billionaires, corrupt land grabbers and Mafiosi in his own party, the PTI. With the full involvement of the corrupt barons of the corporate media linked to the bosses of Gig economy, the media stirred a malicious campaign against the Sharif and his meteorically rising daughter Maryam. Those sections of the deep state that Nawaz Sharif had dared to defy backed his campaign with a vengeance. This discourse was also intended to push into political oblivion those seething issues tormenting the masses, from poverty to unemployment and from deprivation to lack of health care and

education. It was an elections campaign sans the real issues. The reality is that with two-thirds of Pakistan's economy operating as a "gig" or black economy, corruption is an indispensable ingredient of Pakistan's economic existence; Pakistani capitalism survives and breeds on corruption. It's the main component of the buffer that protects it from total collapse.

Although the PML (N) government did largely end the traumatising power blackouts and carried out several reforms, the limitations of Pakistan's debt-ridden capitalist economy and the rottenness of the system could not bring any significant development or prosperity for the masses. When the repression came the PML's dynastic leadership seemed to be divided on what line of action to take. Nawaz and Maryam were using a radical rhetoric of defiance but were very careful not to touch on the class question, as they were themselves ultimately representatives of the bourgeoisie and were unwilling to infringe their class base by raising the class contradictions. At the same time, Nawaz's heir and younger brother Shahbaz wanted to reach some sort of a deal with the military. Being at the

helm of the party, with Nawaz and Maryam incarcerated he actually put in jeopardy the mass procession in Lahore to welcome and support of Sharif and Maryam against their conviction, which many people thought was an act of revenge for their defiance of the powers that be. Shahbaz wanted to play the 'development' card - something that didn't have much appeal, since the lives of ordinary people under the shadows of the huge monuments he had built in Lahore didn't bring them much relief from the miseries inflicted under capitalist rule. Similarly, Nawaz Sharif's narrative of the "sanctity of the vote" and "democracy" didn't fire much mass enthusiasm amongst the oppressed classes.

The uneven and fragile growth in the last five years brought more social discontent rather than any satisfaction or improvement in the conditions of the oppressed masses in the country. Imran Khan's victory is analogous with the wave of right-wing populism that we are witnessing worldwide, from the electoral triumphs of Duterte in the Philippines, Donald Trump in the USA, and to a certain extent the emergence of Narendra Modi in India, Erdogan in Turkey, Orban in Hungary and similar

demagogues playing on the deprivations and grievances of the masses with their populist rhetoric promising development and an end to corruption. Imran Khan also whipped up support using anti-India rhetoric and Pakistani chauvinism to appeal the reactionary sentiments of the frustrated petty-bourgeois youth, the middle class and primitive sections of the population. He also combined a queer hybrid of liberalism and Islamic fundamentalist rhetoric to reach sections of these strata of society.

However, now the chickens have come home to roost. The achievement of Imran Khan's desperate yearning to be prime minister is just days away. The PTI is a right-wing bourgeois, or rather a "lumpen-bourgeois" party, with a social base in the liberal and religious petit bourgeois and a leader who has strong Bonapartist tendencies, in some ways more right-wing than the current PML(N)'s Sharif/ Maryam faction. His ideology is an amalgamation of contradictions; no one has yet defined what it really is.

After his victory in Wednesday's election, Khan made a televised address which was a sort of rehearsal for his inaugural speech as prime minister. Once in office he vowed to improve the lives of the poor, fight corruption, plant ten billion trees, issue health and education cards, create ten million jobs in the next five years, build half a million houses... and several other tall promises. Even if all these were ever fulfilled, they will fall far short of the needs of society, considering the existing levels of deprivation. The macro-economy is in a catastrophic state. There is no new plan to fix it apart from the age-old solution of borrowing from imperialist financial institutions. One of the first challenges he'll need to tackle is easing a foreign-reserves crunch. The country's buffers have been steadily dwindling as a result of surging imports and debt, forcing the central bank to devalue the currency four times since December. All of that comes against a global backdrop of higher oil prices, trade war tensions and an emerging-market sell-off. Asad Umar, the PTI's shadow finance minister, says no option will be ruled out as a way out of a severe economic

crisis, including knocking on the doors of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Pakistan's reserves have dropped at the fastest rate in Asia to \$9.1 billion, according to data compiled by Bloomberg. Reserves are now below the level reached when the country approached the IMF for a bailout on the last two occasions. Bloomberg wrote <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-07-11/imf-will-not-be-that-easy-this-time-around> : "The IMF will not be that easy this time around. Lots of structural reforms were delayed or not done last time. They will be much tougher in the enforcement process, whether it's privatization program, revamping the tax infrastructure, or widening the tax net. It's not going to be easy on the ground level." The economy is already expected to slow down for the first time in six years to 5.2 per cent or even less this year.

Like most populists, Imran Khan's 'easy' solution to raise finances is to increase the tax base. While Pakistan has increased its tax-to-GDP ratio in recent years to 12.5 per cent in the year through June, that's still among the lowest in Asia and globally. Most of the government's tax revenue comes from indirect levies, and there's a huge pool of untaxed money that can be tapped in real estate and savings instruments, as well as non-declaration of income. Pakistan's bourgeois cannot exist as such if they pay their taxes and stop plundering the exchequer. Foreign investors only bring in their money on harsh conditions, including tax reliefs on their profits and their smooth and unhindered transfers to their headquarters. That leaves almost no room for the PTI government to raise the funds needed to pay the interest on loans and reduce the deficits in the trade, budget and fiscal sectors. In fact, Pakistan faces a mammoth task in this fiscal year alone: to arrange around \$11 billion to fill its external financing gap. The deficit is higher than Pakistan's gross official foreign currency reserves, which currently stand at \$9 billion. Experts say that even the IMF cannot fill this gap. Its last bailout in 2013 brought Pakistan over \$6 billion spread across three years.

The Ministry of Finance, the IMF and independent economists have

assessed Pakistan's gross external financing needs for 2018-19 to fall in the range of \$23 billion to \$28 billion. In any case, it will not be that easy to seek an IMF package. The lender will impose certain politically unpopular actions, including privatisation of state-owned enterprises, severe cuts, price hikes through indirect taxation and other stringent austerity measures that will squeeze the working classes and play havoc with the lives of the already impoverished masses.

With this level of dependence on the IMF and other imperialist institutions, Imran Khan won't have much say in economic affairs. The IMF will call the shots, and this government will have no option but to carry out imperialist demands that will have drastic impacts on society. Like all its predecessors, the PTI government will not be able to touch the largest chunk of the country's GDP: imperialist (Western or Eastern) debt servicing. Similarly, it would be considered a sin to even think of cutting military expenditure. More than two-thirds of the budget is spent on these two sectors, while the rest is mostly spent on the functioning of the state. The funds raised by turning government rest houses into hotels and other tourism projects will not be able to raise even a trickle towards the massive debts and deficits that have to be paid back and filled. As for health and education, it will yet again be the private sector that will suck the blood of poor patients and parents, as neither the system's ideology nor its near-bankrupt financial condition have much to offer in terms of human development. Imran's assertion of turning the prime minister and Governor's houses into public places is cheap gimmickry borrowed from Gandhi and other Indian elite politicians. It will not solve any of the agonising problems inflicted upon the masses.

Imran may be the blue-eyed boy of his country's masters, but still he will not be allowed to dabble in the domain of foreign affairs or security issues. His powers will be no greater than those of Sharif or any previous civilian prime ministers. Despite his macho imaging, he will remain subservient to the state in all the crucial policies of the

country, including relations with India. His utopian promises will soon be exposed, and his honeymoon period could be much shorter than he envisages. The current crisis will only worsen, exacerbating the problems of the economy and the resulting social and political turbulence.

Illusions in Imran Khan's 'new Pakistan' will inevitably evaporate much sooner than most experts think. There is no room for any reforms that will improve the plight of the masses. The astrologers' predictions so dear to Imran will fail as the excruciating

material conditions of life sweep away superstition, and the socio-economic contradictions will explode, creating even greater instability and turmoil. However, the reality of Imran Khan's 'change' can prove a qualitative breaking point for social consciousness.

Lenin described this controlled democracy long ago when he wrote; "Bourgeois democracy is the democracy of pompous phrases, solemn words, exuberant promises and the high-sounding slogans of

freedom and equality. But, in fact, it screens the non-freedom and inferiority of women, the non-freedom and inferiority of the toilers and exploited." The masses of Pakistan have voted in this moneyed democracy so many times and yet their plight only worsened. Now a time is coming when these working classes will, in Lenin's words, "vote with their feet." The oppressed classes shall enter the arena of history, not to change the faces or methods of governance but to challenge and overthrow this obsolete and inhuman capitalist system through a revolutionary insurrection.

Fires in Greece: the politics of natural disasters

4 August 2018, by **Kleanthis Antoniou**

The circumstances that made possible were the extraordinary strong wind, the high temperature, and the site itself. This is a summer resort for citizens of the capital, who are of average to low income, as those with higher incomes invest in land in more prestigious areas. In July, the resort is full of people who still work but modify their schedule for a quick trip to the coast, which is just an hour away from Athens.

Context of arsons

It is indeed sad to go through the details of the destruction. But is necessary to explain the context to understand the degree of importance of the event. It is common for fires to break out during the Greek summer. There are good reasons for the public to blame someone else, rather than a careless tourist who threw a cigarette butt still alight or some group of naïve teenagers who wanted to roast marshmallows in a field.

Forrest fires in Greece are usually regarded as acts of arson as for decades they have been closely connected to the urban expansion

plans of property speculators. The geography of Greece, which is mainly mountainous or semi-mountainous and usually forested, is a difficult terrain for the urban expansion plans of property speculators who target mountainous regions for mining or for the construction of huge tourist facilities. Tourism is the most profitable industry in Greece, and indicators prove it to be more and more profitable with record arrivals during the last two years. With money making the world go round, the past and present governments have always kept the door open for this sort of investment, and as far as construction investment is concerned, the bigger it is, the more profitable.

There is also the private interest of the Greek petit-bourgeoisie who for decades is building where it is illegal as it searches for a calm and remote place. It is done in the knowledge, that if necessary, the rules will be bent and that the SYRIZA-ANEL government has made the legislation a lot more lenient.

Government Responsibility

So there is motive, but the state likes to claim that it defends the public from devious individuals, but it is there to protect, first and foremost, the profits of the petit bourgeoisie. The Greek state can't hide from the total lack of social care. Initially there was the argument that the public debt, brought in by the IMF, was an attack on public expenditure with its privatization and everything that the word austerity usually includes. Almost ten years later, this argument is worn out. The Greek PM Alexis Tsipras boasts that after all the sacrifice, a closure will be reached with a slow-paced exit from the financial control and the possible departure from IMF. Though blood is already on the government's hands, it comes from the disastrous policies they introduced along with the European Union and the International Monetary Fund, locking the state into an obligatory GDP surplus. Furthermore, the Greek State's imperialist views comply with the NATO strategy in the region, making

it a country of high importance and that also means high military expenditure. As a matter of fact, Greece is the second state in percentage of GDP devoted to military expenditures amongst the NATO countries. Military expenditure means aeroplanes, tanks and helicopters, thus no fire extinguishing planes. Natural disasters definite, human response isn't.

Who is the enemy?

The solidarity response was astonishing. Volunteers of all ages, but especially young people showed up, while at the same time the hospitals all over Athens saw long queues of people answering the call for blood donors. The amount of funds and resources collected is encouraging as

well. The most interesting is the demographics of this response. Egyptian workers, Kurdish organisations, Syrian and Iraqi refugees, all helped in an active way, either by taking part in various rescue attempts or by providing for the ones in need. Even Roma people appeared, even if during the last month in the region they are under pressure from the police and the far right. The state of Macedonia offered 100.000 euros, while in Turkey first in the twitter trends is the hashtag #Geçmi?OlsunKom?u (May everything pass to Neighbour).

It is a class issue

Fire casualties are always a class issue. Just a bit more than a year from

Grenfell Tower incident, the British society has been reminded of this in a tragic manner. In the Greek case, it is not so different. Arson is committed for the interest of private investment. State fire prevention policy is non-existing, something sadly proven in previous cases of fires and flooding that have led to loss of life and destruction of property. The only part of the society affected are workers, the ones driven by the sole motive of surviving, and the helpless. The last days have brought into surface horrific stories. If there is an alternative, it is somewhere between the migrants who stood up and lent a hand to a society that treated them as aliens for decades, and the section of the left that points at those who are responsible instead of making vain cries for state support and better public services.

Migration policies are the key question

3 August 2018, by **Jakob Schaefer**

Opposition to the single currency and to contributions to the EU

But, from 2005, a movement of conservative economists (including Bernd Lucke) demanded a turn in the approach to the debt (returning to a nationalist policy). They also demanded a fall in wages, so as to remedy the "German disease" which was supposedly sapping the country's competitive capacity. It was against this background that Bernd Lucke (an economist at Hamburg university, then a member of the CDU and a European Parliament deputy) created in 2013 the AfD (Alternative for Germany). At the centre of their programme was opposition to the single currency and to contributions to the EU. The loss of the national

currency was deplored and the return to the Deutschmark was presented as the main remedy for the evils of society. But above all: the single currency risked losing the benefits of German austerity, which should not be sacrificed for the EU. National independence should be prioritised, as "we can't pay for the others" and so on.

With the Greek crisis in 2014-2015, this "argument" became increasingly accepted and the AfD (supported on this point by most of the press) - complained that Germany was paying the costs of the "lazy Greeks". This was the background to the governmental policy, and at the same time it was the moment for nationalists of every stripe to join the AfD. The latter swung ever more to the far right. Lucke was removed from the leadership (he founded a new party which did not survive) as was his successor, Frauke Petry, while the party's profile increasing resembled that of other right-wing populist

formations in Europe. Today the party is openly racist and is in the sphere of activity of a number of fascists.

Facts don't matter

In reality it is above all Germany, Austria, Holland and Finland who benefit from the EU. First by the increase of exports from German industry. Germany's surpluses (235 billion euros in 2017) equivalent to 8% of GDP, are increasingly strangling a significant part of the industries of southern Europe. No other country benefits from the single currency as much as Germany, with moreover historically low interest rates (at the moment German state borrowing is done at negative rates).

Of course, the German (and French) banks profit from the Greek crisis. And not only does Berlin dictate what the Greek government must do, but it is also the German state budget which benefits from the "stability" of the

situation. This doesn't stop the bourgeois parties (including the social democrats) from pushing still more the line of "not paying for the others". The new finance minister, the social democrat Olaf Scholz, is opposed to the installation of the banking union which would ensure a guarantee of a rescue of a failing bank by other banks at the European level. From the viewpoint of capitalist integration and the construction of the EU – or rather of saving the EU – it would be wise to establish this union since an explosion of the crisis (not only at the level of the banks) in Italy would be the end of the EU. But the government's policy precisely expresses the fact that in the final instance it is always national interests which prevail.

2015: happiness for all kinds of racists!

The very brief "migrant summer" in 2015 demonstrated the solidarity extended by a good part of the German population towards refugees. This is explained above all by the fact that the people had for some years seen the number of drowned victims in the Mediterranean. But at the same time the racists (AfD and others) used the arrival of more than a million refugees to raise fears ("they will steal our jobs, our houses" and so on). This gave a huge boost to the AfD which, from this time, broadly shaped the public debate (directly and indirectly). It called for the massive closure of the borders – the most extremist wing of the AfD called for the refugees to be fired upon, and the mass expulsion of those already here, and so on.

As this discourse is absolutely coherent with the racist logic of the other bourgeois parties and as the policy of the AfD has the advantage of appearing more consistent, it can influence all the other parties, including the social democrats. The CSU (the Bavarian branch of the Christian Democrats) thus tries to apply the policy that the AfD propagates, hoping to reduce its influence. But the opposite is clearly happening. Why vote for the copy (CSU) and not for the original? Today

(mid-July) the AfD is at 15-17.5%, the SPD at 17-19%. It would not be surprising if the AfD soon overtakes the SPD. And with reason: the SPD fears that the "grand coalition" (Merkel's Christian Democrats and the SPD) is a failure, and that the SPD will be ousted from the government. Thus, the SPD adapts to Merkel's policy of – step by step – closing the border, strengthening Frontex, increasing expulsions and so on.

The underlying reasons for the rise of the AfD

The installation of "Agenda 2010" by the SPD chancellor Schröder represented the most significant destruction of social rights in Germany since the Second World War. The most serious effects have been a significant fall in unemployment benefits and greater precarity of jobs, so that Germany now has the most developed precarious sector in Europe.

Hence a widely spread fear of losing one's job, becoming precarious, seeing one's standard of living fall considerably, of being excluded from society. In eastern Germany – where there have "traditionally" been few immigrants and still less refugees from the 2015-2017 period – we can add the fact that wages are (depending on the sectors) from 12 to 22% lower than in western Germany, the unemployment rate is twice as high as the west, small towns are in the process of becoming depopulated and so on. It is very promising territory for the AfD: at the last federal elections, it scored 22.5% in east Germany. Thus, with significantly less refugees in eastern Germany, but with a standard of living lower than that of the west and the feeling of being excluded and without perspectives, it is clear that it is above all the social question which paves the way for the racists.

In this atmosphere of a progression of the right and far right, the governments of the Bundesländer (federal states) are increasing police and legal repression, preparing new

laws which – for example – authorise police searches even without proof of a danger, with the suspicion of a crime being prepared sufficing as pretext.

Far right mobilisations and counter-mobilisations

In this context, far right mobilisations have multiplied, as – happily – have those of anti-racists and anti-fascists. In Cologne, there was in early July a mobilisation of 8,000 people demanding effective aid to castaway refugees. Ten days later, on July 17, interior minister Seehofer (CSU) came to Düsseldorf to defend his policy of expulsions, but when a crowd as big as that in Cologne assembled in the streets, he cancelled the visit (officially it was postponed for technical reasons).

For almost two years, the EU question has not been in the foreground, but it could once again become a very divisive question in the event of an aggravation of the debt crisis (in Greece or Italy). Since 2015, immigration policy (and thus the question of the closure of the borders) has become the key question for all the parties, but also in the debates of the left and the revolutionary left. The Die Linke party has largely maintained its position of defence of migrants' rights, but this is not the case for Sahra Wagenknecht and Oskar Lafontaine, who are preparing the foundation (planned for September) of a rallying movement. Their supporters include many nationalists (even from the right), and their project seems visibly inspired by Mélenchon and La France insoumise (and like the latter, this project is top-down, without any construction from below). So, it looks to have very little chance of success, and the sole effect will probably be to divide the left rather than rally it. This "movement" favours a regulation of immigration, thus a sizable concession to the AfD, in the hope of reducing the influence of the latter. A colossal farce.

Fortunately, the majority in Die Linke,

and the great majority of the extra-parliamentary left and above all the revolutionaries (including the ISO), defend the rights of migrants, and are

saying loud and clear:

Down with Frontex! Open the borders!
Help the castaways!
Halt the expulsions!

Stop arms exports!

Revise all the free trade treaties
ruining societies in Africa and
elsewhere!

For an internationalist break with the EU institutions

2 August 2018, by **Alex Merlo**

Disaffection with the EU

The turning point goes back to 2010, when the Zapatero government applied the measures dictated from Brussels, modifying the Constitution in the middle of the summer to make payment of the debt the priority. The subsequent disenchantment was the starting point in a significant decline of the traditional parties. The bailout of the banks which was organised shortly afterwards, with millions of euros of public money being transferred to the financial system, raised awareness of the fact that the European Union was in reality a project designed by and for the élites alone.

Also, the racist management of the arrival of asylum seekers has made it apparent that the European Union was not the space of solidarity and open borders which many had believed it to be. Happily, we do not in the Spanish state have a far-right party which could develop an openly racist discourse at a mass scale. The

majority are favourable to welcoming the refugees, and many towns have declared themselves refuge towns. The welcoming of asylum seekers has however been strongly limited because of the action of the successive national governments and the EU.

All these elements have led to a lowering of enthusiasm in favour of the European Union, even if this disaffection is limited by the fact that people perceive no viable alternative to it

The lessons of the Greek precedent

The brutal pressure exerted in 2014 by the Eurogroup and the ECB on the Syriza government has also shown to what extent democracy in the EU is limited by very narrow margins. But Syriza's capitulation has made the task of the forces of change in the Spanish state difficult.

Podemos is regularly confronted with this argument: your programme is very appealing, but it is inapplicable inside the European Union. Our

response is to explain that our strategy is very distinct from that of Syriza: first, it is indispensable to take unilateral measures of disobedience to the EU before even beginning any negotiation. Thus, it is only the basis of suspension of the payment of the foreign debt and a democratic control of capital that any negotiation with the European institutions can be considered. Also, we know that a break with the institutions and policies of the EU cannot be envisaged in a national perspective, but only in an internationalist and class-based perspective. Our objective is not take our independence in relation to the EU, but to put an end to the current EU and replace it with a solidarity-based union of the peoples of Europe. Our objective should not be independence in relation to the ECB and the Eurogroup, but the dismantling of these neoliberal institutions and their replacement by other structures which are democratic and socialist. To get there, it is necessary to lead the battle for change taking place at the European level, by building an alliance of peoples and movements breaking with the neoliberal institutions.

Pakistan's most rigged general elections

1 August 2018, by **Farooq Tariq**

Demonstrations in several cities have taken place against the post poll rigging. The majority of several dozen candidates has been turned into minority votes overnight by "unknown hands". These unknowns are known to everyone but if you write with the right name, you may disappear for this crime. Almost all the commercial media is under control by these "unknowns".

The media is instructed on daily basis by these "unknowns", all this to get a favourable mandate for their loved one "The great Imran Khan" who once was captain of the most popular game, the cricket, and won a world cup for Pakistan in 1992. Imran Khan is a conservative politician who had developed in recent years his magic love for the army generals and is keeping a kind heart for religious fanatics.

This was the most rigged election in the history of Pakistan. From Pre poll period until today on 28th July, all efforts were made to ensure that Imran Khan would get a simple majority. Prior to the elections, there were consistent attacks on Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz, the ruling party, by the judiciary on the question of accountability.

The PMLN has fallen apart from the military and judicial establishment on mainly two issues. The most important was the supremacy of civilians over the military. The second was the relationship with India. PMLN wanted more trade with India and no war.

Mian Nawaz Sharif, the former prime minister and a right wing politician, has to pay a heavy price for his insistence that as PM, he rules Pakistan and not the army. He was ousted by the Supreme Court, disqualified for life and now serving a ten years sentence along with his daughter at a Rawalpindi jail.

When the election date was announced, the media portrayed Imran Khan as the cleanest politician with a plan to curtail corruption. His main election slogans were "change" and "a new Pakistan". Billions of rupees were spent on advertising by his billionaires party men. The richest always smells the changing directions

of power and they accordingly change their political affiliations. Most of these are called "electable", a politician who could spend billions on elections and buy votes. Imran Khan Party, Pakistan Tehreek Insaaf (Justice Movement), saw an influx of these "electable" who changed their party from PNLN to PTI without a hint of shame. They always did the same at the election times.

When PMLN gave tickets (nominations) to their probable candidates, phone calls were made by these "unknowns" to those nominated and were asked to return the tickets at the eleventh hour and contest elections as independent. Those who refused were beaten up physically in their offices and homes. Threats and intimidations worked and around 40 of those who were nominated by PMLN returned their tickets and announced to contest as independent.

During the election campaign, several PMLN nominees were arrested and some disqualified for life and sent to jail on pretext of corruption. All these measures gave a general impression that military and judicial establishment want Imran Khan to win the general elections at any cost. Imran Khan has already created a myth among the youth that we need a change and a corruption free government. There was euphoria among a large section of youth in Pakistan that Imran Khan is not corrupt and that he needs "electable" to win an overall majority.

The two banned outfits of religious fanatics were allowed to contest elections by the Election Commission. The strategy was if the extreme right would contest elections, they will reduce the PMLN votes who were favoured by these religious groups in the past. One religious group Tehreek Labaik became the third largest party in terms of fielding candidates all around Pakistan after PTI and PMLN.

Over 300,000 military men were deployed in all the polling stations with a judicial power to military officers on the "request" of the Election Commission to ensure a complete security. This was aided by the religious terrorists who carried out suicidal attacks on public meeting

during election campaign killing hundreds including the candidates. In one unfortunate incident, over 150 were killed in Mastung district of Balochistan province including the candidate.

Most of the human rights groups in Pakistan including Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) criticized this gross pre poll rigging through press conferences and termed these extra ordinary measures to favour a certain political party.

On the Election Day, the polling went smoothly and military presence was at everywhere. However, the rigging work started after 10 pm, four hours after the counting started. Suddenly most of the results of the constituencies where the difference was between 1000-5000 were stopped. Then, there was an almost blackout of the counting, it remerged early in the morning, those winning elections at night time were losing and PTI candidates were always the winners.

The final results were delayed for over 72 hours, it never happened earlier.

The results showed PTI with 116 seats, PMLN 63 and PPP with 43 seats at the national parliament. PPP under the young leadership of Bilawal Bhutto improved from their previous devastating results of 28 seats. PPP kept control of Sindh assembly with more seats than they held previously, Khaiber Pukhton Khwa saw PTI "land slide". In Punjab, PMLN kept it majority with a drastic reduction of seats and PTI now vowing to form the government in Punjab also with the help of the elected "independents".

The two religious fanatic groups who contested got no national assembly seat but one of them Tehreek Labaik got two Sindh assembly seats. They did not do badly. In almost every constituency, they got from 1-10 percent of the votes and in some they got over 20 percent votes. This is quite alarming situation.

The Left contested almost 50 national and provincial seats from all over Pakistan. However, one Wazeer Ali from The Struggle group who is part of Left Democratic Front won a national assembly seat from former

federally administered area called FATA. The area is dominated by religious fanatics. However Ali Wazeer comfortable majority of 16000 votes had given a new hope the forces of the Left in Pakistan. Ali Wazeer contested as independent candidate. He was leader of Pashtun Tahafaz Movement which organized this year mass public rallies across Pakistan for compensation of those victims of "war on terror".

In my home constituency of Toba Tek Singh, where I contested elections for Punjab Assembly in 2013 elections, AWP candidate Mohammed Zubair came on third position with 4586 votes leaving behind the candidates of the religious fanatic parties and Pakistan People's Party. I did not take part in the elections as candidate because of health issues, however, campaigned for our candidate with two mass rallies in the constituency.

Almost all political parties except PTI has termed this general election as the

most rigged. They have rejected the results. PTI who launched a three year long movement against the rigging during 2013 elections termed this election as the most free and fair in history of Pakistan, the only party to say so.

The new government is in the making. It is quite obvious that Imran Khan will become the new prime minister. This new government will be a weak one and would have to face a severe economic crisis. The designated finance minister of PTI has already hinted to turn to IMF for a new loan. One of the main issues that PTI campaigned on was the massive foreign loans obtained during PMLN five years from China. Now they have no shame to say even before taking over power that they have to turn to IMF.

The government would try to improve the tax base in the initial period and that would bring them into

contradiction with strong traders lobby who have no habit of paying taxes. Imran Khan hinted to have friendly relationship with India. This would not be done. With an open support of the army generals, it is out of question that there will be improved relationship between Pakistan and India.

Religious fundamentalism will grow in the next period as Imran Khan has already pledged to "negotiate" with Taliban and he had always a soft attitude towards religious fanatics. He has supported some known Madararas associated with Taliban with state subsidies while he controlled KP government during 2013-18.

The opposition parties have announced agitation against the election results and have demanded fresh elections. However, they might not succeed in launching a successful agitation. Interesting times ahead.

28 July 2018