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## New Zealand First and the global far-right

30 November 2018, by [Daphne Lawless](#)

The words used to describe New Zealand First have usually been “nationalist”, “populist”, or – more critically – “anti-migrant” or even “racist”. Ask any New Zealanders what politics Peters is usually associated with, and they will doubtless reply anti-immigrant politics, especially opposition to Chinese immigration [1]. Given that, overseas observers might scratch their heads at seeing Winston Peters as deputy Prime Minister to Ardern, whose sunnily optimistic social-democratic approach has led to her being labelled “anti-Trump” [2]. How can a political force which is usually seen as part of the same global trend as Donald Trump, UKIP, and other nationalist reactionaries and fascists be supporting the centre-left?

Some historical background on Winston Peters is probably required to understand this. New Zealand was one of the most enthusiastic adopters of Thatcher/Reagan-style neoliberal economics in the 1980s. However – unlike most countries – neo-liberalism was not at first combined with authoritarianism and social conservatism. Rather, the Labour government of 1984-90 combined privatisation, deregulation and

financialisation with an anti-nuclear foreign policy, the legalisation of homosexuality and steps towards reconciliation with the indigenous Māori people. In this way, they were the reverse of the previous 1975-84 National government of Robert Muldoon, which combined social conservatism and an authoritarian style with heavy Keynesian-style state intervention in the economy and trade protectionism.

During National’s period in opposition 1984-1990, leaders Jim McLay and later Jim Bolger did their best to ditch Muldoon’s legacy and to reform their party in the neoliberal image. In this period, Winston Peters (first elected as an MP in 1978) was seen as the leader of the remaining “Muldoonist” faction in the National Party – sceptical of neo-liberal economics, and appealing to the traditional Tory rural and suburban base. When National returned to power in 1990, and quickened the pace of the neoliberalization of the economy started by Labour, Peters was increasingly the main internal critic of this approach. After being sacked as a Cabinet Minister and told he would not be re-selected as a National candidate, he struck out on his own,

promising a new party that would “put New Zealand first, second and third”.

The political basis of New Zealand First has always been *anti-neoliberal and conservative traditionalist*. In an era where both major parties were committed to neoliberal reforms, anti-neoliberalism united former Labour and National voters. NZF quickly pulled significant support away from the Alliance, a broad anti-neoliberal coalition whose major members were the Green Party and a social-democratic split from Labour. I have argued in a series of articles on what I call “conservative leftism” that the perspective of forming a broad anti-neoliberal bloc during the 1990s and 2000s led the activist Left not only into building coalitions with conservative anti-neoliberals such as NZF, but to some extent intellectually capitulating to their xenophobic politics – thus opening the door to the current far-right surge. [3]

Given all of this, what should the radical Left’s attitude to New Zealand First be? Certainly Winston Peters is no friend of progressive politics. His historical animus with the Green Party – the most progressive of New Zealand’s parliamentary parties – led

to them being excluded from formal participation in the current coalition government. [4] His party's latest stunt is a "respecting New Zealand values" law, which "which would legally mandate new migrants to respect gender equality, "all legal sexual preferences," religious rights, and the legality of alcohol." [5]

It goes without saying that an Ardern-led coalition in which the Greens' James Shaw or Marama Davidson were Deputy Prime Minister would surely be far preferable to the current situation - if the parliamentary numbers were to work out that way. But should we be treating New Zealand First the same way that we would other right-populist, "alt-right" or neo-fascist movements? Commentator Liam Hehir argues that a consistent Left would "no-platform" Winston Peters:

Is Peters really on quite the same level as Nigel Farage? Possibly not (shared interests in Brexit and cricket notwithstanding).

But the big difference between the two is that Farage has a lot less influence over New Zealand than Peters. If you want to ensure migrants and other vulnerable groups feel welcomed and safe, the views of the second most powerful man in the country weigh more heavily than do those of the member of the European Parliament for South East England. Or they should, at least...

For Green MPs, protesting Nigel Farage achieves little but costs nothing. Protesting Winston Peters, on the other hand, might achieve something - but only at the risk of losing political power. It doesn't take Niccolò Machiavelli to work out who gets protested. [6]

There is of course no sharp dividing line between traditionalist conservatism and the resurgent far-right, as the career of the UK's Enoch Powell should show. Peters is famous for a pugnacious, antagonistic relationship with the news media, similar to what we see from Donald Trump. His innate social conservatism led to opposition to the bill legalising same-sex marriage, in favour of a referendum on same-sex marriage -

which would have no doubt led to the same extremely divisive consequences as in Australia.

However, Peters draws as much from what has been called in Britain "One Nation Conservatism" - "preservation of established institutions and traditional principles combined with political democracy, and a social and economic programme designed to benefit the common man" [7] If you asked New Zealanders who votes for New Zealand First, those who did not immediately answer "racists" would immediately answer "old people". Peters' traditionalist-conservative politics have historically appealed older New Zealanders in particular. A significant social reform that he was responsible for in a previous Labour-led government was the "Super Gold Card" guaranteeing free public transport for all over 65s.

Perhaps the best international equivalent to New Zealand First would be the Independent Greeks (ANEL), the conservative-populist party who are SYRIZA's junior coalition partner in Greece. Peters has not even been averse to using rhetoric which might be called "left-nationalist". In his speech announcing his decision to join Ardern's coalition government in 2017, he said:

Far too many New Zealanders have come to view today's capitalism, not as their friend, but as their foe.

And they are not all wrong.

That is why we believe that capitalism must regain its responsible - its human face. That perception has influenced our negotiations. [8]

However, a "protean" (vague and shifting) populist appeal to both left and right at the same time is part of Peters' political strategy, and also part of classical definitions of fascism [9] - so Peters' "anti-capitalist" rhetoric doesn't let him off the hook there.

The New Zealand far-right have traditionally seen Winston Peters much like they see Donald Trump - if not precisely "one of them", then at least as a possible ally. The explicitly Nazi National Front named NZF as their preferred mainstream political

party in their electoral propaganda in 2005 [10]. More recently, during the 2017 election campaign, Peters came out in support of a "European Students Association" (a front for white-nationalist students) which had been closed down at the University of Auckland:

Winston Peters visited Victoria University in Wellington. During his speech to students he questioned the media's role in causing the "European" group to shut down. He accused journalists of suppressing dissenting voices, and on his way out, unashamedly signed a cartoon of a frog named Pepe - the most popular symbol of the alt-right.

Peters' actions set the New Zealand 4Chan boards alight.

"Guess who just got my vote!!" one user wrote. "Winston is based". (Based, loosely, means good).

"Absolutely BASED," said another. "Winnie has my undying respect."

"Winston is /ourguay/, right?" another asked. "I want someone to get rid of the Indians and Chinese, those f\*\*\*\*\* are stealing our country right out from under us." [11]

One obvious problem with assimilating New Zealand First to the global "alt-right"/white-nationalist phenomenon is that Winston Peters is himself M?ori. The support of a bloc of conservative, rural M?ori opinion has always been a vital part of the NZF coalition - as Ani White pointed out in an article for Fightback[<https://fightback.org.nz/2017/10/20/racial-populism-and-the-2017-new-zealand-general-election/> ], it is precisely rural and small-town voters who tend to be most prone to anti-migrant views. The very first NZF MP other than Peters was elected in one of the constituencies reserved for M?ori electors [12]; and at the 1996 election, NZF made a clean sweep of all the M?ori seats. However, as Ani White also points out, Peters trumpets a conservative, assimilationist policy, opposing "special rights for M?ori", and has recently shifted to supporting a referendum on abolishing the M?ori seats altogether.

Others have argued that Peters cynically uses anti-migration rhetoric in the same way that pre-Trump US Republican politics have used the issue of abortion - as a way to whip up support on the campaign trail, but having no interest in actually doing anything about the issue once in government. Political commentator Danyl Maclauchlan argues: "He campaigns on the immigration issue every election, but Peters has been in the powerbroker position in government three times now, and each of those governments has seen very high levels of net migration of what his supporters and voters consider "the wrong sort" of people." [13]

It would be best to argue that, although Peters no doubt cynically benefits from the far-right resurgence, and has no shame in appealing to racial populism, he is essentially a conservative rather than a fascist "national revolutionary". He seeks to bolster and defend the traditional institutions of the New Zealand colonial settler state, rather than to incite mob violence against the Establishment. Although New Zealand First has long used the rhetoric of racial populism, in practice Peters and his party are mainly concerned with getting a seat at the Establishment table, rather than raising mobs to overthrow it.

## Footnotes

# China Intensifies Crackdown on Marxist Student Activists

29 November 2018

**GREG WILPERT: It's The Real News Network and I'm Greg Wilpert, coming to you from Baltimore.**

Over a dozen Marxist student activists have been arrested in Beijing, China in the past month. This is in addition to about nine student activists who have been arrested between August and October. These student activists were

[1] New Zealand's position as a small developed Anglosphere country in the Asia-Pacific region has historically led to a tendency to "Yellow Peril" anti-Chinese politics. For a historical background, see

[2] [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/new-zealand-progressive-paid-leave-environment-jacinda-ardern\\_us\\_5bcd998be4b0a8f17eee3a7c](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/new-zealand-progressive-paid-leave-environment-jacinda-ardern_us_5bcd998be4b0a8f17eee3a7c)

[3] See for example <https://fightback.org.nz/2016/02/15/against-conservative-leftism/>

[4] For pre-election NZF/Green polemics see [https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=1&objectid=11888053](https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11888053).

[5] The legality of alcohol as a New Zealand value is ironic given that in this country, as in many others, temperance societies were at the forefront of the movement for women's suffrage, and prohibitionist leader Kate Sheppard is on our \$10 bill for this reason.

[6] <https://thespinoff.co.nz/politics/17-09-2018/why-are-the-woke-set-not-fighting-to-de-platform-winston-peters/>

[7] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/One\\_nation\\_conservatism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/One_nation_conservatism)

[8] <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/98084598/winston-peters-wants-todays-capitalism-to-regain-its-human-face>

[9] See for example <http://www.anesi.com/Fascism-The-UltimateDefinition.htm>

[10] [https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=1&objectid=10343503](https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=10343503)

[11] [https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=1&objectid=11888810](https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11888810)

[12] Constituencies reserved for Māori electors were introduced in 1867, when the restriction of voting rights to property-owning citizens meant that many Māori were disallowed from voting, to ensure that Māori had some input regarding the makeup of parliament. Although they were intended as a temporary measure, they continue to this day, and many Māori still consider them essential to ensure representation.

[13] <https://www.newshub.co.nz/home/politics/2018/10/opinion-whistling-on-migration-yet-leaving-migration-high-what-s-winston-peters-playing-at.html>

all involved in a solidarity campaign with workers at the Shenzhen Jasic Technology Company who had been involved in a unionization campaign. The students have been organizing in solidarity with Jasic Technology workers because the workers have been dismissed, beaten and arrested for their organizing activities, according to the group Committee for

Workers International. While it is not unusual for the Chinese government to prevent independent unionization efforts, the growth of an explicitly Marxist student movement in solidarity with workers, and the repression of this movement, is a relatively new development.

Joining me now to analyze the situation of students' and workers'

movement in China is Zhun Xu. He teaches economics at Howard University and is author of the book, *From Commune to Capitalism: How China's Peasants Lost Collective Farming and Gained Urban Poverty*, which was recently published by Monthly Review Press. Thanks for joining us today, Zhun Xu.

ZHUN XU: Thank you, Greg.

**GREG WILPERT: So information on the crackdown against this relatively new student movement is fairly difficult to come by, but what can you tell us about them? Who are they, and what are they trying to achieve?**

ZHUN XU: Right. So before we talk about the specific students who got arrested, I think it will be useful for us to see where they are coming from. Because back 20 years ago, or even 10 years ago, it would be unimaginable to see so-called Marxist students to support solidarity movements with the working class. Ever since China took the path of capitalism, it enjoyed years of high economic growth. And many younger students, elite college students, they were naturally sympathetic with the capitalist project, they think that this is the way that we're bringing China forward and giving freedom and prosperity to everyone in the society. But I think, starting from the 2000s, the theme has been changing, that in spite of high economic growth, China also has seen increasing inequality, corruption, as well as severe environmental damage.

That made many students, younger generations, start to rethink about the whole capitalist project that China has been doing over the last several decades. And a radical faction of those students started to read again, I mean really reread Marx, read Lenin, or read Mao, and they became self-educated Marxists in the process. So when we're talking about the students who got arrested, they are all part of, representative of the last generation of the radical students. I think over the last ten years' time, that's where they come from. Now, last year, around the same time, November, there was a group of students who got arrested because they were organizing

study groups for working class in Guangdong Province in one of the colleges. So they were organizing the workers to study capital, to study how capitalism works and how they exploit people.

And they got arrested during the process. And that was really a precursor to the recent arresting students. When that happened, there was a nationwide campaign from the leftists, and also joined by some mainstream right-wing people, that called for the government to release the students who got arrested. And that campaign, overall, was very successful because all the students who were arrested, then were released within two or three months. I think this whole campaign greatly encouraged the students, the younger generation, to think about something beyond just study groups, beyond just education. They were trying to do something more bold, more concrete. And that's part of the reason they started supporting this worker movement, including building an independent union.

But when they actually did that, there's immediate crackdowns from the police station and also the local government. Obviously, students wasn't really afraid of those, so they kept fighting and they got arrested multiple times, actually, many of them. And this one, actually, the peak of the struggle really took place in August, when about 50 to 100 students and activists, they did this daily campaign outside of the Jasic factory every day. So later on, in later August, they all got arrested. Many of them are still in detention. We don't really know much about where they are and how they're doing, but there is a group of students who went back to college, but they still keep doing the campaign and want to talk to many people about this whole thing and want more people to support the workers' movements. And I think this was what really got them arrested in the last few weeks.

**GREG WILPERT: Yeah, I actually just wanted to turn to that question of just how far can students and workers go in terms of organizing movements and organizations that are independent of the Chinese state. I**

**mean, you already mentioned that this has been going on for a while now, but are there other movements, or is this the only one? And when they do take place, is there a crackdown almost every time?**

ZHUN XU: According to the experience from the last several years, my feeling is that as long as you confined yourself to the factory, so if you don't cause a major scene in the society, most likely the government would try to refrain from directly intervening, because they don't want to cause too much trouble. But in this particular case, when the workers got fired and the students decided to help them, they did the support group, they did the demonstration protest outside the factory and even outside the police station. So that was what really, I think, caused some of the more violent repression from the government. But this kind of protest or demonstration where the worker-student coalition, as I mentioned, has been going on for many years. Not all of them were successful, but the more gradualist approach like education groups or legal support, those are pretty widespread. I mean, so far, they were okay. But I wonder, maybe, after this kind of more radical approach has been repressed, it's possible that the government will take them for this kind of thing.

**GREG WILPERT: So President Xi Jinping recently called on the Chinese to study the work of Karl Marx. That is, on the occasion of the 200th anniversary of Marx's birth, for example, on May 5 of this year, Xi Jinping organized a mandatory study session of the Communist Manifesto for the country's senior officials. Could one say that the president, in effect, has brought the student movement upon himself and that he shouldn't be surprised when students begin to take Marx seriously?**

ZHUN XU: I think every president, every leadership of China in the last 30 years, have been saying the same thing. They want people to study Marxism, they want people to read The Communist Manifesto seriously. But I think it was really the change in

the social conditions, all the deepening of social contradictions, that led the students to self-study Marx. Obviously, when President Xi Jinping said that in a high level meeting, maybe that created some room, extra room, for college students or young people to study the classical writing more freely, that's possible. But I think now that we're actually seeing that, as you probably know, the major universities in China are trying to crack down the leading Marxist study groups. So I think it's more like this rhetoric versus reality, this kind of thing.

**GREG WILPERT: Yeah, I want to turn to the more general picture as to what's happening. I mean, you already mentioned that China has, for a long time obviously, said that it's a communist country, that it's inspired by Marx. And as you mentioned, however, inequality is rising, and workers have had a hard time organizing for their demands and there's growing contradictions there. But what is,**

**more generally, how would you characterize this relationship between Marxism and the Chinese government or the Chinese state? I mean, how do they reconcile these kinds of contradictions?**

ZHUN XU: Probably the contradiction can never be reconciled. Everyone living in China or studying in China can feel this tension between what is going on in reality in the society and what actually people learn from the textbooks, because the textbooks are more difficult to change. They have the legacy from the previous decades. So you still find the theory of Marxism explaining that workers would get exploited under capitalism and there are better ways to get rid of the exploitation, and et cetera. But in reality, it's a totally different kind of system. So the tension is always there.

It's a problem not just for, say, the young activists, it's also for the leadership, it's for the rich people. I mean, they also feel the tension. So it's also a struggle whether you want to keep that part of teaching in the

official education system or simply get rid of it. Many people from the leadership who are the leading intellectuals already proposed from a long time ago that we should simply get rid of Marxism in the in the textbooks so that we just have a better life, we don't have to worry about anything. But to remove that part of Marxism from the teaching is it is quite radical, so it might have further social consequences. And so, I think that's part of the reason that the leadership is still very hesitant to reconcile this, to get rid of Marxism entirely. So they still keep the tension going on.

**GREG WILPERT: Okay. Well, we're going to leave it there for now. I was speaking to Professor Zhun Xu, Professor of Economics at Howard University. Thanks again, professor, for having joined us today.**

ZHUN XU: Thank you so much for inviting me.

[The Real News](#)

## Facing the left-wing challenge in the European Union

28 November 2018, by [Éric Toussaint](#)

The left needs to adopt an internationalist, anticapitalist break strategy and push ahead with an eco-socialist federation of the peoples of Europe. A large part of the population aspires to radical change; if the left shows that it has strong proposals and is ready to commit fully to bringing them about, it could win popular support. The left must gear up to taking a profoundly radical course of action that is internationalist, feminist, environmentalist, antiracist, socialist, communist and not tethered by any dogma. It is shocking to see that the right-wing government in power in Italy since Summer 2018 refuses to reduce the budgetary deficit while so-called left-wing governments bow to the constraints of austerity.

It is now, when the peoples of the

Eurozone are ever more disgusted by the policies imposed by European leaders and big capital, that the radical left should start fighting the structures of the European Union and the Eurozone. The time is ripe to expose their legitimacy crisis and use it as a means of tackling the challenges populations are faced with. The left needs to adopt an internationalist, anticapitalist break strategy and push ahead with an eco-socialist federation of the peoples of Europe. A large part of the population aspires to radical change; if the left shows that it has strong proposals and is ready to commit fully to bringing them about, it could win popular support. The left must gear up to taking a profoundly radical course of action that is internationalist, feminist, environmentalist, antiracist, socialist,

communist and not tethered by any dogma. [1]

One of the central and most concrete themes that the break should cover concerns the way public indebtedness is used to justify austerity policies.

The way governments have managed the economic and banking crisis that began in 2007-2008 has led to a massive increase in public debt. As of May 2010 the debt issue became a central concern for Greece and for the rest of the Eurozone. The first programme of €110 billion, imposed by the Troika that was constituted for the purpose of implementing it, resulted in a brutal increase in Greek public debt. This was also the case in Ireland (2010), Portugal (2011), Cyprus (2013) and Spain. This programme had five fundamental

objectives.

The way governments have managed the economic and banking crisis that began in 2007-2008 has led to a massive increase in public debt

1. Bail-out the private banks [2] with public funds so that they may avoid the damaging consequences of their own private credit bubble, and so avert a new major international financial crisis. [3]
2. Give the new public creditors, [4] who replaced the private creditors, enormous coercive powers over the governments and institutions of the peripheral countries in order to impose policies of radical austerity, deregulation (wearing down large numbers of labour and welfare benefits), privatizations and stricter authoritarian controls (see 5 below).
3. Preserve the Eurozone perimeter (in other words, keep Greece and the other peripheral countries within the Eurozone), which is a powerful instrument in the hands of the multinational corporations and the major economies of the Zone.
4. Bring neoliberal policies to bear more heavily on Greece, in particular, but also on the other Eurozone peripheral countries as an example to all the European populations.
5. Reinforce, Europe-wide (as much for the European Union generally as for each member State), authoritarian forms of governance, without resorting to new experiments resembling Fascist or Nazi regimes or that of Franco, Salazar or the Greek colonels (1967-1974). This aspect is insufficiently taken into account because the accent is placed on the economic and social repercussions. The authoritarian tendency within the EU and the Eurozone is a key issue and goal of the European Commission and the big corporations. This touches on executive powers, expeditious voting procedures, limiting or violating many rights, disregarding electors' choices and, among more, increased repression of dissent.

There are lessons to be learned from the failure of the policies adopted by the Alexis Tsipras Government in 2015 to break the bonds of austerity. Also, it is necessary to realize the limits of the socialist minority government of Antonio Costa in Portugal. [5]

Alternative policies in the people's interest must at the same time deal with austerity, public debt, private banks, the Eurozone, oppose authoritarian tendencies and launch the process of creating a new constitution. The experiences in the Eurozone over the 2010-2018 period clearly show that: it is impossible to break with austerity unless responses to, at the least, all the above problems are put forward. Of course, the climate and environment crises must also be addressed. So must the humanitarian crisis caused by Europe's fortified-borders policy - the cause of so many deaths in the Mediterranean of immigration and asylum seekers -, the Middle East crisis, the far-right and the rise of racism. Since the election of Trump, and also since the appearance of the radical movements that gathered around the Bernie Sanders candidacy and are called into the front line of opposition against Trump and his programme, the European radical left, trade unions, feminists and environmentalists must create links with the forces of resistance in the U.S. It is also vital that the European radical left develop close collaboration with the British left and the Corbyn tendency.

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A large part of the radical left who have sitting members of Parliament had and still have a mistaken idea of what EU integration and the Eurozone is. To put it simply, they seem to see more advantages than disadvantages in the EU. They consider that the EU, as much as the Eurozone, is

compatible with a return of social-democratic policies, somewhat less injustice and Keynesian measures to relaunch the economy.

Considering the experiences of 2015, it is fundamental that those who have no illusions about the EU or the Eurozone, and are proposing authentic ecological and socialist perspectives in rupture with the EU, as it exists, be strongly supported. It is clear that neither the EU nor the Eurozone can be reformed. It was demonstrated that it is impossible, on the basis of the legitimacy of universal suffrage or democratic debate, to talk the European Commission, the IMF, the ECB and the conservative governments in power over most of Europe into taking measures that are respectful of the Greek people's, or broadly any other country's, rights. The 5th July referendum, which the institutions rejected tooth and nail by blackmail and coercion (such as forcing the Greek banks to close for five days preceding the referendum), did not bring them to make any concessions. On the contrary, totally ignoring all democratic principles, their demands became considerably more oppressive.

Certainly, there are many measures that could and should be taken at the European level to stimulate the economy, reduce social injustice, make the debt sustainable and invigorate democracy. In February 2015 Yanis Varoufakis, then Greek minister of the economy, presented proposals along these lines suggesting that Greek debt be exchanged for two new kinds of bonds - either growth-indexed obligations or 'perpetual' obligations -, on which the Greeks would only repay the interest, but perpetually. [6] These proposals, although moderate and perfectly feasible, had no chance at all of being accepted by the European authorities.

This is the case with many proposals aiming to ease Greece's and numerous other countries' debt (joint debt recognition, Euro-denominated mutual bonds, etc.) Technically these proposals are all viable but what is wanting is the will, in the present political context and balance of power in the EU. A progressive government cannot hope to be heard, respected

and, even less, assisted by the European commission, the ECB and the European Stability Mechanism.

The ECB can paralyse a Eurozone country's banking system by cutting off its banks' access to liquidities. The arbitrary power of the ECB and the banking union used these means to reinforce the coercive powers of the European institutions over Greece in 2015 to be sure that the attempt at progressive government would fail.

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In view of the upcoming European elections in May 2019, several left-wing forces have put forward proposals similar to those suggested by Varoufakis, even though there is no chance whatsoever of their being implemented. For it only requires a few Eurozone governments to oppose them for such measures to be rendered impracticable, since they would need the approval of the ECB.

The treaties have become extremely restrictive on matters of debt and deficit. The European authorities, in control of policies, could easily decide to derogate regulations in consideration of the state of crisis (they do this for governments that suit them [7]), but they clearly had no intention of doing so. On the contrary, all the negotiating parties fiercely fought the Greek government even though it gave proof of great moderation (to say the least). The mainstream media and numerous European leaders treated Alexis Tsipras and Yanis Varoufakis as rebels, or even radical anti-Europeans. The Troika fought against the Greek government's experiment, between January and July 2015, in order to have the European people believe that there is no alternative to neoliberal capitalism.

The capitulation of the first Tsipras

government was not enough to satisfy the IMF or the European leaders. Pressure continued to be laid on the second Tsipras government to apply ever more neoliberal policies, especially attacking common property and the welfare and retirement systems, and assisting big capital through the introduction of further judicial and legal measures that constitute fundamental structural regression and favour privatization processes.

There follows an incomplete list: a change of legislation so that in case of a firm going bankrupt, creditor banks would take precedence over the firm's employees and pensioners; the complete marginalization of the public authorities in the share ownership of banks; increased powers for the independent tax-collecting body; further regression in the system of retirement pensions; further regression in labour laws and the exercise of the right to strike; further privatizations; adaptation of legislation to permit the forced eviction of indebted households from their homes and the forced auctioning off of goods belonging to indebted individuals via internet; repression of citizens who lend assistance to people under threat of eviction; a mechanism of automatic budget cuts, should the budget surplus objectives set in stone in the 3rd Memorandum not be met. Furthermore, household indebtedness increased.

When Greece officially left the 3rd Memorandum on 20 August 2018, the same budgetary constraints were nevertheless maintained. The Tsipras government made a commitment guaranteeing a primary budget surplus for the next ten years. All these new measures and counter-measures produced greater injustice and precariousness. Greece was not granted any reduction of debt-stock and continues to reimburse the ECB and the IMF on the nail. [8]

**This is the first lesson: The Peoples and the authorities they have entrusted to break with austerity programmes cannot put an end to the Human Rights violations perpetrated by the creditors and the big corporations unless they take strong unilateral**

## **measures of self-defence.**

Some would argue that should a leftist government come to power in Madrid, it could use the weight of the Spanish economy (4th largest GDP of the Eurozone) to negotiate concessions that Tsipras was unable to obtain. What concessions? Relaunch production and employment through heavy public spending and deficits? The ECB and Berlin along with at least five or six other capitals would oppose such policies! Taking strong measures against the banks? The ECB, with the support of the European Commission would reject such policies.

What is also sure is that if the radical left entered into the government of a country like Cyprus, Ireland, Portugal, Slovenia or one of the three Baltic States, they would not have the weight, before an unyielding European Commission or board of the ECB, to convince these institutions to let them renounce austerity, stop privatizations, develop public services and drastically reduce the debt. These countries will have to resist and take unilateral measures in the interest of their populations. Could several progressive governments of Eurozone countries form a common front for renegotiations? It would certainly be very welcome if this could happen, but the possibility is remote, if only for reasons of electoral agenda.

Should a French left-wing candidate win the next presidential election in France in 2022, and his radical left coalition win the general election that follows, could a French left-wing government achieve a reform of the Euro? The Mélenchon camp believes so. It is reasonable to have doubts about that possibility. Suppose Mélenchon had won and formed a government intending to introduce social policies and tried to reform the Euro. What would be feasible? It is quite within the realms of possibility for a French government to disregard the current treaties, but it will not achieve a far-reaching reform of the Eurozone. To do this would take simultaneous progressive electoral victories in the major countries as well as in peripheral countries. This said, it is clear that the government of a defiant France and its allies, taking measures in favour of the French

population **and the peoples of the World** (for instance, by abolishing Greece's and developing countries' debts towards France) could have a positive effect throughout Europe.

**Having said that, the way out of the crisis is not a Nationalist approach. It is as important now as it ever was to adopt an Internationalist strategy and aim for a European integration that binds all the peoples opposed to the present form of integration that is totally dominated by the interests of big capital.**

**There is also a need to keep up new campaigns and coordinated actions at the continental level and beyond on issues of debt, the right to accommodation, the reception of migrants and refugees, public health, public education, the right to work, the struggle to close down nuclear power plants, the radical reduction of use of fossil fuels, combating tax dumping and tax havens, the fight for the socialization of banks and insurance companies, actions against increasingly authoritarian methods of governance, the struggle to defend and extend women's rights and the rights of LGBTI people, promoting common goods, and launching constituent processes.**

The weak links in the inter-European chain of domination are to be found in the peripheral countries, in France and UK. If Syriza had adopted a correct strategy in 2015 it could well have been a turning point. It didn't happen.

The weak links in the inter-European chain of domination are to be found in the peripheral countries, in France and UK

Other weak links where the radical left may gain power in the not so distant future are Portugal and Spain and perhaps Cyprus, Ireland and Slovenia etc. A new progressive advance would be dependent on the capacity of the radical left to learn the

lessons of 2015 and thus make anti-capitalist and democratic proposals that rouse support. Without doubt, the force of popular mobilisation will be a decisive factor. If the pressure for real uncompromising change does not invade the streets, the neighbourhoods and the work places, the future will be very grim.

## **Ten proposals for avoiding a repeat of Greece's capitulation**

To avoid a repeat of the capitulation we saw in Greece in 2015, here are ten proposals for social mobilization and actions to be taken by any government that is truly operating in the interests of the people, to be taken immediately and simultaneously.

**First proposal: A left-wing government must disobey** the European Commission in a very transparent manner, with prior announcements. The party or coalition of parties (the example of Spain comes to mind) which claims to govern should refuse to obey the austerity measures from the outset, and pledge to refuse measures for the sole reason of balancing the budget. They should announce: "We will not yield to the European treaties' diktat of a balanced budget because we want to devote more public expenditure to social development, ending austerity and embark on the ecological transition. This all implies managing greater budget deficits for several years running".

Therefore, the first step is to begin disobeying in a clear and determined way. The Greek capitulation has shown us why we must shed the illusion that the EC and other European governments respect popular will. This illusion can only lead to disaster. We must disobey.

**Second proposal: Call for popular mobilization** both at the national and the European levels. In 2015, such an initiative failed in Greece and

elsewhere in Europe. It is obvious that the European social movements did not achieve great success in mobilizing demonstrations, which did take place, but did not show enough solidarity with the Greek people. However, it is also true that Syriza's strategy did not include appeals for popular mobilization in Europe, or even in Greece. And when the Tsipras government did call for mobilization by means of the referendum of July 5, 2015, the popular will of the 61.5% of Greeks who refused to accept the creditors' demands was not respected.

Remember that starting in late February 2015 and until the end of June 2015, Yanis Varoufakis and Alexis Tsipras made statements aimed at convincing public opinion that an agreement was in sight and that the situation was improving. Imagine that instead, after each important negotiation, they had explained what was at stake through press releases, statements to the media, and declarations in public places - in front of the headquarters of the European institutions in Brussels and elsewhere. Imagine that they had revealed what was really going on. It would have led to gatherings of thousands or tens of thousands of people, and the social networks would have relayed this alternative discourse to hundreds of thousands or millions of others.

**Third proposal: Resolve to launch a debt audit with citizens' participation**

The situations in the EU countries, and of course within the Eurozone, are diverse. In some European countries - as in Greece - it is a matter of utmost necessity and priority to suspend debt repayments, in order to make an absolute priority of meeting social needs and guaranteeing basic human rights. It is also a key element of a self-defence strategy. In Spain, in Portugal, in Cyprus, and in Ireland, it depends on the balance of power and the current economic picture. In other countries, it is possible to carry out the audit first and then decide on the suspension of repayments. The specific situation of each country must be weighed before implementing these measures.

## financial sector and the energy sector

Socializing the financial sector does not merely mean developing a public banking hub. It implies decreeing a public monopoly on the financial sector, i.e. the banks and insurance companies. That is, a socialization of the financial sector under citizen control. In other words, turning the financial sector into a public service. [10]

Socialization consists of placing the finance sector under citizen control and creating a public banking service. Socializing the banking sector means:

- expropriating the major shareholders without compensation (or merely with a symbolic euro); small shareholders will be compensated;
- entrusting to the public sector the monopoly of banking activity, with one exception: there will be a small-scale cooperative banking sector subject to the same basic regulations as the public sector);
- drawing up - with citizen participation - a charter of objectives and missions which place the public service of savings, credit and investment in support of priorities defined through a process of democratic planning;
- ensuring transparency of accounts which must be presented to the public in easily understandable form;
- creating the public service of savings, credit and investment with a double structure: on the one hand, a network of small proximity

establishments, and on the other, specialized organisms in charge of fund management and investment finance of projects not handled by the ministries of public health, national education, energy, public transport, pensions, the socio-ecological transition, etc. The ministries must be endowed with budgets adequate to cover the funding of the investments relating to their responsibilities. As for the specialized organisms, they would intervene in matters falling outside the competence and spheres of action of those ministries to ensure a cohesive whole. [11]

Of course, socializing the energy sector will also remain a priority during the ecological transition. Ecological transition cannot take place without a public monopoly over the energy sector, both in terms of production and distribution.

## Sixth Proposal: Creation of a complementary, non-convertible currency and the unavoidable debate on the Euro

Whether it is a case of exiting the Eurozone or of remaining in it, it is necessary to create a non-convertible complementary currency. In other words, a currency that is used locally, for exchanges within the country - for example, for paying civil servants' pensions and salaries, taxes, public services etc. The use of a

Faced with the threat of reprisals from the ECB, the peoples of the member States of the Eurozone have a powerful weapon of self-defence. Now the ECB holds large quantities of sovereign bonds of the Eurozone countries that it bought up from private banks in the context of Quantitative Easing. On 30 September 2018, it held sovereign Spanish debt bonds to the value of € 256 billion, € 360 billion Italian bonds, € 414 billion of French bonds and € 36 billion Portuguese bonds. [9] In all, in September 2018 the ECB held 2150 billion euros' worth of sovereign debt bonds of Eurozone countries (if we include what is left of the Greek bonds bought up in 2010-2012). What if a leftist government in Spain or France should say to the ECB: "if you try to prevent us from conducting the policies that our people have elected us to carry out, we will suspend repayment of the bonds you hold herewith". The suspension of payments would apply both to interest and to the amount due at maturity. Thus the government would have in its hands a powerful weapon of self-defence and pressure that it should not hesitate to use. Further, if the debt is judged to be odious by the government and the people, having served objectives that were contrary to the interests of the majority, repudiation based on an audit with citizen participation would be a legitimate act.

**Fourth proposal: Establish supervision of capital movements** and understand what that means. It does not mean that people cannot transfer a few hundred Euros abroad. Obviously international financial transactions would be allowed up to a certain amount. On the other hand, it is important to enforce strict control over capital flow beyond a certain limit.

**Fifth proposal: Socialize the**

complementary currency enables partial relief from the dictatorship of the euro and the European Central Bank.

Of course, we cannot avoid the debate on the Eurozone. In several countries, exiting the Eurozone is an option that must be defended by political parties, trade unions and other social movements. Several Eurozone countries will not be able to truly break away from austerity and launch an eco-socialist transition without leaving the Eurozone. A redistributive monetary reform [12], or else the levying of a special progressive tax on incomes above €200,000, should be implemented in the case of an exit. That proposal would apply only to cash assets, and not to personal property (principal residence, etc.).

#### **Seventh proposal: radical tax reform**

Remove VAT on basic consumer goods and services, such as food, electricity and water (up to a certain level of consumption per individual) [13], and other basic necessities. On the other hand, increase VAT on luxury goods and services, etc. We also need to increase the taxes on corporate profits and incomes above a certain level - in other words, a progressive tax on income, wealth, and luxury residences. Owner-occupied homes will not be targeted. The reform of taxation must produce immediate effects: a very significant decrease in indirect and direct taxes for the majority of the population and a very significant increase for the wealthiest 10% and for major corporations. Also, strict new measures will be taken against fraud and tax evasion.

#### **Eighth proposal: deprivatization - "buy back" privatized companies for a symbolic Euro**

Paying no more than a symbolic Euro to those who have benefited from privatizations would be an appropriate gesture and would strengthen and extend public services under citizen control.

#### **Ninth proposal: implement a broad**

#### **emergency plan for creating socially useful jobs and for justice**

Reduce working hours with no reduction in wages. Repeal antisocial laws and adopt laws to remedy the situation of abusive mortgage debt; countries such as Spain, Ireland, Greece, etc. are the most concerned. This could well be fixed legislatively, to avoid court actions (since many households have to face litigation by banks). For example, a Parliament could pass a law to cancel mortgage debts below 150,000 Euros and so put an end to such cases. A vast programme of public expenditures would be implemented in order to stimulate employment and socially useful activity by encouraging local systems.

#### **Tenth proposal: Initiate a genuine constituent process**

This does not imply constitutional changes within the existing parliamentary institutions. It involves dissolving the Parliament and electing a Constituent Assembly by direct vote, and articulating this process with ongoing struggles at different local levels, thereby laying the foundations of something resembling an "eco-socialist" society. To mention just a few such struggles, they might be strikes aiming to improve working-conditions in defiance of the power of the bosses; the occupation and take-overs of factories, introducing models of self-management; a new wave of feminist struggles tackling patriarchy and pushing for equal rights; movements to receive and help migrants; environmental movements based on occupation of territories and direct action ("ZAD", "Ende Gelände", etc.), inventing new forms of community management; "rebellious municipalities" that disobey austerity or anti-migrant directives and create their own networks; grass-roots initiatives of public debt audits and questioning illegitimate debt. These struggles provide starting-points for a constituent process with an anti-capitalist orientation. Such a process could also be integrated in similar processes at the European level.

The measures to be taken must go to the root of the problems, and must be applied simultaneously within a coherent programme

These are ten basic proposals for discussion. But one thing is certain: the measures to be taken must go to the root of the problems, and must be applied simultaneously within a coherent programme. Breaking away from austerity policies cannot be achieved if radical measures against big capital are not taken, from the very start. Believing there is another choice is like hiding behind a smokescreen and can never achieve real progress. The architecture of Europe is such, and the capitalist crisis is so great, that there is no room for neo-Keynesian productivist politics. Eco-socialism must be put at the heart of the debate, not left aside. Immediate and concrete proposals must emerge. We must carry out the anti-austerity struggle and embark on the path of an eco-socialist transition. It is an absolute and immediate necessity.

It is of the utmost importance to provide people with an explanation of what needs and can be done to bring about real change. For in public discussions, the feasibility of breaking with the neoliberal model is constantly questioned, after the fiasco of the Greek experience in 2015.

Proposals must form a coherent programme. The programme needs to come with some sort of user guide. This is obviously the most difficult part, but how else can people be convinced of a programme's feasibility? There need to be several scenarios based on the lessons of the last eight years in the EU in general and in the Eurozone in particular.

It is important to keep in view a rigorous analysis of the events of the first semester 2015. There is one obvious lesson to be learned: faced with a popular government, the negative response of the governing bodies of the EU would be rapid. The European Commission, the Eurogroup and the managers of the ECB would not remain impassive if a popular government decided to take the route

of change. There would be no waiting-period of several months. The popular government itself would have to act rapidly.

In the case of Greece, in the first days that followed the installation of the government, the ECB subjected Greece to a process of financial suffocation. The Tsipras government's refusal to take strong measures of self-defence led to the first capitulation of 20 February 2015. [14] Afterwards, they could still have taken a radical turn but the governing core around Tsipras maintained the same attitude of capitulation that led to the tragic outcome of July 2015.

In fact, since the Greek experience, unless they are ready to settle for measures such as those taken by a government like Costa's in Portugal, any leftist strategy must integrate the fact that the European authorities' sabotage measures will come thick and fast. In the same way, markets will respond negatively and the mainstream media will be hostile towards a popular government.

The Left would be wrong to imagine that the Eurogroup, the ECB, the German government of 2018 and its allies in the Eurozone might allow a popular government in Spain or France or other Eurozone countries to engage in far-reaching change. For those institutions, it would be vital to prevent any possible extension of an authentic left-wing experiment.

It is therefore indispensable that they should show they are capable of drawing up radical proposals in the domains of monetary policy, debt, banks, taxes, the budget (by refusing to secure a primary surplus before debt payment), Capital/Labour relations, social security, international policies and -no less indispensable- in the domain of political democracy, which implies calling an authentic constituent process.

We know that to elaborate a coherent programme and add a convincing user guide is not going to be enough to modify power relations. Mobilization of the people will be the decisive element. But without a coherent programme and a real desire to implement it, there would be a risk

that popular mobilization would fail to win through, remaining fragmented. The existence of a programme and the determination to push it through could begin to shift the lines and take the offensive.

**Let us hope that we will prove capable of confronting our ideas and our proposals in order to come up with a collectively elaborated programme that goes beyond the present state of fragmentation and abstraction that we see in the popular camp. Let us do everything it takes in terms of action and mobilization to get that programme implemented.**

**Translated by Snake Arbusto, Mike Krolikowski, Vicki Briault and Chistine Pagnoulle**

[Cadtm](#)

## Footnotes

[1] This text has been written for the collective publication *Que faire en Europe ?* co-edited by Alexis Cukier, Benjamin Bürbaumer, and Marlène ROSANO-GRANGE published by La Dispute, Paris. Scheduled date of publication: March 2019

[2] In Greece, about 15 major Belgian, Dutch, French, German and Greek banks were involved. For a detailed analysis see <http://www.cadtm.org/Preliminary-Report-of-the-Truth> June 2015 Ch. 1 and 2; Eric Toussaint's presentation of the Preliminary Report of the Truth Committee 17 June 2015, and "Banks are responsible for the crisis in Greece" <http://www.cadtm.org/Banks-are-responsible-for-the> 23 December 2016

[3] The major banks are greatly involved in the US and UK financial markets and banking systems. They had access to large Federal Reserve lines of credit. It's for this reason that the Obama administration took an interest in

the European banking crisis and the Greek and Irish situations in particular.

[4] In the case of Greece, this was the fourteen Eurozone countries, represented by the European Commission, the EFSF - the European Financial Stability Facility (which was replaced by the ESM - European Stability Mechanism) -, the ECB and the IMF.

[5] The outgoing right-wing coalition won the most votes in the 4 October 2015 general election but did not win the ruling majority. Various left-wing groups won the majority of seats in the Assembly of the Republic: the Socialist Party was 2nd with 32.4%; the Bloco de Esquerda (Left Block), was 3rd with 10.3 %, and 19 seats (from 8 in 2011); The Portuguese Communist Party gained one seat to make 15; the Green Party maintained its 2 seats. A governing agreement was concluded in November 2015: the PS governed alone and the BE and the PCP, although they refused to enter the government, would give their support when they thought it suitable.

[6] See: <http://www.latribune.fr/actualites/economie/union-europeenne/20150203trib85abe7370/les-propositions-grecques-pour-restructurer-la-dette.html> (in French).

[7] To cite the least of examples: France under Nicolas Sarkozy and Germany under Angela Merkel were never sanctioned for their continual non-respect of deficit limits; more recently, the European Commission has been equally 'understanding' towards the Mariano Rajoy government in Spain through 2015-2016.

[8] Eric Toussaint, "The Troika's Policy in Greece: Rob the Greek people and give the money to private banks, the ECB, the IMF and the dominant States of the Eurozone", published 28 August

2018,  
<http://www.cadtm.org/The-Troika-s-Policy-in-Greece-Rob-the-Greek-people-and-give-the-money-to>

[9] ECB official website, "Breakdown of debt securities under the PSPP",  
<https://www.ecb.europa.eu/mopo/implementation/omt/html/index.en.html>, accessed 3 November 2018.

[10] For an explanation regarding socialization of banks, see *What is to be Done with the Banks? Version 2.0*:  
<http://www.cadtm.org/What-is-to-b>

[e-Done-with-the-Banks,13315](http://www.cadtm.org/What-is-to-b)

[11] Patrick Saurin and Eric Toussaint, How to Socialize the Banking Sector  
<http://www.cadtm.org/How-to-Socialize-the-Banking-Sector>

[12] By applying a progressive exchange rate when moving from the Euro to the new currency, the amount of cash in the hands of the wealthiest 1% would be reduced and wealth redistributed to households.

[13] This could be combined with

measures to provide water, electricity, gas, etc. free of charge to individuals up to a certain level of consumption.

[14] Eric Toussaint, "Varoufakis-Tsipras move towards the disastrous agreement with the Eurogroup of 20 February 2015", published on 11 February 2018,  
<http://www.cadtm.org/Varoufakis-Tsipras-move-towards>; Eric Toussaint, "The first capitulation of Tsipras and Varoufakis at the end of February 2015" published on 14 March 2018,  
<http://www.cadtm.org/The-first-capitulation-of-Tsipras>

## What is at stake in the "yellow jacket" mobilization

27 November 2018, by [Léon Crémieux](#)

On 17 November 2018, at least 2,500 blockades of road junctions and motorway toll booths were reported in all regions, involving, according to the police, at least 300,000 *gilets jaunes* ("yellow jackets" - protesters wearing a hi-vis safety jacket, mandatory in vehicles). The following week, many blockades continued in secondary cities and in rural areas. Last Saturday, 24 November many actions took place: more than 100,000 participants, including at least 8,000 in Paris on the Champs Elysees, with 1600 blockades identified in the regions. [1]

This movement was not initiated by any party or trade union. It has been built entirely from social networks, around rejection of a further increase in the carbon tax on fuels through the TICPE (TICPE, domestic consumption tax on energy products) scheduled for 1 January 2019: +6.5 cents on a litre of diesel and 2.9 cents on a litre of SP95. By 2018, the tax on diesel had already increased by 7.6 cents. On 1 litre of diesel fuel costing  $\hat{a}$ , -1.45, the state currently receives about 60% in tax, or 85.4 cents. The government plans in 2020 and 2021 to increase this further, by 6.5 cents each year. This is the largest diesel tax

percentage in Europe after the United Kingdom and Italy. But in France, unlike most other European countries, diesel is very much in the majority and accounts for 80% of fuel consumption. The price of diesel has risen by 23% over the past year.

An online petition against these tax increases, quoted in an article in the country's leading daily newspaper *Le Parisien*, gathered hundreds of thousands of signatures in mid-October and more than a million by early November. From there, hundreds of Facebook groups sprang up all over the country, videos against the tax were viewed millions of times on the internet (including one made by a local representative of the far-right group "Debout la France"). A lorry driver called for a blockade of the Parisian ring road on November 17. From then the date of November 17 became the date chosen by all groups for thousands of local initiatives to block roads and roundabouts, listed on a site set up for the occasion by two yellow jacket Internet users. The major daily news media (particularly BFM TV) took up the story, amplifying the phenomenon.

Starting from the mere signing of a

petition, the movement spread like wildfire.

### What kind of movement?

This movement has confronted the government, but also the trade union and political leaderships! The contrast was striking between its extension in the popular classes, the broad sympathy, especially in workplaces, the massive support of the population (70% support on the eve of November 14) and the caricature that was made in many left circles, decrying, pell-mell, the hand of the road transport employers and that of the extreme right. However, all the employers' unions in road transport condemned the blockades, asking the government to clear them; as far as the extreme right is concerned, it is true that Nicolas Dupont Aignan, leader of the movement "Debout la France" has been enthusiastic since mid-October, displaying his yellow jacket on the media. Similarly, the Marine Le Pen's Rassemblement national has shown its support, while disavowing roadblocks. Most organizers of the *gilets jaunes* have clearly wanted to mark their

distance with this inconvenient support. Discreetly, "les Républicains" and the Socialist Party have expressed their sympathy with the movement. On the other hand, while leaders of France insoumise, such as Jean-Louis Mélenchon or François Ruffin have expressed support for the movement in several televised interventions, as has Olivier Besancenot of the NPA, all major trade unions, not only the CFDT and FO but also the CGT and Solidaires have refused to support the demonstrations, insisting on the manipulations of the far-right and the road transport bosses.

The reality is that the yellow jackets reflect a profound movement among the popular classes. Every day 17 million people work outside of their municipality of residence, i.e. 2/3 of those economically active. Of these 2/3, 80% use their own vehicle. The concern for the cost of fuel is therefore a popular concern, in the greater Paris region and in the regions in particular (even in the Paris region, only one in two employees uses public transport to go to work). The question of the supplementary tax therefore concerns the vast majority of employees!

Employees, especially families, are forced to live farther away from urban centres, and precariousness accentuates the distance from the workplace. In the Paris region, the 50% of employees who take a car to go to work are most often those who are forced to live on the periphery or work in staggered hours.

The cost of car transport, and in particular diesel has exploded in a context where the official level of inflation has been used as a pretext for not increasing wages. The yellow jackets polarize a popular exasperation, with an obvious class character regarding purchasing power, wages and pensions.

But this exasperation also catalyses the diffuse anger caused by the discredit of the government, the accumulation of attacks on purchasing power and pensions, in the face of the many gifts made to the rich, to the capitalists. The discredit also of the political parties which having all managed the country in turn are

responsible for this social situation. Macron had benefited from this discredit in order to get elected and now it has a boomerang effect.

Through government tax reforms - removing the ISF wealth tax, a flat tax on capital incomes - the wealthiest 1% will see their incomes rise by 6% in 2019, the richest 0.4% will see their purchasing power increase by 28,300, the richest 0.1% by 86,290. Meanwhile, the least wealthy 20% will see their incomes fall, with the absence of increased social benefits, the reform of housing allowances, the decline in pensions, while prices are increasing.

## Unpopularity and governmental crisis

Macron is viewed by a very large part of the population as the president of the rich, the very wealthy. The increase in fuel taxes, hitting employees on the lowest wages, after such gifts to the richest classes, was experienced as the straw that broke the camel's back.

Moreover, through its class politics and its discredit, the Macron government has entered an accelerated crisis since the summer. The Benalla affair was the scandal of the summer. Alexandre Benalla, a personal security officer of Macron, was convicted of assaulting demonstrators on May 1 last year, revealing presidential practices using state services according to personal need, recalling in a different way the Fillon scandal on the eve of the presidential election. This Benalla scandal was followed by the resignation of Nicolas Hulot, Macron's environmental front man, after many denials of environmental commitments. In the aftermath, Collomb, Minister of the Interior and an early supporter of the president, also resigned in early autumn. These successive internal crises testify to the accelerated erosion of this government and the weakness of its political and social base.

All polls give Macron a level of

popularity lower than that of Francois Holland after an identical period in office.

## The demands of the yellow jackets

All the messages of the *gilets jaunes* on the social networks or on the blockades demand withdrawal of the fuel taxes, but beyond that there is anger at the cost of living, the demand for the reinstatement of the wealth tax ..... and often purely and simply the resignation of Macron.

To justify its fuel tax and gain popular support, the government notes the need to fight global warming and at the same time fight against emissions of greenhouse gases and fine particulates. The government spokesperson, Benjamin Grivaux, tried to win support from the environmentalist left by denouncing "those who smoke cigarettes and drive with diesel." But even in the environmentalist electorate, the increase in taxes did not meet a favourable echo and the contemptuous haughtiness of the government has not impressed.

The fundamental reason for this is that all the policies of the government as of its predecessors ignore the ecological imperatives of the hour: after favouring all-car and diesel, nothing is done to develop public transport, in rural areas and in the periphery of large cities, while the working classes must travel ever greater distances from their workplaces and urban centres. There is an unbearable government arrogance in charging more to people who will not be able to change their mode of travel or vehicle! With the attacks on the SNCF, the government intends to remove more than 11,000 kms of railways and rail freight has been largely sacrificed for the benefit of the road. At the same time, Total is exempt from any tax contribution and has a free hand to continue mining exploration. In addition, the debates on the 2019 finance law have revealed that more than 500 million euros from the fuel tax will serve, not ecological transition, but to replenish the deficit of the 2019 budget, to compensate for

the abolition of the wealth tax.

For weeks, the government and the media have tried to discredit, with condescending contempt, the movement, as that of “France of the periphery”, of the “forgotten territories”, to make it a “jacquerie” of uneducated people, unaware of climate change.

## And the organized workers’ movement?

The workers’ movement and its organizations did not initiate this “yellow jackets” movement. This reflects its loss of influence in many regions and working groups. It is also, as the leaders of ATTAC and Copernicus say in a column in *le Monde*, the result of the cumulative failures of social movements in recent years. [2] The readiness to set up blockades, to carry out direct actions is also the rejection of traditional forms of demonstrations, but is a continuation of the actions of blockades carried out in recent years by the combative social sectors.

Moreover, the policy practiced by the trade union leaderships, the weakness of the relays of such a popular movement is problematic. This policy has taken as a pretext the manoeuvres of the extreme right or the “apolitical” nature of the yellow jackets. But as the leaders of ATTAC and Copernicus say in the above-mentioned column “we will not fight this defiance, nor the instrumentalization by the extreme right, nor the risk of anti-taxism, by practicing the politics of the Empty Chair or blaming the demonstrators. It is on the contrary about giving ourselves the means to weigh within it and to win the cultural and political battle inside this movement against the extreme right and the employers’ forces who want to subjugate it.”

Many union structures and activists, have not hesitated to lend their support and to call to participate in the actions of the *gilets jaunes*: in the summer this was the case in particular with CGT métallurgie, Sud industrie, FO Transports, with several unitary departmental appeals that advanced an industrial platform for wage increases, against indirect taxation that hits the popular classes and for a progressive income tax. Often, these calls clearly rejected fuel taxes, while emphasizing the need for a genuine environmental policy hitting Total, developing public transport and rail freight in the face of road transport.

In the activist networks, even in the press, all reports testify to the popular reality of this movement, composed essentially of employees and retirees alongside the self-employed or small entrepreneurs, all those who, with low incomes, are suffering the government’s attacks in full force. The NPA activists who participated in the blockades or even distributed leaflets also testify to a good welcome and above all agreement with requirements for the reinstatement of the ISF and the end of tax gifts for the richest.

## What’s at stake in the movement

There are therefore major political stakes in this movement, whatever the consequences. What is key is to make it democratically structured and convergent with the organizations of the workers’ movement who want to conduct a common struggle, through a general confrontation with the regime. The government hopes to see in the yellow vests only a disturbing parenthesis before a return to “normal” political and social life. After November 17th, all the media dwelled heavily on the clashes, those wounded on the blockades and the death of a *gilet jaune*, crushed by a motorist. They also highlighted racist and

homophobic acts that were unacceptable but very marginal, committed on roadblocks, trying to discredit the whole movement. Even if it is more prudent than with the demonstrations of the social movement, the government has severely suppressed the blockades of recent days, and in particular the demonstration on the Champs Elysees last Saturday. Little accustomed to street demonstrations and even less to clashes, many *gilets jaunes* have been shocked by such violence, but it does not hinder their determination and willingness to set up new blockades. The government hopes that the images of the clashes and the approach of the end of year festivities will lead to the extinction of this movement. If the workers’ movement thought the same thing, it would be a big mistake. Although marginal, the far right is waiting to ambush this movement and hopes that no anti-capitalist perspective will arise to give it perspectives. The “Forconi” episode in 2013 in Italy [3], with which the yellow jackets have points of comparison, must alert particularly anti-capitalists who want the popular anger and social exasperation not only to be turned against this government of the rich but also to pave the way for an anti-capitalist offensive, a bearer of emancipation.

## Footnotes

[1] On the same day demonstrations against violence against women were also taking place around the country. Police estimated the Paris march at 12 000, the organisers at 30 000.

[2] Copernic Foundation “[Les gilets jaunes sont aussi le produit d’une succession d’échecs du mouvement social](#)”.

[3] See “[A new wave of mobilizations?](#)”.

# Vox: the new face of the far right in the Spanish State

26 November 2018, by Brais Fernández

On September 7, the far-right party Vox filled Spain's Vistalegre arena with ten thousand nostalgists for Franco's regime, neofascists, Catholic extremists, and reactionaries of all kinds. [1] In organizing such a spectacle, Vox had good reason to choose this particular venue - that is, the same arena in which Podemos has held its own congresses. The far-right party staged its rally here in order to display its own strength.

Vox wanted to vaunt itself as the natural antagonist of the new left that has arisen from the 15M anti-austerity movement. And it succeeded. Since this event, the name Vox has appeared across the media, its leaders are in all the papers, and the party has begun to be taken seriously by opinion pollsters (rising from zero percent to around 5 percent in months).

The event at Vistalegre marks a turning point in Spanish politics: the rise of a new far right, in a country once considered an exception to the global fascist menace.

## Origins

Vox was created in 2013 under the leadership of Alejo Vidal Quadras, a former leader of the **Partido Popular** (PP) — the traditional party of the Spanish right. Quadras set Vox the explicit objective of “rallying the right-wing voters disillusioned by the PP's policies.” However, this operation did not take off as well as expected, and this right-wing vote critical of the PP was instead picked up by alternative forces with a less sharp ideological profile, such as Ciudadanos or the Unión Progreso y Democracia (though this latter has now almost disappeared).

This failure brought the first crisis in Vox; having advocated closer relations with these other center-right forces, its founder-president Quadras soon left the party, which was now

reorganized on new bases. In September 2014 Santiago Abascal became party president (a role he still holds) and began to shift the party from more traditionally conservative positions to a new reactionary far right: a shift aligned to other global phenomena, and yet one which also has some unmistakably Spanish characteristics.

Vox's ideas link up with the reactionary wave spreading worldwide. It expresses a powerful hatred against the traditions of the Left; its anticommunism (“against the Reds”) translates into attacks against the fantastical menace of “cultural Marxism.” Its militants claim that this latter has colonized the minds of citizens, thus threatening the values underpinning Spain's cohesion.

One of the main targets of Vox's rage is the feminist and LGBTQ movements, which it accuses of organizing brainwashing in the lecture theaters and in media supposedly hegemonized by identity politics. Asserting its own “politically incorrect” bona fides and claiming itself the victim of “progressive censorship,” Vox paints itself in the colors of the white Spanish producer who dutifully gets up to work every morning, and who — whether boss or worker — sees himself threatened by hordes of migrants coming to steal his job.

*With the political left exhausted and lacking in ideas that go beyond managing the system, Vox will try to position itself as a reactionary alternative to the existing political system.*

However, Vox maintains the fundamental traits of Spanish conservatism. The Spanish fascist tradition has never allowed itself too many “revolutionary” hues. The

founder of the **Falange Española**, Jose Antonio Primo de Rivera, and General Franco always sought to adopt a more “reactionary” than “revolutionary” discourse.

These figures have much to do with the fact that since its origins, Spanish fascism's main task has been to organize the counterrevolution against the Left, in a country whose social formation means that the petty bourgeoisie and the middle classes have always been deeply tied to the ruling class's and the aristocracy's political structure. Apart from certain minorities of little wider import, Spanish fascism has always been royalist, looking to the king for a traditional source of legitimacy than other European fascisms sought elsewhere.

Another ideological matrix that establishes a family relationship between Vox and this national-reactionary tradition is its defence of an inheritance of *hispanidad* (“Spanishness”). Though few still remember it, Spain certainly was once a global empire, which conquered America and half of Europe in blood and fire. Though this legacy is hard to lay claim to, even in terms of development (the imperial monarchy was but a parasitical excrescence, based on military blunder, religious colonialism and the underdevelopment of the productive forces), it operates as a Spanish version of Donald Trump's “Make America Great Again,” albeit with a much lesser material basis in present-day realities.

This is a neo-imperialism lacking in imperial scope, which thus ends up directing these frustrated desires toward a sharpened Spanish nationalism within the domestic context: Galicians, Basques, and, today, Catalan independentists are — together with the “Reds” — the enemies par excellence which the Spanish right's project is built around. Vox itself could take advantage of a

certain disaffection with regard to the traditional right, which was accused of being overly “soft” on an internal enemy seen as having been on the offensive across the recent turbulent spell in Spanish politics.

## Possible Advance

What we do know for sure is that it is still too early to say how the Vox phenomenon is going to play out. The pollsters still give it relatively low scores (the ones giving it the highest percentages rate it at 5 percent of the vote). Yet its sudden breakthrough has already had immediate effects, allowing us to guess at some of the ways that it may develop in future.

Vox has grown up on the margins of official politics. Its leaders have had to get by attention-seeking in a political market already saturated with conflicts and an over-supply of alternatives. But they have skillfully operated in the world of civil society, building organizations and think tanks with which to relate to various sections of the Right.

The godfather of this world is the former prime minister Jose María Aznar, a close admirer of George W. Bush, **whom he accompanied** in the doom-laden adventure in Iraq. Aznar and the whole neoconservative sector he represents have spent years living apart from the political front line, embittered as they are by the PP leadership under prime minister Mariano Rajoy (before he was deposed from this office a few months ago by a motion of censure driven by the Left and the pro-independence parties, **thus returning** the Spanish Socialist Workers Party [PSOE], the historic social-democratic party, to power). And yet even then, this neoconservative sector continued to work on the underground, in an ideological recomposition of the political right.

This place “on the edges” has allowed Vox to appear with an anti-establishment discourse, even though its leaders are people who come . . . from the establishment. For example, Aznar (who remains a member of the

Partido Popular) has himself called Vox chief Santiago Abascal “a guy full of talent.”

But Vox has not stopped at building up legitimacy among influential circles on the Right. It has also begun to deploy an activist accumulation strategy, trying to penetrate working-class districts by whipping up fear of immigration and opposition to the Left’s policies. For example, in Usera — long one of the most working-class districts of Madrid — Vox has used very aggressive tactics, packing out the meetings at the [left-wing] city hall and especially virulently attacking the district councilor **Rommy Arce**, who is the first migrant woman to become a councilor in the Spanish capital.

The active mobilization of resentment against what Vox considers intolerable (a Marxist, feminist, migrant woman of working-class background holding office) will remind many of the old tactics of the European far right, which mobilized middle-class layers in poor districts to put back in their place any socialists who achieved a position of power. This markedly reactionary orientation does limit Vox’s own electoral potential, but also provides its very basis. According to pollsters its voters are high-income, white men; it has not yet managed to penetrate working-class, migrant, or female electorates.

Vox has also had other more immediate effects on Spanish politics. If in other European countries, liberal democracies’ very DNA was founded on the fight against fascism, Spanish democracy was not constituted by any similar birth process. Rather, this democracy was the fruit of a pact between the heirs of the dictator Franco and the forces of the Left. For this reason, the Right has never condemned Francoism, but rather continued on from it. This means that Vox has many points in common with the traditional parties of the Right.

In fact, the young Partido Popular leader Pablo Casado — himself an Aznar protégé — has already made several nods to Vox in interviews, not least by refusing to term it a far-right

party; he has had no similar problem chucking all manner of epithets at Podemos. Moreover, Vox’s breakthrough has caused a right-wing radicalization of both the Partido Popular and Ciudadanos, who have entered into a spiraling competition to advance authoritarian measures against migrants, feminism, workers’ organizations, and Catalan independentists.

Up until recently, Spain had been one of the few European countries the new far right had not yet reached. But Vox’s breakthrough marks the end of the so-called Spanish exception. Discontent with the system had expressed itself through the 15M austerity movement, Podemos, and progressive local politics. But this new left opted for a strategy of moderation, as it sought a governmental pact with social democracy — a choice reminiscent of the French Communist Party’s failed 1980s experiment in **François Mitterrand’s Socialist-led government**.

With the political left exhausted and lacking in ideas that go beyond managing the system (notwithstanding the existence of a powerful feminist movement and a dynamic movement for the right to housing, as well as incipient workers’ struggles) the far right as represented by Vox will try to position itself as a reactionary alternative to the existing political system.

Not all is lost: the forces do also exist to prevent the growth of the global fascist monster, and to avoid a disaster like the ones our brothers and sisters have suffered in Brazil and the United States. But we cannot deny that this monster has indeed arrived in Spain.

*Original source **Jacobin** “Spain’s New Old Monster”.*

## Footnotes

[1] *El País* 8 October 2018 “La extrema derecha de Vox llena Vistalegre con más de 9.000 simpatizantes”.

# Pakistan, hostage of the religious - The radical left in resistance

25 November 2018, by [Pierre Rousset](#)

The radical left in Pakistan was celebrating from 9 to 11 November the 50th anniversary of the uprisings of 1968-1969, a crisis deeper than that we experienced in France [1]. I was invited to present "our May 68". A group of mullahs, returning from a visit to Mecca, was on the plane that was taking us to Lahore. They were kind to me, but not to their sisters. I had to change places twice because they did not want to sit next to a woman. The Pakistani lady seated beside me, head uncovered, was getting tense. The stewardess was getting exasperated. Atmosphere.

The Supreme Court declared Asia Bibi innocent on October 31 - the day of my arrival. A new radical religious party, the Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan (TLP) [2], had called pre-emptively to block the roads to express their joy if Asia Bibi's death sentence was confirmed, or to go on the counter-offensive if not. Other fundamentalist movements joined the mobilization. My friend Farooq picked me up by car (he had to wake up very early to be sure to be on time). All the ways out of the airport zone were closed. We turned around a long time to find a breach, then looked for side roads that would allow us to reach his home.

Asia Bibi is a Christian, agricultural worker, poor, mother of five children. She has been in prison for almost 10 years, sentenced to death, accused of using water from a well "reserved" for Muslims [3]. The Supreme Court recognized that the charge was inconsistent and that there were indications of local revenge against her. The blasphemy law was originally a legacy of British colonization, but it was hardened in 1986 by General Zia-ul-Haq. Since then, this law has been used many times in sectarian religious conflicts, to settle personal accounts or to take possession of coveted property. Most of the victims are Muslims, but minorities (3% of the population) are under constant threat of religious cleansing. Entire villages

can be attacked for alleged blasphemy.

Originally, Pakistan was not an *Islamist* state. But most likely the rot had set in. The partition of the British Indian Empire in 1947 was based on a religious division (Hindus and Muslims), causing huge population displacements and numerous massacres. Provinces were cut in two: Punjab in the west, Bengal in the east (the border with East Pakistan which became in 1971 an independent country, Bangladesh). In his first speech to the Pakistan National Assembly [4], Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the "founding father", acknowledged that his previous partition policy was being criticized.

The new state was an Islamic Republic; but he wanted it to be open to all religions, all castes, all classes without discrimination. The laws in force were inherited from English law or customary traditions. The Islamization of the country was done against this heritage of Jinnah. It was fully enforced only under the dictatorship of General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq who took power in 1977. It was in no way a response to an external threat (Washington supported Pakistan against India and Moscow). It served to consolidate illegitimate power.

The price of this forced Islamization was heavy. Henceforth, any person accused of blasphemy or who protests against this law finds him or herself in danger of death. In 2011, the governor of the province of Punjab, a member of the government party, Salman Taseer, was assassinated by his bodyguard because he had defended Asia Bibi. The judges of the Supreme Court, the lawyers who defended Asia, as well as her relatives are all now being threatened.

In this situation of great tension, holding meetings against all odds is perceived as an act of resistance. I

first met with students and they feared to be only 3 or 4 present, but close to 30 came. Then I spent a day with members and sympathizers of the Fourth International. It should have been a national meeting. The participation was reduced, even the trade unionists of the suburbs of Lahore could not come: the gates of the city were blocked. Nonetheless, the meeting took place.

At the weekend, the organization The Struggle, which recently tied regular links with the Fourth International, held its Congress. Some 2000 participants were expected; more than 1600 came. Given the situation, it was a real success, even if the participation of women was reduced (it is very dangerous for women to move around when mullahs block roads). Their Congress took place under a large banner celebrating their 68-69 Years. So, in these circumstances, the presence of a Frenchman who personally experienced this decade was doubly appreciated: a past of common struggles, the affirmation of solidarity in times of crisis.

Moving around was a constant puzzle, but the noose was now loosening. Under street pressure, the government compromised with the TLP allowing it to appeal against the Supreme Court ruling. Imran Khan, the new Prime Minister had been elected with the support of the military and was cajoling the fundamentalists. This is the problem of Pakistan. Successive governments have regularly yielded to the demands of fundamentalists. How to go back?

I was able to reach the airport safely for my return flight - but the fate of Asia Bibi is still on hold. Is she still in prison, in a safe secret place? We do not know. International pressure is strong and Imran Khan must take it into account. Hopefully.

## Footnotes

[1] See on ESSF (word 14059), 1968-69 (Pakistan): <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spi...>

[2] "Pakistani Movement I am here".

[3] See ESSF (word 7080), Aasia Bibi: <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spi...>

[rg/spi...](http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spi...)

[4] ESSF (Article 46833), First Presidential Address to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan: <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spi...>

# The electoral triumph of Uribism and the dilemmas of neoliberal peace

24 November 2018, by [Daniel Libreros C](#)

## Electoral unity of the elites

This candidacy was supported in the first round by a right-wing coalition comprising sectors of the Conservative Party and representatives of Protestant churches. Duque obtained 7,567,785 votes in the first round, with 2,803,387 votes more in the second. But between the two rounds, he significantly increased his range of support.

All the parties and political machinery linked to the establishment, including the regional powers associated with criminal enterprises that continue to guarantee territorial control, called for a vote for him. Added to this was the support of the National Business Council, made up of the most representative commercial and financial corporations of the country's cities and countryside. [3].

Then, during the negotiations in Havana, he recognized the formalization of settler properties in the areas where the FARC had their social base, and the creation of a land fund of 3 million hectares to be distributed to the landless peasants and to ethnic communities in various parts of the country [4]. In addition to legitimizing the agreements, the Santos government's vision was to foster the consolidation of entrepreneurial control of territories, by opening up business opportunities for large companies associated with transnational production chains. [5]. The formal recognition of the

ownership of the small agricultural producer has become an indispensable condition for integrating it into a rural market where farm production represents a small part of the value chain in a globalized agriculture.

But these contradictions between the elites have given way to an electoral front of "those who are at the top", faced with the possibility that a person outside the establishment might take the presidency of the Republic.

## Uribism triumphs electorally once again

Throughout his presidential campaign Iván Duque did nothing but repeat the recipe that enabled Uribism to win the plebiscite that was to ratify the outcome of the political negotiations in Havana. On this occasion, he also used the crisis in Venezuela, which affects the country with its border migrations, while migrants are made to compete with each other for low wages in the cities. The crisis in Venezuela also served Duque's campaign to frighten the middle classes, on the pretext that it was the result of a policy of expropriation by the state, of which he presented himself as the fiercest opponent. In his campaign discourse, he added the commitment to comply with the reforms demanded by big capital for the entire region, through international financial institutions and rating agencies, such as a retrogressive reform of the pension

system, reductions in corporate taxation and greater work flexibility, which synthesise a new phase of deepening neoliberalism.

The 10,373,080 votes obtained by Duque in the second round signified his triumph in 24 of the 32 departments. He also won in 18 cities - we should highlight the case of Medellín - but lost in Bogotá and in major cities such as Cali, Barranquilla and Cartagena. He also lost in the geographical area of greatest social conflict in recent years, the Pacific Rim in the southwest of the country. It was in the department of Antioquia, where Duque got a total of 2,537,361 votes, that his score was the highest, confirming that this region continues to be the bastion of Uribism. A traditionally conservative and religious department by its customs, in which Uribism managed to impose as a result of the war a parastatal social order in some areas (the case of Urabá).

The votes for Duque were also important in the departments of the eastern zone, bordering Venezuela. Another highlight was the vote in the coffee producing areas, where a large number of voters are from the urban and rural middle classes associated with coffee production and export, whose cultural traditions are also conservative. In the first round, on May 27, Sergio Fajardo [6] had been leading in this region. Fajardo was a Green Alliance candidate in coalition with a sector of the alternative democratic pole led by the MOIR [7]. The Green Alliance, which acts formally as a political party but is an

amalgam of groups with diffuse political boundaries, tailor-made for themselves by the middle classes, presented its campaign in the name of the "political centre" and obtained 4.500,000 votes. In the case of the coffee zones, Fajardo's votes went to Duque, despite the fact that members of the Alliance leadership supported Gustavo Petro [8]. The same thing did not happen in Bogotá, where this agreement led to an increase of nearly 700,000 votes.

The Uribist triumph formalizes a backward electoral system, without electronic voting, without state funding and structured around an Electoral Council with administrative functions, controlled by traditional politicians. This system allows the unpunished operation of clientelist networks and the uncontrolled flow of licit and illicit funds to support parties and their occasional candidates. This money comes from various sources. In the first place, from the big business lobby, interested in obtaining concessions from the state, which eventually internationalized corruption - the Odebrecht case is paradigmatic in this respect [9]. Secondly, they come from the corruption associated with the exercise of politics. Official statistics themselves acknowledge that in this way about \$10 billion disappear from the Treasury every year. Thirdly, from the unregulated circulation of money from drug trafficking [10]

It should be added that the way the drug traffic functions in the Twenty-first century is different from previous periods. To continue expanding the circuit of its business in the midst of the facilities afforded by financial globalization, it eventually evolved towards conventional political power, and acts as a fraction of capital: "Drug trafficking no longer only signifies illegality and no longer operates outside of all the frameworks established by the law, but in the framework of a mafia model it has captured the political and economic system and has strengthened itself through the structures of conventional enterprises." [11]

This access to political power in the Colombian case was facilitated by the civil war, which led to the alliance

between groups of traffickers and military forces in the implementation of the counter-insurgency policy. [13]. Since taking office in 2002, Álvaro Uribe has achieved the political centralization of these powers, which were crystallized during the conflict. At the same time, Uribe has been a fervent advocate of big capital and an architect of the implementation of neoliberal reforms. During his tenure, he satisfied the demands of the enlarged agreement signed by Colombia with the IMF in 1999, increased tax exemptions for large entrepreneurs and organized subsidies for the production and sale prices of the sectors of agribusiness who have turned to agrofuels (sugar cane and oil palm), while promoting a labour reform that reduces the rights of workers. For all these reasons, Uribe is at the same time attracting the support of the "emerging political class" and that of entrepreneurial groups and the parties that express their interests. This political hybrid has been expressed in elections since his first arrival as President.

## The oppositional campaign of Gustavo Petro

Gustavo Petro led a campaign based on the denunciation of the traditional forms of politics, corruption, clientelism, paramilitarism, which he has denounced since he was a member of parliament. This type of campaign has earned him the support of a multiclass spectrum of democratic opinion, including almost the entire social movement, the trade unions, peasant and ethnic organizations, the majority of the left and even the middle and upper classes, especially the young layers. The recovery of the public square was a key aspect of this campaign. Its growth in the polls and the audience achieved would not have been possible before the peace negotiations with the FARC. Because peace has neutralized the stigma perpetrated for decades by the establishment's spokespersons against the political opposition. This can be said, despite the fact that the FARC themselves paid the price of unfavourable public opinion, which

reduced them to 50,000 votes in the legislative elections (which precipitated the abandonment of their candidacy for the presidency).

The programme presented by Petro respected the rules of the game of neoliberalism. Before the first round of presidential elections, to the question of a journalist from the daily *El Tiempo*, "Why is your candidacy raising fears among the country's leading businessmen?" he replied: "Last week, I had a useful meeting with the National Council of Entrepreneurs, as well as other meetings with investment funds, international rating agencies and the International Monetary Fund. A climate of confidence has been established around the stability of monetary policy and the autonomy of the Bank of the Republic, as well as the management of taxation. As well as a better understanding of the urgent need to prepare the country for oil depletion with more agro-industry, metallurgy, smart services and tourism. The productive economy that we propose will be 20 per cent state-owned and 80 per cent private enterprise" [14]

The broadening of his alliances to members of the Green Party leadership forced him to further reduce the programmatic content of his candidacy. He has committed himself to respect without any objection private property, budgetary regulations (regular payment of the debt) and the existing institutions in force [15].

The goal of his programme was based on the development of capitalism, which in his opinion the latifundists and the rentier and mafia elites are blocking: "We propose to evolve towards a model that turns Colombia into an agrarian and environmental power and makes possible the integral development of industry", he explained [16]. To differentiate himself from the supposed support of the Venezuelan government, of which his opponents accused him during the campaign, he insisted on the need to reduce extractivism: We propose the opposite of what is being done today both in Venezuela and in Colombia (...). The latifundios and the extraction of the resources that geological

hazard has left us generate only rents, not productive profits, because the minerals, the coal and the oil, and the earth as well, are not a productive process, they are simply there." To replace the extractive economy, he proposed an energy transition under the parameters of "green capitalism". This proposal had antecedents. When he was mayor of Bogotá, he unsuccessfully tried to change the city's transportation system with the support of the employers-government group represented in this sector by the Clinton Foundation. [19]. He proposed the use of solar panels in homes. But the different priorities that he proposed did not consider the eventual elimination of dams - which cause considerable damage to the environment as well as the displacement of populations throughout the country. He ended up accepting that they should be reduced to small-scale investments. Nor did he succeed in formulating a guarantee of changes in the energy used in industry, or comment on the relationship between the production and the consumption of energy.

The other economic objective he insisted on, presenting it as an alternative to extractivism, was agribusiness [20]. "Productivity in the countryside leads us to agribusiness, that is to say to the increase of the added value of agricultural products. Every Colombian municipality can become agro-industrial if the fields are productive ..." [21] In order to be able to develop it, he proposed a prior distributive exercise because of the concentration of land and its waste through extensive farming. [22]. At this point, he insisted that such a distribution would not be made through expropriations but by the increase of the tax burden. To the peasants, he promised to get them away from poverty and proletarianization through the mechanisms of associative and cooperative movements, which in the context of increasing productivity, would make farmers of them: "Developing a productive and democratic area that transforms the peasant into a farmer and a citizen is one of the most urgent tasks that we will undertake ..." [23]. Furthermore, this objective did not apply only to the countryside, it was a general

approach. "What we want is to turn towards the millions of Colombian entrepreneurs, and above all towards women and young people. And not, as the false discourse of the political class claims, to wait for big Colombian or foreign entrepreneurs who will never arrive ..." [24]

The commitment to the development of capitalism obviously requires capital investment, which is reminiscent of the obsolete debates of the bourgeoisie in the region during the period of import substitution. "Integral industrialization is the development of the three sectors of industry, namely unsustainable and sustainable consumer goods, intermediate goods, chemical and other products, and capital. Without this last element, everything else fails ..." [25]

On the question of how to obtain the financial resources to mobilize these economic transformations, Petro proposed to eliminate tax exemptions [26] of big business and strengthen contributions to Colpensiones, the public pension system [27], contrary to the proposals of the leaders of the pension funds and the neoliberal technocracy.

To summarize, the programme of the "Petro Presidente" campaign was a liberal developmentalist programme, including periodic reforms in the framework of neoliberalism, a programme that ignored the new international division of labour, in which industrial investment in Latin America has been relegated to a secondary level; ignoring also the functioning of financial globalization that has allowed transnational financial groups to control wealth - a control exercised through the capital market where money from the mafia circulates with impunity. Obviously, this programme is unfeasible under the present conditions of capital accumulation.

However, by attacking unproductive latifundia, including those resulting from dispossession, and by opposing the circulation of extractive and financial rents, he stood up to those who fomented the civil war, and encouraged democratic aspirations. That is why the organized social

movement came to his assistance. It is a divided social movement, defeated by state terror and by neoliberal policies, without its own means of propagating its ideas, which found in this campaign an opportunity to change the present state of affairs, whereas paradoxically the candidate insisted on the respect of the rules of the social system in force in order not to intimidate the middle classes, which constitute a juicy electoral objective.

Since the ideological stakes are also part of the relationship of social forces, neoliberalism ended up by imposing its hegemony. Interpretations of the functioning of society and politics, subjects such as the right to work, distributive politics, sovereignty, the rights of peoples seem to have been relegated to the past. They are not part of the public debate. This is one of the signs of this era.

The electoral movement that formed around Petro ended up being a pluriclassist and amorphous movement [28] around a sort of caudillo who expressed social discontent, combined with the weariness of large sections of the population in the face of traditional forms of political domination and the widespread corruption that infects the three arms of the state (the executive, the legislature and the judiciary). This electoral movement included feminist, youth and animal welfare organizations, presented by Petro as "new forms of citizenship". He also expressed interest in getting rid of the aftermath of war and of polarizations that he did not understand. Such political expressions, despite their limitations, are not despicable in a country that has opened up a political transition after decades of civil war. This confirms that there are opportunities to form political and social coalitions with a view to channelling this broader democratic view towards alternative proposals that would confront the dominant regime.

The questioning by the "Petro Presidente" campaign of unproductive latifundia and those who live on extractive and financial rents also produced a closing of the ranks of the dominant elites after the first round of

the presidential elections. Contradictions concerning land ownership and use in a globalized world gave way to the preservation of major interests - to the preservation of their economic order and political dominance. As far as the economic order is concerned, it should be noted that the accumulation of capital includes the laundering of mafia money by the invisible networks of the financial system. At the same time, macroeconomic stability depends on extractive investments, which make it possible to obtain budget revenues and account for the bulk of exports, putting the trade balance in equilibrium and meeting the demands of globalized capital. To try something else would be from the point of view of these elites a leap in the dark. With regard to political dominance, all the elites agree on the need to pursue state terror. If the application of this type of regime allowed them to win the civil war and also to create a situation where the popular resistance has its back against the wall, why abandon it? A government that does not belong to this elitist tradition, whatever its discursive talent, is in their eyes a useless risk, especially if it generates expectations in the population.

## **A peace at the service of the big entrepreneurs**

After the defeat of the plebiscite which was to approve the agreements signed in Havana, a new negotiation took place and ended with the "Colón Theatre accords". In this second version, the political bloc led by Uribeism obtained considerable changes.

Thus, in recognition of the leading role played by most Catholic bishops and Protestant church leaders in the campaign, the family - "fundamental core of society" [31]. In addition, it should be recalled that, as soon as the agreement was drafted, technical assistance included GMOs [34] by latifundists and rural entrepreneurs. Without a "legal guarantee" there is no chance of attracting large agricultural investors. The standards

for the restitution of land to the victims, negotiated in 2011, proved to be a resounding failure. The agreement provided for the creation of an agrarian jurisdiction that never saw the light of day.

The other changes made at the Colón Theatre include the inclusion of local authorities in the implementation of the rural cadastre and the limitation of the formation of the Peasant Reserve Zones, on which the FARC had focused [35].

At the level of political participation, 10 parliamentarians were granted to the FARC (5 in the Senate and 5 in the House), as well as the legal status of a political party and access to funding by the state. The possibility was opened up of granting 16 districts, called peace constituencies, in the 16 areas most affected by the war - so that social organizations could have access to parliamentary representation.

With regard to the Special Peace Justice (JEP), recognized as a form of transitional justice for crimes committed in the conflict by both guerrillas and state officials, both sides had already accepted the break-up of the chain of command for guerrillas as well as for the armed forces and the symmetrical judgment of responsibilities [37].

The record of the Congress as regards the adoption of the regulations that were requested of it and the implementation of the Colón Theatre agreements is deplorable. It contrasts with the implementation of the agreement by the FARC, which concentrated the guerrillas in the defined areas and delivered their weapons on June 27 last year in the municipality of Mesetas, department of Meta. The negligence of the members of the majority in Congress, controlled by the government, was obvious.

In accordance with the agreements, bills were submitted to the Congress for approval, beginning with the ordinary session of March 2017. Here are the results:

1. With regard to changes in the party system and political representation, the bill containing the "peace

constituencies" was classified. At the same time, the government set up a special electoral mission composed of academics and professionals with experience in the field to submit proposals to the legislature. At ordinary sessions in the second half of 2017, these proposals were rejected by the Congress.

2. Regarding the rural question, the project of reclaiming dispossessed land was not even presented; the one that formalizes the general cadastre was just communicated, as well as the adjudication of newly cultivated zones in the forest reserve areas.

3. In penal matters, the project of differential treatment of small producers of coca was also not presented; the submission to justice of criminal gangs was not approved in plenary; as for the draft law regulating the procedure of the JEP, although it was approved up until last week, considering the results of the presidential elections, Uribeism managed to include in it a special court for the judgment of the military, to guarantee them greater impunity.

4. As regards the economic commitments, the modification of in the national rent system was not presented and the one that modified the law of the plan was approved [38].

Meanwhile, the Santos government concentrated its efforts on completing the institutional conception of what can be called "entrepreneurial peace", a peace that expands the commodification of territories and the subsoil for the benefit of big capital. Since the publication of the development plan at the beginning of the second mandate, the Strategic National Interest Projects (NIPs) were institutional mechanisms designed to promote large-scale mining. [53]. Duque will generalize the blind use of these fumigations.

With regard to economic questions, Duque has already agreed with the employers, in conformity with the requirements of rating agencies and international financial institutions, to submit to the Congress regressive reforms of pensions, taxation and the labour code to increase flexibility.

In the case of the Special Peace Justice (JEP) - and before Duque took office as President - the Parliament,

which had accompanied President Santos until the elections, made procedural changes, suspending the trials of soldiers involved in war crimes until the establishment of a special section of the JEP, with new magistrates for the preparation of cases, investigation and trial. This suspension may be requested for a maximum of 18 months - the period necessary for the commissioning of this special section. The paradox is that already more than 2,000 military and police officers have appeared before the JEP and nearly 1,500 of them have been released.

Once state terrorism has been preserved, the conflict between the ruling elites has taken the form of an escalation: who will now guarantee the most impunity to the regular forces of the state.

This insistence on further weakening transitional justice is only one element of Uribe's overall strategy to reduce the functions of the judiciary. During the campaign, Duque announced the creation of a "Super Court" to concentrate the functions exercised by the High Courts, in order to eliminate them. This strategy aims at obtaining presidential control over the judiciary and at the same time seeks to formalize the impunity of those adhering to Uribism, including Álvaro Uribe himself.

Duque has already laid down the main lines of his mandate. But this return of Uribism to the government cannot count on the favourable conditions that earned it the triumph of 2002. Now that the internal war has been deactivated, the international accusations against Uribe are increasing [54]; there are a lot of legal proceedings against his relatives, against members of the Democratic Centre and against Uribe himself. For this reason, Duque has maintained a constant confrontation with the courts and the journalists' union.

## Political space for the opposition

The electoral results, by the very fact of their contradictory manifestations, confirm that there is a political space

to advance democratic proposals and that the political negotiation has opened a different space for the political opposition. There is the possibility of forming a great democratic convergence between the various political and social organizations that would develop a platform of peace with social justice, make demands beyond what is left of the Havana agreements and of course oppose the latest changes introduced by Uribism. Respect for the lives of social leaders and former demobilized guerrillas can be a unifying slogan, as it aims to dismantle paramilitaries, denounce state terrorism, recognize victims and denounce judicial impunity.

The entrepreneurial peace enforced by the Santos government, which his successor will undoubtedly pursue, strengthens resistance in the territories. It takes the form of struggles against extractivism. Defenders of the territory and ethnic communities acted against the exploitation of hydrocarbons, against mines and dams and denounced the displacement of communities and the destruction of nature.

In the cities, this resistance has taken the form of the rejection of town planning projects and confrontation with the big construction companies, who are the urban agents of extractivism.

The unification and the coordination of these forms of resistance in a national platform are a necessity ... But these daily struggles must be articulated with the proposal for an energy transition based on democratic decisions of the society, with respect for common goods, and far from the commodification of nature proposed by green capitalism. The Ecosocialist Movement has repeatedly expressed its willingness to participate in the construction of a movement with such characteristics.

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## Footnotes

[1] "The Consejo Gremial Nacional (National Business Council) has 21 guilds covering all economic activities, which together account for 60 per cent of national production and generate 73 per cent of formal employment in the economy. These unions represent 166,903 micro-, small, medium and large enterprises operating in different sectors of the economy ..." From the public statement of support of this Council, Bogotá, June 7, 2018  
[9http://www.centrodemocratico.com/?p=1713](http://www.centrodemocratico.com/?p=1713)

[2] A cadastre (also spelled cadaster) is a comprehensive land recording. In most countries, legal systems have developed around the original administrative systems and use the cadastre to define the dimensions and location of land parcels described in legal documentation. The cadastre is a fundamental source of data in disputes and lawsuits between landowners.

[3] Law 1448 of 2011 "by which are encouraged measures of attention, assistance and comprehensive compensation to victims of internal armed conflict and other provisions". This law promised reparations with the recovery of 6 million hectares; to date only about 250,000 hectares have been redistributed. The precariousness of a judiciary trapped by the weight of conventional political authorities explains this Pyrrhic victory.

[4] The lands of this Fund, according to the final text of the Agreement, were to be derived from the confiscation of land acquired through money laundering and "other illicit activities", from newly cultivated land, the delimitation of forest reserve areas, unexploited land, acquisitions for reasons of public utility and donations. So far, there is no regulation.

[5] The peace agreements mention several times the territorial entrepreneurial ordinance in the regions where the FARC were present and the Agricultural Border which will be open to major investments, including foreign ones through state concessions. Such is the case of the Altillanura, a region of the eastern plains covering 7 million hectares. This ordinance should facilitate the option of clusters of employers associated with globalized capital.

[6] Sergio Fajardo was mayor of Medellín, governor of Antioquia and one of the visible political figures of the Grupo Empresarial Antioqueño corporation (Antioquia Employers' Group), which controls about 14 per cent of the national GDP and includes enterprises that invest abroad as well as in the financial sector. This group of enterprises supported Fajardo in the first round and Iván Duque in the second round. <http://lasillavacia.com/silla-paisa...>

[7] The MOIR (Independent and Revolutionary Workers Movement) has a very popular senator, Jorge Enrique Robledo. It is an organization of Maoist origin, present in the trade-union movement and in the unions of the middle peasantry. The MOIR denounces free trade agreements in the name of a supposedly national bourgeoisie, which leads it to form alliances with regional businessmen, generally reactionary. Its support for Fajardo indicates a turning point towards alliances with big capital.

[8] The members of the Green Alliance leadership who supported Petro in the second round, were Antanas Mockus (former Mayor of Bogotá who won popularity using symbols referring to "anti-politics") and Claudia Lopez (a member of parliament well-known for her denunciations of paramilitarism).

[9] The Odebrecht affair (concerning a Brazilian construction company) was

revealed on 21st December 2016 by an investigation by the United States Department of Justice. Marcelo Odebrecht, CEO, was sentenced in Brazil to 19 years in prison and a fine of more than \$30 million, because his company had paid over the previous twenty years bribes to officials from 12 countries (Angola, Argentina, Colombia, Ecuador, the United States, Guatemala, Mexico, Mozambique, Panama, Peru, the Dominican Republic and Venezuela) for public procurement. In Brazil, former President Luis Ignacio Lula da Silva was also sentenced (he appealed) and other leaders of Latin American countries, such as Jorge Glas (Ecuador), Pedro Pablo Kuczynski (Peru), Ricardo Martinelli (Panama) and Juan Manuel Santos (Colombia) are threatened with prosecution or have already been sentenced.

[10] Including with official political support: during budget reforms, which are frequent, "fiscal amnesties" for capital transferred abroad are recurrent, testifying to legislation tailored to money launderers. In 1992, such an amnesty was subordinated to the purchase of public debt ...

[11] Cf. Carlos Medina Gallego, *Mafia, narcotráfico y bandes criminales en Colombia*, published in 2018 by the Universidad Nacional de Colombia, p. 27.

[12] "State judicial instruments to protect property rights have failed, because security has become a function delegated to co-ordination between the law enforcement and private forces, and these forces, as allies, enjoy immunity to appropriate the land of the displaced and, in many cases, to compel them by force to legalize the transfer of ownership. This process has exceeded the possibilities of ordinary civil justice to protect rights lost due to violence and has exceeded the reduced administrative capacity of organizations responsible for the cadastre, registration, clarification, issuance and

distribution of rural property". (Alejandro Reyes Posada, *Guerreros y Campesinos*, Ariel Editorial, Bogotá 2016, pp. 159 and 160).

[13] "The Supreme Court of Justice and the Office of the Attorney-General of the Nation conducted the trials of 184 members or former of Congress and 8 governors between 2007 and 2013. Twelve former Presidents of Congress have been brought to justice. In February 2013, 41 people were found guilty and 5 were declared innocent. The Attorney-General's Office opened 519 disciplinary proceedings against local officials and leaders, mainly members of councils, assemblies and town halls". (Camilo González Poso, "El Complejo paramilitar se transforma", *Indepaz*, March 4th, 2017, <http://www.indepaz.org.co/wp-content...>

[14] *El Tiempo*, May 22nd, 2018 <http://www.eltiempo.com/eleccion-s-...>

[15] The first commitment was not to convene a National Constituent Assembly, which implied that Gustavo Petro, if elected, would fully implement the Constitution that currently governs the legal and institutional order. The second was to "respect private property in the terms of the Constitution, especially Article 58". The third was to apply the rule of fiscal sustainability in his public policies, that is to say that the President pledged "not to jeopardize the economic stability of the country". The signed agreement says: "The 'fiscal rule' will be respected in order to gradually reduce the public expenditure deficit. The increase in tax revenues will be sought by stimulating the growth of the economy." See, "Los siete puntos del acuerdo con Petro", *El Espectador*, 5th June 2018 <https://www.elespectador.com/electi...>

[16] Cf. Gustavo Petro's campaign

web page:

<https://www.petropresidente2018.com...>

[17] "Bogotá Mayor Gustavo Petro Urrego and former US President Bill Clinton met in Cartagena to discuss important issues for the city. They talked about the climate change affecting the planet and the importance, among other things, of setting up public electric transport in the city. The Clinton Foundation, a non-governmental organization dedicated to promoting environmental protection policies through partnerships between businesses, governments, non-governmental organizations and individuals, is collaborating with the administration of Gustavo Petro on various issues related to the implementation of electric taxis, a hybrid and electric bus programme, and the creation of a Cities Fund for risk mitigation and adaptation to climate change." ("Petro y Bill Clinton se reunieron en Cartagena para tratar temas de ciudad", *El Espectador*, May 16th, 2013 : <https://www.elespectador.com/notici...>

[18] Ibid. note 15.

[19] "Since technology has already been developed to transform roofs into solar panels, all you have to do is change the regulations so that each family generates its own electrical energy at no cost, transforming your home into a productive unit and improving the means of production and transport, the city, the countryside and the water wells". Quoted by *El Espectador*, April 5th, 2018 <https://www.elespectador.com/electi...> )

[20] This is contradictory to the environmental discourse, since chemical fertilizers are used in the agri-food industry. However, in relation to the peasant economy or ethnic communities, he recognized the importance of preserving organic seeds.

[21] Ibid. note 15.

[22] The Gini coefficient (a number varying from 0 to 1, where 0 signifies perfect equality and 1 signifies perfect inequality) is in Colombia one of the highest of the region, One per cent of landowners concentrate in their hands nearly 60 per cent of cultivable land and extensive stock breeding occupies 32 million hectares, against only 8 million hectares for all agricultural crops

[23] Ibid. note 15.

[24] Ibid. note 15.

[25] Ibid. note 15.

[26] Which represent a considerable annual amount. For example, the National Directorate of Taxation and Customs (DIAN) issued a resolution allowing large extractive companies to add the payment of royalties to the payment of income tax, which resulted in tax evasion of approximately \$14 billion.

[27] The pension system is mixed in Colombia; it combines a contribution to the Pension Fund and one to the public entity (Colpensiones) which maintains the system of "reciprocal solidarity". Petro proposed that this entity receive the so-called fourth pillar contributions, i.e. those of the informal sector.

[28] In fact, Colombia Humana is an electoral movement with no party structure, which takes part in presidential elections by collecting signatures. In the legislative elections, it formed a coalition called the List of Decency, obtaining 4 seats in the Senate and 2 in the House.

[29] "The Final Agreement recognizes without discrimination the primacy of the inalienable rights of the person as the basis of coexistence in the public and private spheres and of the family as the fundamental nucleus of

society and of the rights of its members."

<Http://www.altocomisionadoparalapaz...> Documentos%20compartidos/24-11-2016NuevoAcuerdoFinal.pdf)

[30] This territorial approach is often inspired by the Territorial Agenda of the European Union: "The new European Territorial Agenda 2020 (adopted in 2011) is the main guiding instrument for the national territorial management policies of the Member States; it is characterized by an approach based on the characteristics of each place, as an endogenous development potential, from which to promote territorial cohesion at three levels : local, regional and national; and at the same time confront the geographically diverse impacts of global change". <http://www.fao.org/in-action/territ...>

[31] "Integral development of the countryside: the integral development of the countryside depends on an adequate balance between the various existing forms of production - family farming, agro-industry, tourism, agriculture on a commercial scale. - ;competitiveness and the need to promote and encourage investment in the countryside with an entrepreneurial vision and productive objectives as a condition for their development; and the fair promotion and development of small-scale rural chains of production with other models production, which may be vertical or horizontal and on a different scale. In any case, the peasant, family and community economy will be supported and protected, with a view to its development and reinforcement." <Http://www.altocomisionadoparalapaz...>

[32] The text of the agreement mentions "the promotion and protection of native seeds and seed banks, without restriction or the imposition of other types of seeds, such as improved seeds, hybrids and others."

[33] This fact has been recognized by the Director of UPRA, the Office of the National Planning Department, which is responsible for determining soil quality in the different regions of the country: "The director of this entity, attached to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Felipe Fonseca, told *Dinero* that currently, the country has about 3,691,000 million identified rural properties. However, the country's great challenge remains the informality of the countryside, since 54.3 per cent of the country's rural estates are exploited without title, the equivalent of nearly 49 million hectares". (*Revista Dinero*), July 30th, 2017 :[www.dinero.com/pais/articulo/inform...](http://www.dinero.com/pais/articulo/inform...) ).

[34] And also of national history: "The occupation and use of Colombian territory was a conflictual and violent process, in which the efforts of the elites played a determining role in subjecting labour to the service of the latifundist regime, provoking the reaction of the peasants who fled to colonize spaces where they could free themselves from the monopoly of the land and carry out independent projects of economic accumulation". (Alejandro Reyes Posada, *Guerreros y Campesinos*, op. cit., Footnote 11, p 396).

[35] These are peasant associative units in which the extensions of the family holding are limited. They were created by the current agrarian law (Law 160 of 1994) in the perspective of a continuous increase of the agricultural frontier: for the FARC, this associative form played an important role in relations with the peasant movement.

[36] In the case of the military by the "renunciation of the judicial action of the state

[37] "The High Court has decided that, contrary to what was agreed between the national government and the FARC, the third-party

civilians who are answerable for these crimes cannot be summoned to jurisdiction and will only appear voluntarily. This means that the new system, in practice, will massively judge disappeared ex-combatants of the FARC guerrillas and members of the police force who have committed war crimes and crimes against humanity ..." <https://verdadabierta.com/tribunal...> of November 16th, 2017). The following day, the Congress - which had delayed the publication of the statutory law of the JEP pending the decision of this Court - approved it with these considerations. This decision also left the ordinary courts the choice of guardianship issued by the JEP. In addition, it determined that its term will be 20 years.

[38] This is intended to link national planning with Territorial Development Plans (TDPs), which will be implemented in former conflict zones with the aim of concentrating investments there. To this end, the government created the Territorial Renewal Agency, which aims to coordinate all entities, plans and programmes in the territory. This agency must act in 170 selected municipalities using four indicators: poverty, violence, institutional fragility and illegal economies.

[39] "The Commercial Mines Directorate is responsible for managing the mining progress necessary for the implementation of National and Strategic Projects of Interest (PINE), in order to achieve the objectives of the National Development Plan. It is important to indicate that the national government must select the NIP projects with a significant impact on the economic and social growth of Colombia, linked to the strategic minerals for the country, which constitutes a viable project and an opportunity for social development ..." (Ministry of Mines and Energy : <https://www.minminas.gov.co/proy ect...> ).

[40] In various fertile regions of the country: Altillanura , Guajira ,

Urabá Chocoano and Mojana - Sucre. Last May the Constitutional Court approved this law. The text of the law ends with the old normative criterion, according to which new land should be mainly intended for poor settlers and peasants. In addition to the criticism of the parliamentary opposition, OXFAM criticized the law arguing that it " legalized the irregular accumulation of properties by national and foreign companies, resulting in negative effects in terms of concentration and expropriation of land ..." See : <https://www.semana.com/nacion/artic...>

[41] It is especially in the eastern region of the plains called Altillanura that the Santodomingo group (of Colombian origin), now associated with SABMiller , has, since 2011, implemented a major investment plan.: " The plan is to produce cereals, mainly soybeans and corn, first for the domestic market and, in the long run, for the global market. Santodomingo is the symbol of a style of new investor, which is at present positioning itself in the Colombian highlands. It has a contract with the Impar firm for the transfer of Brazilian technology from Embrapa , the Brazilian agricultural research agency. This agency is recognized worldwide for being the axis of the miraculous expansion of productivity achieved by this country during the last two decades. The model includes a patient transfer of technology from Brazilian experts to local residents, who must learn a range of soil management practices". So far, the Santodomingo group is not the only investor: "The big pioneer is the Aliar Business Group , which includes the industrialist Jaime Liévano and the enterprise Contegral , which has invested 100 million US dollars and now has 13,000 hectares of corn and soybeans. One of the biggest known projects is that in La Fazenda. The Aliar model is based on the configuration of a food chain for the poultry sector in Santander." Incursions by large

investors included those of the Sarmiento Group and the Eder Group (which owns sugar refineries), which have also made large investments, in the second case in Valle del Cauca . Cf. "Los nuevos Llaneros", *Revista Dinero*, 21st February, 2011 <https://www.dinero.com/caratula/di...>

[42] In drafting these agreements, the government was authorized to act by decree, which was justified by the urgency of the implementation of the peace process. They were called "fast track", by analogy with the authorizations granted by North American legislation to the President in the commercial field.

[43] "The Financing of Environmental Services [PSA] is an agreement with the owners and occupiers of strategic areas that generate environmental services, enabling them to develop activities preservation and restoration on their properties (...). It is paramount in the peace and post-conflict strategy, which is why PSA is included in the thematic portfolio of the Colombia Peace Fund as an integral alternative for the economic and social development of populations affected by the armed conflict. For decades, factors such as the presence of illicit crops, the expansion of the agricultural frontier and the armed conflict have affected our lands and territories. Now that Colombia is moving towards peace, we are creating these instruments so that our nature will also benefit, with this new country that we have already begun to build." Statements by the Minister of the Environment, Luis Gilberto Murillo, July 7, 2017, reported by: <http://www.minambiente.gov.co/index...>

[44] Decree 1915 of 2017. The mechanism of payment for taxes by working, dealt with by Article 238 of Law 1819 of 2016, is a way to extinguish the tax obligations of income tax and complementary taxes, by the direct investment of

the taxpayer in implementing social transcendence projects in the areas most affected by the armed conflict (ZOMAC). Cf. <http://es.presidencia.gov.co/norma...>

[45] Cf. *Ã reas de referencia para identificar Zidres*: Document jointly prepared by the Ministry of Agriculture and the UPRA- Unidad de Planeaci3n Rural Agropecuaria.

[46] As an example: "My attention was drawn to the fact that Purdue and Andean Universities announced a presentation on the progress of contract research for the DNP, which they were developing in partnership with other universities, Corpoica and others. institutions, and I attended the meeting in the hope of discovering encouraging news. One such piece of news was that the research was not focused solely on the highland area, but extended to the entire region, which includes seven departments: Arauca, Casanare, Meta, Vichada, Guaviare, Guainia and Vaupes. They have also developed pilot projects for the production of various products, some of which can be developed in small and medium-sized farms, which opens up the possibility that the development of the region is not exclusively for large commercial farms. It is possible to establish production units of different sizes, including family farms, various forms of organization and production that would create a diversified local supply of agricultural products (citrus fruit, pineapple, other fruits, food for the local population, rice, pigs, fish farming, cocoa, rubber, African palm, walnuts and, of course, corn and soybeans over large expanses) ... " ( Rudolf Hommes, "Orinoquia", *El Tiempo* , July 1st, 2018 <http://www.eltiempo.com/opinion/col...>

[47] "Motivos de un Respaldo", editorial of *El Tiempo*, June 9th, 2018 : <http://www.eltiempo.com/opinion/e...>

[48] "282 social leaders have been killed in the past two years," statement by mediator Carlos Negrette in the daily *El PaÃ s de Cali* <http://www.eltiempo.com/opinion/e...>

[49] *RCN Radio*, June 5th, 2018 <https://www.rcnradio.com/colombia/9...> ).

[50] "The number of combatants of the FARC is now alarming ", *El Pacifista* (<http://pacifista.co/el-numero-de-ex-combatientes-de-las-farc-asesinados-ya-es-alarmante/> ).

[51] Quoted on December 18th, 2017 by: <https://www.kienyke.com/radar/soci...>

[52] As a political realist, Gustavo Petro commented on the subject starting from the calendar of the agreements: if the alleged crime had been committed after their signature, he said he would extradite Santrich. Humberto de la Calle, Liberal Party candidate and lead negotiator on behalf of the government in the Havana dialogues, first demanded more serious proof.

[53] "Colombia autoriza uso drones para fumigar cultivars de hoja coca con glifosato": <https://www.asuntoslegales.com.co/a...>

[54] Decommissioned State Department documents from the 1990-2000 decade highlight the relations between Ã lvaro Uribe and the drug cartels: "Luis Guillermo Velez Trujillo, then Senator for the Liberal Party, a political party of which Uribe was a member, (...) told the US government that Uribe had received "funding" for his Senate election campaigns from the Ochoa Vsquez family, a member of the Medelln cartel headed by the drug chief Pablo Escobar. Senator Velez Trujillo also told the Americans that it was Uribe who made contact with Pablo Escobar's

mother, when the trafficker was trying to negotiate a channel of communication with the then

president, Cesar Gaviria (1990-1994)." ( "Documentos desclasificados vinculan a Álvaro Uribe con el narcotráfico",

*Vanguardia.com*, May 25, 2018: [http://www.vanguardia.com/colombia/...](http://www.vanguardia.com/colombia/) ).

## Is There a Gig Economy?

23 November 2018, by [Kim Moody](#)

For a brief period following World War Two until the mid-1970s, the system in the developed capitalist economies appeared to grant some security to sections of the working class, above all in manufacturing. This illusion was shattered with the increase in economic turbulence that characterized the neoliberal era, beginning in the early 1980s, as millions of manufacturing jobs were obliterated even as output continued to grow.

Along with deeper crises, lean production methods and new forms of work measurement and surveillance brought not only work intensification through "constant improvement" that destroyed jobs, but also outsourcing of work to lower-paying firms often "out on the Interstate" or abroad. Labor force participation rates fell, and insecurity became the norm for millions displaced by such changes.

In the midst of these often disorienting structural shifts, some commentators and academics have seen what they believe is the rise of new types of employment inherently more unstable and irregular than those of the past half century or more. The rise of digital platforms such as Uber and TaskRabbit seemed to point to a new workforce that some academics labelled the "precariat," presumably a new class of workers lacking permanent employment and traditional social networks according to some academics. [1]

Older forms of irregular work such as independent contractors, the self-employed, multiple-job holders, and temporary agency workers also figure in most accounts of the broader "gig economy." While a "gig" has been jazz musicians' word for a job for a long time, just who coined the term "gig economy" remains a mystery.

Nevertheless, institutions from the National Bureau of Economic Research to the JPMorgan Chase Institute published studies of increasing irregular employment, while major newspapers reported and debated the alleged trend. [2]

The Freelancers Union/Upwork claimed that some 54 million Americans worked freelance, a claim that brought a response from the union-backed Economic Policy Institute. [3] National Public Radio's "Fresh Air" program declared "Goodbye Jobs, Hello Gigs" and called "gig" the word of the year for 2016, despite its actual vintage. [4]

As recent statistics show, however, this cluster of irregular jobs has not replaced "traditional" employment relations. It's at best a relatively small aspect of the declining conditions of the working class in the United States, and has not actually grown as a proportion of private sector employment even under the conditions of the post-2008 crisis. What has developed since the early 1980s is not so much a "gig economy" as a capitalist economy with its violent ups and downs and its continuous dislocations, in which working class employment and income are never secure.

### Precarious Employment: How Big?

In June 2018, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) finally released its long-awaited contingent worker survey (CWS) of precarious, irregular, or "non-traditional" employment. This is the first such survey of "contingent and alternative employment

arrangements," as the BLS calls the various forms of irregular work, since 2005. [5]

Running counter to the many impressionistic projections of growing precarious work, the new BLS survey shows a slight decline in the proportion of these forms of irregular employment, from 10.7% of the workforce in 2005 to 10.1% in 2017. The total number of such jobs in the BLS survey grew from 14,826,000 in 2005 to 15,482,000 in 2017, a relatively small gain of 656,000 jobs or by 4.6% over 12 years.

The total number of employed workers, moreover, grew faster by 14,379,000 or by 10.4%. Thus, according to the BLS figures, almost 90% of those employed hold "traditional" forms of employment "whether or not they are actually secure. The New York Times reported the BLS results under the headline, "How the Gig Economy Is Reshaping Work: Not So Much." Left Business Observer editor Doug Henwood, writing for Jacobin online similarly headlined his analysis "No, It's Not a Gig Economy." An Economic Policy Institute comment on the new BLS report agrees that "we are not becoming a nation of freelancers." [6]

Table I presents a modified version of the BLS surveys of 1995, 2005 and 2017. The one difference with the BLS figures is that I have substituted the Current Employment Statistics' (CES) larger results for temporary help service employment for the BLS Current Population Survey (CPS) data on which the CWS is based.

I believe this much larger figure to be more accurate because it is based on answers from about 145,000 businesses with records of whom they employ, while about half the 60,000 or

so of the answers to the BLS-CPS survey come from “proxies,” household members other than the job holder.

In addition, I have put a broader measure of “part-time for economic reasons” separately and have not used the BLS figures on “contingent” jobs, which is simply a measure of whether the respondent to the survey expects to keep his or her job a year or more. This may tell us something about the individual’s feelings of insecurity concerning employment, but doesn’t actually tell us how long the respondent has been in this job or describe the nature of the job itself.



I have substituted the BLS’s Current Employment Statistics (CES) figures for temporary help services, which is significantly larger than the BLS/Current Population Survey (CPS) figure and more likely to be accurate as it is based on employer answers rather than a combination of proxy and direct answers.

Unfortunately, there are no CES equivalents for the other alternative work categories in the BLS/CPS report. In the case of “independent contractors,” however, the BLS figure for “unincorporated self-employed,” most of whom are by the BLS definition independent contractors, is quite similar over time so that the BLS figure for independent contractors is probably more or less accurate.

In addition, as the Economic Policy Institute notes, the BLS estimate of independent contractors is similar to estimates that exclude self-employed individuals who employ others. [7] (The number of “on-call” workers and those from “contract firms” are relatively small so that an undercount would not drastically affect the outcome.)

The adjusted version of the BLS figures reproduced for all three BLS surveys in Table I show an increase in irregular jobs of 3.8 million since 1995 – a significant gain, but hardly a paradigm-altering increase in an employed workforce of over 150 million. They do not, however, show

any great increase in precarious work as a proportion of the employed workforce. Other BLS figures provide more evidence that there is little growth in irregular work, and that the “gig economy” remains a relatively small subset of the total workforce.

Significantly, the BLS/CPS figures in Table II for “Millennials,” who are sometimes said to be the main victims of precarity, don’t show any increase and, at 7.2%, in fact are lower than the average of the overall proportion of workers in all alternative work arrangements.

Of course, job tenure, which this BLS survey does not include, is far shorter than average for those in the 20-34 years “Millennial” cohort, meaning that the experience of precarity is real enough. [8]



*Here I have used the BLS’s original CPS figure as the CES figure does not include age.*

Source: BLS (2005) Contingent and Alternative Employment Arrangements, February 2005, USDL 05-1433, July 27, 2005, Tables 1 & 5; BLS (2018) Contingent and Alternative Employment Arrangements Summary, USDL 18-0942, June 7, 2018, Tables 1 & 5; BLS (2018) Current Employment Statistics – CES (National) Establishment Data, Table B-1b, Employment and earnings on nonfarm payrolls by industry sector, available [here](#).

The lack of any significant growth in irregular jobs is further supported by the “other” measures of precariousness in Table III, which do not show any overall increase in “gig economy” work. The relative stability of multiple job holders, a BLS figure that counts all jobs held by individuals surveyed, and its decrease as a proportion of total employment over time, indicates no real increase in those working more than one “gig.”

As noted above, unincorporated self-employment closely follows “independent contractors.” “Part-time for economic reasons” shows some

increase, but is a cyclical phenomenon that rises in recessions and falls in recoveries. These figures cannot be added to the total of Alternative Employment Arrangements because they overlap in ways we cannot count.

Thus, although under- and overcounts in BLS surveys are possible, unless we assume that all BLS figures for the last several decades are crap there is no real evidence of an expanding gig economy.



Sources: BLS (2018) CPS, Databases, Tables & Calculators by Subject, <https://data.bls.gov/pdq/SurveyOutp...>

Table IV shows that both middle and working-class occupations were affected in similar proportions, though the number of working class people in alternative work arrangements was much larger and there was considerable variation between different occupations. In other words, the rise of irregular work impacted all classes except the pinnacles of capital.

The rise of digital platform sources of work such as Uber or Task Rabbit has yet to impact the figures. According to one survey they accounted for .05% of all jobs in 2015. [9] While this has certainly increased since 2015, it is still impacts a small portion of the workforce. The BLS promises to release their count of such jobs in September.



Source: BLS (2018) Contingent and Alternative Employment Arrangements – May 2017, USDL 18-0942, June 7, 2018; Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey, Table 11. “Employed persons by detailed occupation, sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity” 2017, available [here](#).

## Duelling Surveys

Naturally, the debate on precarity does not end there. The most frequently cited alternative survey of precarious work arrangements is that

by Lawrence Katz of Harvard and Alan Krueger of Princeton. [10] Done in 2015, using the same categories and slightly modified questions employed by the BLS in the 1995 and 2005 surveys, its authors claim that those working in “alternative work arrangements” composed 15.8% of the workforce in 2015 — showing a nearly 50% leap above the BLS’s 10.7% for 2005, and a much higher figure than the BLS’s 10.1% for 2017. [11]

What might explain so radical an increase? Although the questions in the Katz and Krueger (K&K) survey were mostly the same as the BLS survey, the sample and the method of data collection were not. As the authors point out their sample was much smaller, 3,850 compared to about 60,000 for the BLS/Current Population Survey (CPS).

Furthermore, their sample was “a bit younger” and had “considerably higher weekly earnings than the CPS respondents.” [12] This latter difference would increase the numbers of independent contractors, on-call workers and those provided by a contract firm due to the high proportion of “management, professional, and related occupations” in these categories (43.4%, 35.6%, and 49.1% respectively according to BLS figures). [13]

The younger age of those surveyed would produce shorter than average job duration. In addition, while the BLS surveys were conducted in February and May, K&K’s were done in October and November. K&K argue there is no increase in precarious work during those months. Yet, this is a time of year when employment figures in retail and related industries, much of it temporary, as well as the figures for multiple job holders show consistent increases each year due to holiday season consumption. [14] Finally, it was an online survey which was certain to bias it against the growing mass of lower-income workers in “traditional” jobs. [15]

Given these significant differences in the samples, it seems likely that had K&K used a similar sample in 1995 and 2005 they would have had a similarly and consistently larger result

than the BLS/CPS surveys for those years. Consequently, the trend over time would not have seen a big increase in 2015. Comparing the 2005 BLS figures with their own 2015 figures seems invalid on the face of it.

The BLS/CPS comparisons are consistent over time, while K&K’s are not. It is this dubious comparison that allows K&K to assert that 95% of all new jobs between 2005 and 2015 were in “alternative work arrangements.” Again, they use a different and larger employment total for 2005 than the BLS to get a smaller total increase with which to compare their much larger 2015 figure for “alternative work arrangements.”

The BLS/CPS figures show an increase of 656,000 alternative jobs from 2005 to 2017, which would amount to 4.6% of the total increase in employment. Even my higher figure of 895,000 would only be 5.5% of the total growth in employment.

A May 2018 Federal Reserve report on “economic well-being” in 2017 argues that almost a third (31%) of adults engage in “gig work.” The Fed survey was done by a private firm and does not appear to be truly random.

This firm used a highly demanding recruitment process for the survey sample. As a result, only 12% of those invited agreed to participate and only half of those (about 12,000) actually filled out the survey. Furthermore, the Fed survey is mainly concerned with income and takes “a broad view of the gig economy” that includes activities not usually seen as jobs, such as selling things directly or on eBay, participating in a flea market, or renting a room through Airbnb, etc.

Most of these income-producing “gig” activities, it notes, are in addition to, not as an alternative to a regular “traditional” job. [16] So, for example, by this method the tiny income I derived from royalties on an earlier book I wrote while working full-time at Labor Notes or later at Brooklyn College would, by this standard, have made me a part of the “gig economy” had anybody used the terms back then. This, it seems to me, is not a real measure of precarious or alternative or even freelance work. [17]

Finally, Table I shows that the biggest increases in irregular work occurred between 1995 and 2005 — before anyone talked of a “gig economy.” I believe this was a function of the rapid restructuring of capital in the 1990s.

Timing is important in this respect. It is significant that the first flurry of surveys focused on precarious work came in the 1990s, by which time the decline in U.S. manufacturing jobs was clearly permanent and the movement of displaced workers into lower-paid jobs or out of the labor force was well-established. This was also when the largest wave of mergers and acquisitions (M&As) in U.S. history took off reaching its high point in 2000 and levelling off after that. [18]

The merger movement was accompanied, of course, by significant downsizing and work reorganization. As Cappelli and Keller noted not only the BLS surveys, but all of the Census Bureau’s National Employer Surveys of irregular work or income sources, were formulated in the 1990s. The third and most complete of these conducted in 2000 was they argue, “motivated by concerns about the corporate restructuring of the 1990s.” [19]

The rising tide of M&As, the re-structuring of supply chains, and other organizational changes produced some increases in irregular work, but the impact appears to have dissipated after 2005. Despite all the restructuring and recurrent crises, the vast majority of jobs remain “traditional” within the framework of capitalist employment relations.

## **Big Trends in Working-Class Insecurity**

A major aspect of the post-1980 restructuring and recurrent crises of U.S. capitalism was the accelerated decline in the rate of labor force participation of males, from 75.1% in 1994 to 69.0% in 2014, while that of women declined only slightly from 58.8% to 57.0% over that period. The “mystery” of slumping participation

rates is, therefore, largely a male phenomenon.



Perhaps most significant has been the decline in the major 25-54 "prime-age" male group, who are least likely to retire, be in school, or take on family care responsibilities, from 91.7% to 88.2% over those years, while that of prime-age women fell only slightly from 75.3% to 73.9% over that period. [20]

Furthermore, the 2016 Obama White House report on falling labor force participation of prime-age men found that 83% of those who dropped out had not worked at all in the previous year, up from 73% in 1988. [21] While unemployment rates tend to rise and fall significantly with the ups and downs of the economy, the numbers of men leaving the workforce have increased over time with only minor fluctuations.

The "flows" out of the labor force and those who gave up looking for work tracked by the BLS give us a good idea of this trend. Tables V and VI show that over the years more and more men have left both employment and unemployment to exit the labor force. By the post-recession years of 2010 to 2017, almost three million males were leaving the workforce each year on average to join the reserve army of labor despite this being a period of economic "recovery."

This was not primarily a voluntary act for most. Those who have already left but want employment became discouraged in growing numbers, as did those wanting to work and considering themselves "available for work" but have given up seeking employment.



#### *December of each year*

Source: BLS (2018) "Labor Force Flows Unemployment to Not in Labor Force, Men," "Labor Force Flows Employment to Not in Labor Force, Men," Databases, Tables & Calculators by Subject, <https://data.bls.gov/pdq/SurveyOutputServlet>.

#### *Annual average*

Source: BLS (2018) "Not in Labor Force, Searched for Work and Available, Discouraged Reasons for Not Currently Looking, Men," "Want a job now, Available to work now," Databases, Tables & Calculators by Subject, <https://dtat.bls.gov/pdq/SurveyOutp...>

This continuous increase in the reserve army of labor is not a consequence of a rise in irregular work, which is a form of employment, but above all of the decline since the early 1980s in manufacturing production jobs, where males composed 70% or more of the workforce, and the weakness of recoveries particularly since 2000.

A study by the San Francisco Federal Reserve found that the biggest drops in the prime age 24-54 year demographic (for both men and women) fell not on those in the lower income quartile (25%), but in the two middle income quartiles. Those in the \$21,241 to \$41,160 second quartile saw a drop of 2.4 percentage points in their participation rate between 2004 and 2013, while those in the third \$41,161 to \$71,916 quartile saw a 3.2 percentage point decline. [22]

Both of these, but particularly the latter quartile, point to unionized manufacturing workers as a major element in declining participation. This is further supported by a 2016 Brookings study that shows low participation rate among prime-age males in "many small former industrial centers in states like Michigan, Indiana, and Ohio." [23]

As the Obama White House report put it rather tentatively, "a relative decline in labor demand for occupations that are middle-skilled or middle-paying may have begun contributing to the decline in participation in the 1990s." The report goes on to cite other studies to the effect that "the drop in the labor force participation rate for men over the past several decades may be explained by a decline in job opportunities for middle-skilled workers and their

reluctance to take jobs in other industries and skill classes."

Conversely, in states where shares of employment "attributable to construction, mining, and to a lesser extent manufacturing are higher, more prime-age men participate in the labor force." [24]

Membership in the reserve army, however, is not a permanent status for many of those who exit the labor force. Each year between 2005 and 2016, for example, an average of about 7% of those "not in the labor force" re-entered the workforce "though that percentage declined from a high of 7.8% in 2011 to 6.8% in 2016. [25]

While most appear to have given up on employment for long periods, some permanently, others may have taken "non-traditional" jobs; but most of those who eventually found employment ended up working for lower-wages and fewer benefits in the nearly 90% of jobs that are considered "traditional."

In other words, the structural decline of manufacturing that saw 5.7 million production and nonsupervisory jobs eliminated between 1979 and 2017 [26] is a disproportionately large source of declining participation among men formerly in middle income jobs and, as a consequence, their growing numbers in the reserve army. Nevertheless, the annual flows of male workers out of the labor force are far greater, in size and social consequence, than the modest growth in "non-traditional" or precarious work over the last two decades.

The most significant trend affecting working class people of all ages and genders, however, is the growth of "traditional" low-wage dead-end jobs, mostly within "service" sector employment, and the accompanying relative stagnation of working-class real wages that began as long ago as the 1970s.

As the Economic Policy Institute has shown for the period from 1979 to 2007 those industries that have expanded, mostly services, have consistently paid less than those that have lost jobs, such as

manufacturing. [27] The National Employment Law Project estimated that by the end of 2014 42% of U.S. workers made less than \$15 an hour, a proportion that would have been higher if figures had included only production and nonsupervisory workers. [28]

Despite some increases since the early 1990s, the average real weekly earnings of all production and nonsupervisory workers remained at \$312.18 in early 2018 compared to \$315.44 in 1972. [29]

The growth of the low-wage workforce generally has almost certainly been a major factor in heading off any dramatic increase in “alternative work arrangements,” as it has become relatively cheaper to employ a low-wage worker directly and over time. In terms of working class experience, it is more the loss of formerly well-paid industrial employment, time in the reserve army of labor, and subsequent employment in lower-paid work than “gig-type” work that defines this era of recurring crises and slower growth.

One expanding sector in which nearly a million workers barely scrape past \$15 an hour is in warehousing. [30] Recently, an organizer for Chicago-based Warehouse Workers for Justice pointed out to me that as unemployment has declined and the wages of low-paid warehouse workers have risen somewhat during the long, slow recovery since 2009, the 40% extra that warehouse employers pay a temp agency for workers has become less attractive. This is particularly the case since the average cost of benefits for all non-union service employees, a figure bloated by the inclusion of managers and professionals, was only 29% in March 2018.

As a result, a trend toward more direct employment in warehouses in Chicago’s giant logistics cluster has become evident. [31] This gives us a hint as to one reason why the figures on temp work and other forms of precarious employment have not grown faster than they have.

Unfortunately, the transition from warehouse temp to warehouse employee, for all its advantages and at slightly higher wages, still lands you in

a low-paid, hazardous, dead end job along with millions of others “at least until they organize.

## Organizing in an Era of Turbulence

If capital has produced an era of turbulence, restructuring, displacement, and declining living and working standards, hasn’t this transformation also rendered workers’ organization more difficult and the exercise of workers’ power more problematic?

Capitalism with its recurring changes and reorganization is nothing if not contradictory. Many of the conditions it has created in the last two or three decades, from work intensification to declining real wages, are reasons to rebel, including work in irregular jobs. They are the consequence of capitalism’s inevitable reproduction of the struggle over surplus value, conducted in new ways.

Managerial aggressiveness along with the legal and political challenges to such action, however, particularly strong in the United States, often form barriers to such action. At the same time, the very restructuring of capitalism and the manner in which it produces and moves the material wealth of the nation (and the world) have created new vulnerabilities in the system and new avenues for organization and action.

These vulnerabilities are found in irregular job settings from warehousing to building cleaning as well as in “traditional” employment. The consolidation of capital via mergers, its reorganizations, relocations, and outsourcing of production have brought forth the highly vulnerable Just-In-Time Logistics networks that now underlies the whole U.S. economy.

At the key “nodes” and crossroads of these embedded networks are huge geographic concentrations of workers, in the tens and even hundreds of thousands, in metropolitan areas such as New York-New Jersey, Los Angeles, Chicago, Memphis, Louisville, Dayton, Dallas-Fort Worth and others.

These “logistics clusters,” as they are called, include union and non-union workers in transportation, warehousing, utilities, IT, etc. where the pressures of work are among the most intense in the whole interconnected web of supply (value) chains, production sites, intermodal transportation, ecommerce, etc.

While capital abandoned the huge concentration of manufacturing workers in places like Detroit, Gary or Cleveland, the need to re-concentrate workers to move the vast amounts of goods and materials still produced domestically as well as the growing volume of imports has created new and stronger forms of leverage against capital for the organization of millions engaged in all types of work. [32]

Labor movements don’t grow by marginal gains, but in periods of social and working class upheaval like the 1930s for industrial workers or the 1960s and 1970s for public sector workers. They are the result of growing pressures on the workforce and the perception by activists that there are levers of power to be found in the unfolding situation. These upsurges tend to sweep into their path other workers, including those previously thought “unorganizable” by virtue of their turnover or casual employment patterns.

Such upheavals are usually unpredictable. Who would have thought West Virginia teachers with weak unions would have staged a mass strike that Rosa Luxemburg would have appreciated? Or that teachers in similar circumstances in other “red states” would strike in turn?

No one expected thousands of telecom workers at AT&T in the Midwest to follow the teachers’ example and stage a six-day wildcat strike, with one of the rank and file leaders noting “It was amazing how fast it spread.” [33] Or a video of non-union contract workers going on strike at an Indianapolis UPS site to pull in millions of viewers, with some commenting “Yeah, that’s what we need to do.” [34]

It’s time to look at capitalism’s new terrain of struggle and prepare for

bigger things to come.

Against the Current

## Footnotes

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## Turkey's Defiant Working Class: From Offense to Defense

22 November 2018, by [Metin Feyyaz](#)

When it comes to opposition in Turkey most people would think about academics, human rights activists, journalists or political activists and rightly so. But actually, these are not what scares Erdoğan most or these are not what Erdoğan had historically compromised most. When the historic demonstrations started in Gezi Park, the Governor of İstanbul was saying that Erdoğan is afraid that this demonstration might turn into something like Tobacco workers occupation of Ankara from 2010. [1]

At that time thousands of Tobacco workers from all over the country occupied the most central neighborhood of Ankara for more than 2 months in order to protest against privatization of their factories and they were also protesting against their own union Confederation, Türk-İş, for not supporting them. That's why the occupation started in front of the Confederation building. It was probably the first time the Erdoğan Government felt threatened. They tried to threaten workers but it did not work. These workers, of which the vast majority are AKP voters, were protesting against the very party

which they supported. Generally, cultural and political polarization of the country based on lifestyle values helped Erdoğan quite well. So a radical workers' action which might end this artificial polarization was seen as a big threat for the Government. That is why in the end, the Government was forced to reach to some sort of compromise with them. When thousands of young people occupied the main square of İstanbul in the Gezi Park demonstrations in a way influenced by Tahrir, Erdoğan's first reaction was to remember the TEKEL workers' demonstrations from 3 years ago.

But TEKEL is not the only example of these sort of huge spontaneous uprisings of the working class in Turkey. In May 2015, another wildcat strike which started at Bursa plant of Renault spread across the entire automobile industry of the country; FIAT, FORD and many supplier companies started work stoppages and factory occupations. These actions were not called by any union or any sort of organizations, and the workers of these companies who had never seen each other before and were

hundreds of kilometers away from each other, somehow became part of a countrywide movement of strikes and factory - probably one of the rare examples of this in working-class world history. Also at that time, the Government did not want to create tension with these workers, up to the election, police did not attack this demonstrations. And after the election the government raised the minimum wage by about 30 percent in order to calm down the reactions. When they saw that they could isolate some of the factories then these demonstrations were also attacked by police force and mass dismissals of the leaders of the strikes. [2]

The most recent example of these sort of wildcat strikes was in the construction of the new airport of the country. More than 10 000 construction workers protested against their working conditions in a very militant way after a service bus accident. Workers' demands were very simple and basic, sleeping and eating in the proper conditions and working in proper conditions. But in the next morning, at 4 am in the morning police attacked the workers' barracks,

500 of them were detained, some of them were even charged with terrorism. The president of DISK, the construction workers' union, is still in prison. This demonstration was also not called by any union or organization. It was simply an explosion of anger of the workers. [3]

Union density is very low in the country, only 10 per cent union membership and 6 per cent for collective bargaining coverage. This is mainly because of extremely restrictive trade union legislation which was introduced by the military junta of 1980. Turkey's union legislation requires more than 50 per cent membership condition for union representation at the workplace; membership is registered the Government website system among many other restrictions. And legal strikes are limited to very strict conditions in case of dispute during collective bargaining agreements. That is why these sort of "illegal" strikes are so common. When it comes to wildcat strikes around the world most people would probably think about China, but Turkey is probably in the second place after China.

The working class of Turkey is weakly organized in terms of unionization but very well organized in terms of self-organization. In the strikes at Renault, each basic work unit had its own spokespersons who then chose spokespersons for their departments and then spokespersons for their shifts. So in their struggle against the union, they sort of copied company's managerial schema and built they own organizing based on that.

Except TEKEL, these strikes/actions were for gaining new rights like pay increases. So in a way workers were on the offensive. In last ten years, Turkey's economy has grown quite fast. Since 2008, number of the workers who work in automobile production of the country has grown almost 4 times bigger. Turkey has become the biggest car exporter to EU. Turkey is the eighth biggest steel producer in the World. But workers have not benefited from these productivity gains, the minimum wage is still around 230 Euros per month and the minimum wage in Turkey is not an exception, according to

statistics almost half of the entire workforce is working for the minimum wage. And even for the skilled workers who are working in auto assembly, the average hourly wage in companies like Renault, FIAT etc. is around 1.8 Euros per hour, and this is the average of these factories, not the minimum.

Wages and working conditions are not catching up with the growth of the wealth of bourgeoisie. We can tell that workers are seeing the growth in wealth, feeling the increase in the production from their work-pace, number of units they have to produce each day and asking for their share of the wealth. But probably we are coming towards the end of this era.

The growth of the Turkey's economy in the last ten years were mainly a result of facility in finding loans in this period. In the aftermath of 2008 crisis, many Central Banks around the world started to pump money in the world economy. Some central banks were even offering negative interest rates and Turkish companies were one of the biggest customers of these cheap credits. Private sectors debt has reached to 247 billion US\$ and 123 billion of this is the short term debt. And a very important portion of these debts has gone to mega construction projects. So the Turkish bourgeoisie is highly dependent on the foreign debt and now the era of cheap credits is over. Erdoğan's row with Trump, only helped the effects of this upcoming crisis to be felt earlier. Inflation rate has reached to 26 per cent. Many companies have started to declare bankruptcy or to ask for restructuring of their debts.

This trend will probably will get even worse. The government also sees that, and is trying to make adjustments to soften the effects of this upcoming crisis. Recently the government changed the law on "Short Term Work Benefit" which is a benefit found for times of crisis and disasters (earthquakes, floods etc.). It allows companies to employ workers for fewer hours and the remaining amount of the salary can be paid through unemployment benefit fund. Now with new amendments on this legislation, it will be easier for companies to apply to this fund.

Of course, now when the crisis is knocking on the door, bourgeois economists have already started to introduce their austerity measures which will destroy existing rights of workers. On many TV channels, you can see economists trying to convince public opinion that IMF and its "bitter pill" is the only way out of the upcoming crisis. Even though the AKP government is reluctant to knock the door of IMF, mainly because of their strong rhetoric against the Fund, they have already found a middle ground. They have introduced a new economic plan which literally copies the IMF Turkey report from April 2018. [4] And they are looking for private consultancy companies to report on the progress of this process and advise on further "cost cutting" measures. Of course cost here means, health, education, social rights basically the livelihoods of millions of people. In the report the IMF also proposed many direct attacks on workers' rights. Such as keeping the minimum wage low, creating a fund for severance pay and reducing the amount, implementing further flexibility measures in working life, limiting the increase of public servants' wages etc. among others.

Of course now with the conditions of crisis and many attacks towards their rights probably the nature of workers' actions will change as well, rather than offensive actions which aim to gain new rights, we will probably see more defensive actions where workers are trying to protect their already-won rights, or worse, against closure of their workplace, for their unpaid wages etc.

Unfortunately most of these actions are lost from the outset and do not help to improve self-esteem of the workers, on the contrary crisis destroys workers' self-esteem and their ability to act. So most people would try to protect the jobs they already have without trying to advance their rights. This is particularly true in a political context like Turkey where the left is politically absent. There is no leftwing political alternative to crisis on the public discussion. Even during the massive mobilizations which we described in the first few paragraphs, the left was not able to link with these workers or

play any role in the mobilization of these demonstrations. This is mainly result of structural weakness of the left in Turkey and its reluctance to build a political alternative. Today in the public discussion, if you ask anyone what are the proposals of the left, no one will be able to answer. So while socialists in Turkey has lost chance to build links with radicalized sections of working class during these wildcat strikes, it is now also losing another opportunity to mobilize society against possible attacks along with rhetoric about the crisis and to raise demands for advancement of rights (like more social spending, nationalization of bankrupted factories and not paying their foreign debt etc.) instead of cutting social rights.

In the absence of a leftwing political alternative to the crisis, attacks on workers' rights and austerity policies will get stronger. And in the end, the discontent created by these policies and the results of the crisis might lead to strengthening the extreme right

political alternatives. Turkey's traditional fascist movement (Grey Wolves) had a split before the June 2018 elections and now both fractions of the fascists are in the Parliament. The two of them in total received 21 per cent of the votes which is historically the highest vote for the "grey wolf" movement. And one of them (MHP) is the de facto political partner of Erdoğan. Their voice will be heard much more strongly. This might result in directing this discontent into attacks towards Syrian refugees living in Turkey or the Kurdish population in workers' neighborhoods. In last few months we have already seen examples of these sorts of pogroms which were started over minor issues in various neighborhoods.

That's why it is even more important now to build a united left wing political alternative to the crisis, the left in Turkey is already late on that but hopefully not too late. The past sectarian tradition of the radical left in Turkey helped to create this political

void. Ignoring the necessity to overcome these sectarian attitudes in order to build a broader leftwing political alternative in Turkey, might have much worse and more dramatic results.

## Footnotes

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[2] You can find more information here, [Trouble in paradise: A cautionary tale for big capital in Turkey](#).

[3] For more information in French [-"Turquie?: la colère des ouvriers du chantier de l'aéroport">[npa2009.org/actualite/international/turquie-la-colere-des-ouvriers-du-chantier-de-laeroport](#)].

[4] See the report [here](#).

# What recent London demos say about the state of the British left

21 November 2018, by [Phil Hearse](#)

On October 13, an extreme right-wing Democratic Football Lads Alliance (DFLA) march was out-mobilised and disrupted by anti-fascist demonstrators. One week later, about 670,000 people turned out for a "People's Vote" demonstration.

The People's Vote march was ostensibly to call for a referendum on the terms of Britain's withdrawal from the European Union. In reality, it was an attempt to re-run the 2016 referendum that narrowly voted in favour of leaving the EU.

Both demonstrations highlighted fault lines on the left. The huge People's Vote demonstration was dominated politically by the right-wing, pro-EU trend in the Labour Party, as well as the Liberal Democrats. Some pro-EU Conservative MPs also participated.

The left-wing leadership of the Labour

Party, headed by Jeremy Corbyn, did not support the mobilisation. However, a smattering of local Labour Party branches and some trade unions took part, many marching behind the banner of the left-wing Another Europe is Possible campaign.

The October 20 Independent reported: "Masses overflowed through the streets of London for more than a mile, from Hyde Park Corner to Parliament Square ... They came from every corner of the UK, in what is believed to be the largest demonstration since the Iraq War march in 2003, when more than a million people turned out in the capital to oppose the conflict.

"Amid the swathes of EU flags and banners, there was also a growing sense that campaigners, MPs and activists were realising, perhaps for

the first time, that this was a battle that could be won...

"MPs from across the political spectrum addressed the rally, including Green MP Caroline Lucas, Liberal Democrat leader Sir Vince Cable, Labour's Chuka Umunna and Tory MP Dr Sarah Wollaston, who drew huge cheers when she compared Brexit to a botched operation."

Behind the reluctance of Labour leaders to call for a new referendum on Brexit is a simple fact of electoral politics. Nearly two-thirds of Labour voters voted in favour of Remain in the referendum, but most constituencies won by Labour in the last election voted Leave.

In particular, some economically depressed northern cities where poverty is rife returned huge Leave majorities. Corbyn and his allies do

not want to be punished in a future election, or give ammunition to the Tory right who would accuse Labour of betraying the democratic decision of the 2016 referendum.

Nonetheless a huge majority of young voters, and Corbyn supporters inside and outside Labour, are hostile to Brexit.

## Left debate

Important left-wing groups outside the Labour Party were scathing in their denunciation of the October 20 march.

Under the banner headline "Huge March for a People's Vote boosts the big business agenda", the newspaper of the far-left Socialist Workers Party (SWP), *Socialist Worker*, argued: "This was a huge mobilisation" the largest in Britain since the 2003 march against the Iraq War. It shows the campaign has struck a chord with sections of those who voted Remain in the 2016 referendum or who have subsequently turned against Brexit.

"But that doesn't make it progressive or in the interests of working-class people ... Whatever the individual motivation of marchers, it is a vehicle to deliver the big business agenda of defending the single market and the neoliberal, racist EU."

The *Morning Star*, the daily paper linked to the Communist Party, was even more hostile: "Their patronising demand for a 'People's' Vote, with its implication that extraterrestrials or farm animals voted to leave first time round, oozes New Labour marketing style ... the neoliberal media, including the BBC, has been wholeheartedly behind the People's Vote project."

The problem with this type of analysis is that it is entirely removed from the real meaning of Brexit. The EU is a bosses' club, but simply saying that misses the main point. This was explained by Scottish National Party leader Nicola Sturgeon four days before the 2016 referendum, when she denounced the Leave campaign as an attempted putsch by the right wing of the Conservative Party.

The Leave campaign was conducted on the slogan of "take back control", which meant keep out immigrants and break from judicial supervision by the European Court of Human Rights. The hardcore Tory Brexiteers, led by the likes of financier Jacob William Rees-Mogg, want to make a bonfire of EU regulations that set standards for employment conditions and environmental regulations.

They have also used anti-EU rhetoric to attempt to witch hunt and exclude the hundreds of thousands of EU citizens who have come to live and work in Britain.

The October 13 demonstration by the DFLA "supported by a gaggle of extreme right organisations" was billed as being for "justice for women and children". This opportunistic slogan stems from several cases in northern English cities of male gangs of Asian/Muslim composition grooming and sexually exploiting dozens of young women over a long period of time.

In run-down and poverty-stricken cities, grooming gangs were able to befriend vulnerable young women from poor and often dysfunctional families. They then used them for prostitution or rape by themselves and their friends.

These shocking events have been exploited ruthlessly by the far right to spread Islamophobic propaganda. Anti-Muslim propagandists ignore the fact that the overwhelming majority of child sexual abuse cases in Britain concern white British men.

## Anti-fascist marches

The October 13 DFLA demonstration mobilised only about 1500 people, few of them from football supporters' clubs. They were out-mobilised by two different antifascist demonstrations, which both numbered more than 1500.

First was a demonstration by what might be called the "traditional" left "Unite against Fascism and Stand Up to Racism". These organisations are

associated with the SWP, but their march was supported by some local Labour Party branches, trade unions and campaign groups.

Marching separately was the so-called Unity demonstration. It was supported by many young people, particularly those associated with "antifa" trends like London Antifascist Network, dressed in black and wearing masks, women from groups like Women against Fascism and political groups like the libertarian/anarchist Plan C.

The Unity demonstration drew in a wider group of people who sympathised with what appeared to be a more militant approach to stopping the fascists and far right "summed up in the slogan 'No Pasaran'". By marching very slowly in front of the DFLA, the Unity demonstration did indeed slow down, temporarily block and disorganise the fascists. They were denounced as "splitters" by the SWP.

This is just one event and it would be premature to draw fundamental conclusions about the state of the left from it. But some preliminary observations can be made.

The "traditional" far left groups such as the SWP that dominated the Anti-Nazi League in the 1970s "are being politically squeezed and outflanked on a number of fronts.

Hundreds of thousands of radical young people have gone into the Labour Party to support Corbyn's project. Labour under Corbyn has the most radical leadership of a mass party in any advanced capitalist country.

At the same time, a significant anti-capitalist, anti-fascist and feminist trend among young people has emerged that does not look to the traditional type of Leninist-inspired revolutionary socialist organisations that emerged after 1968.

With such a diverse phenomenon, precise definitions are impossible. The organised groups of this trend are mainly small and their composition fluid.

But a flavour of their general outlook can be gleaned from Plan C. Its

supporters describe themselves as “libertarian Communists” and reject fixed programmatic positions or organisational forms, other than the principles of being pluralist, experimental and non-dogmatic. They say they favour building movements over building an organisation. ÅÅ

These outlooks are common among young radicals, whether or not they have heard of Plan C.

The main revolutionary socialist trend outside the Labour Party, the SWP, is hampered from winning support among young radicals by the terrible reputation it gained because of its reluctance to deal firmly with a leading member accused of rape in 2013. The SWP, according to long-time members, lost about 1000 people, more than a third of its membership, during this crisis.

For the moment, the fate of left-wing politics in Britain depends on the

outcome of the push by Labour’s big left-wing majority to win the next general election and install a Corbyn-led government.

Whether or not that happens, the British left is likely to go through major changes and upheavals in the next few years.

*S November 2018*

Source *Green Left Weekly*.

## Sound, Fury and the Midterms

20 November 2018, by [David Finkel](#)

To begin with, let’s imagine the scenario if the 2016 election hadn’t produced the rather fluky Electoral College victory of Donald Trump. In that case, following two years of the stagnant neoliberalism of an unpopular Hillary Clinton presidency, we’d likely have been looking at a massive “red wave” of Republicans consolidating very large Congressional and state house majorities (especially with over two dozen Democratic Senate seats on the line).

Instead, the key factor this November was certainly mass revulsion against the grotesque performance of the Trump regime – a show that his base loves, but repels pretty much everyone else. It’s important that the African American and Latinx voter turnout expanded, reacting against racist voter suppression and Trump’s anti-immigrant atrocities, along with an impressive youth turnout that holds progressive potential for the future. The Republicans’ plans to “reform” (destroy) Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid and wipe out what remains of health care protections under Obamacare were obvious huge factors in their defeat.

The increase in women elected to Congress is positive, of course, even if their proportion there remains pitiful by the standards of most “advanced” countries and some “Third World” nations too. What would be essential for an electoral result to be seen as transformative, however, is a context

of powerful social mobilization. That’s what wasn’t happening in this election.

Despite the heroic turnouts against Trump’s Muslim travel ban, the Women’s Marches and #MeToo, the Movement for Black Lives, pro-immigrant actions and more, these have mostly been episodic upsurges that haven’t yet generated powerful self-sustaining campaigns. Most important, there isn’t a backdrop of massive labor militancy, even though the teachers’ strikes, the UPS rank and file rejection of a rotten contract, the widespread Fight for \$15 and other organizing efforts are very hopeful vital signs.

The fact that a sizeable sector of white working class voters remain in the Trump camp remains a sobering political reality, for which the corporate-driven Democratic Party has no meaningful alternative message.

On the other hand, the fact that voter suppression is now recognized and openly discussed, after flying under the radar for so long, in my opinion is a major development. At this writing one major election – the Georgia governor’s race – has been successfully stolen by the fraudulent removal of tens of thousands of Black citizens from the voter rolls. Under the glare of public exposure, it should be harder to repeat that level of blatant cheating despite the Supreme Court’s gutting of the Voting Rights

Act.

Whatever the contested results in Florida turn out to be this time, the restoration of voting rights to ex-prisoners will change the voter demographics of that state. In my home state Michigan, ballot proposals to ensure access to voting, and ending absurd partisan gerrymandering of legislative districts, passed by large margins (as did legalization of recreational marijuana). Whether the defeat of the execrable Wisconsin governor Scott Walker might open the question of voter suppression there remains to be seen.

The overall reality of this midterm’s rebalancing is that the voters that Democratic strategists foolishly depended on in 2016 – those somewhat caricatured “suburban college-educated white women” – did break for them this year after two years of the Trump spectacle. What flipped in 2018 can flip back next time, of course – but just now, thinking about scenarios for 2020 is more than this writer’s stomach can handle.

For an incisive overview of the mixed midterm results and what they may portend, a useful piece by Matt Karp appears in JACOBIN.

The Left and the Future

What about the left in these elections? With regret, we must note that the

Green Party didn't do well, although the socialist Green candidate for New York governor, Howie Hawkins, is to be congratulated for maintaining the party's ballot status.

An assessment from the Democratic Socialists of America celebrates a modest breakthrough in the election victories of more than a dozen DSA members, including U.S. House candidates Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez in New York and Rashida Tlaib in Michigan, as well as a substantial list of DSA-endorsed state and local candidates.

The presence of a handful of self-declared democratic socialists, along with substantial numbers of left-leaning liberals, means that the "progressive wing" of the Democratic Party will have a firm niche in the party. They will offer an attractive face to part of its voting base, and may be allowed a significant role in drafting that most meaningless of documents, the 2020 Party Platform.

None of this will change the reality

that the Democratic Party in practice is subservient to, and a tool of, corporate power and Wall Street. Its relatively progressive stances (i.e. relative to the vicious Republican policies pandering to the religious fundamentalist right) on social issues only disguise that underlying fact.

We'll need to watch to see whether progressive Democrats, and any other politicians who take the First Amendment seriously, will revolt against the pending Israel Anti-Boycott Act that aims to cripple and criminalize campus and community BDS (boycott/divestment/sanctions) activism.

No doubt this election will be followed by escalating cacophony around the daily antics of the big twit in the White House, civil wars in the West Wing, attempts to shut down the Mueller investigations, empty noise about impeachment, and all the rest. What mustn't be forgotten is that the day after the election, whenever the vote recounts and lawsuits are over, and next January when the new Congress convenes, the fundamental crises

remain.

Under the impact of climate change-driven disasters, California is burning and towns in Florida and the Carolinas are still staggering from hurricane destruction, as does the entire island nation of Puerto Rico. At the U.S. border, world-class crimes are committed against asylum seekers confined in detention camps while ICE's reign of terror sweeps immigrant communities. Children in Yemen die from starvation by the hundreds every day under U.S.-supplied Saudi Arabian bombs and planes. College students are drowning in debt, families are devastated by housing foreclosures and water shutoffs, and wages stagnate even as official unemployment reaches "record lows" and corporate profits soar.

Elections don't change these realities - certainly not automatically. It takes sustained mobilization and mass action to do so.

November 17, 2018

Source [Solidarity](#).

## What's the real cause of the California wildfires?

19 November 2018, by [Phil Hearse](#)

Donald Trump chimed in on the line propagated by Fox News for weeks. It's because of bad forest management by California, a state that's - by American standards - liberal and anti-Trump. Fox even claimed it was because the people running California were "socialists" (!)

In the world of Instagram things are even more serious - Actor Gerald Butler and singers Miley Cyrus and Robin Thicke have had their houses burned down. Luxury houses on the Malibu beachfront have been destroyed. Trump's response has been criticised by Katy Perry, Leonardo di Caprio and Neil Young. Kim Kardashian, Lady Gaga and Kanye West have had to be evacuated (can this disaster get any worse?).

Trump says in his brief tweets that it's because of poor forest management. He forgot that 60% of California forest is under federal management. Bad forest management is not the underlying cause. Leonardo di Caprio said it was because of climate change. That's part of the story, but not the whole issue.

Fires in the California forests and chaparral (shrubland) are regular natural events. Because of global warming they are becoming more regular, and more likely outside of the hottest times of the year. Chaparral has a high-intensity regime. "meaning when a fire burns, it burns everything, frequently leaving behind an ashen landscape." [1]

According to Ben Engel: "Climate

change contributes to the growing destruction from California wildfires. Hot, dry weather conditions that help carry fires for thousands of acres are often present nearly year-round now. The state's urban sprawl and encroachment into formerly undeveloped land is the real catalyst, though, said former Sacramento Metropolitan Fire District chief Kurt Henke." [2]

Mike Davis one of the most articulate and insightful socialist writers we have today, has made similar points many times, blaming what he calls "real estate capitalism". In October 2017, a year before the current disasters, he said:

*"Although the explosive development of this firestorm complex caught*

county and municipal officials off guard, fire alarms had been going off for months. Two years ago (ie in 2015 -ed), at the height of California's worst drought in five hundred years, the Valley Fire, ignited by faulty wiring in a hot tub, burned 76,000 acres and destroyed 1350 homes in Lake, northern Sonoma, and Napa counties. Last winter's (2016) record precipitation, meanwhile, did not so much bust the drought as prepare its second and more dangerous reincarnation. The spring's unforgettable profusion of wildflowers and verdant grasses was punctually followed by a scorching summer that culminated in September with pavement-melting temperatures of 41°C in San Francisco and 43°C on the coast at Santa Cruz. Luxuriant green vegetation quickly turned into parched brown fire-starter.

"The final ingredient in this 'perfect fire' scenario - as in past fire catastrophes in Northern California - was the arrival of the hot, dry offshore winds, with gusts between 50 and 70 mph, that scourge the California coast every year in the weeks before Halloween, sometimes continuing into December. The Diablos are the Bay Area's upscale version of Southern California's autumn mini-hurricanes, the Santa Anas. In October 1991, they turned a small grass fire near the Caldecott Tunnel in the Oakland Hills into an inferno that killed 25 people and destroyed almost 4000 homes and apartments."

[3]

Underlying this is real estate capitalism, "the financial and real-estate juggernaut that drives the suburbanisation of our increasingly inflammable wildlands". Moreover:

"This is the deadly conceit behind mainstream environmental politics in California: you say fire, I say climate change, and we both ignore the financial and real-estate juggernaut that drives the suburbanisation of our increasingly inflammable wildlands. Land use patterns in California have long been insane but, with negligible opposition, they reproduce themselves like a flesh-eating virus. After the Tunnel Fire in Oakland and the 2003 and 2007 firestorms in San Diego County, paradise was quickly restored; in fact, the replacement homes were larger and grander than the originals. The East Bay implemented some sensible reforms but in rural San Diego County, the Republican majority voted down a modest tax increase to hire more firefighters. The learning curve has a negative slope.

"I've found that the easiest way to explain California fire politics to students or visitors from the other blue coast is to take them to see the small community of Carveacre in the rugged mountains east of San Diego. After less than a mile, a narrow paved road splays into rutted dirt tracks leading to thirty or forty impressive homes. The attractions are obvious: families with broods can afford large homes as well as dirt bikes, horses,

dogs, and the occasional emu or llama. At night, stars twinkle that haven't been visible in San Diego, 35 miles away, for almost a century. The vistas are magnificent and the mild winters usually mantle the mountain chaparral with a magical coating of light snow.

But Carveacre on a hot, high fire-danger day scares the shit out of me. A mountainside cul-de-sac at the end of a one-lane road with scattered houses surrounded by ripe-to-burn vegetation - the 'fuel load' of chaparral in California is calculated in equivalent barrels of crude oil - the place confounds human intelligence. It's a rustic version of death row. Much as I would like for once to be a bearer of good news rather than an elderly prophet of doom, Carveacre demonstrates the hopelessness of rational planning in a society based on real-estate capitalism. Unnecessarily, our children, and theirs, will continue to face the flames."

## Footnotes

[1] California Chaparral Institute "Fire & Nature".

[2] *The Sacramento Bee*, 10 November 2018, "California wildfires start in the woods. Why do cities keep burning?"

[3] *London Review of Books*, 2 November 2017, "El Diablo in Wine Country".

# Brazil in the shadow of the far right

18 November 2018, by [Marcelo Ramos](#)

Today Brazil is living through one of the saddest moments of its history. The history of the Brazilian people is essentially a history of resistance, since the European colonial invasion it has been very difficult to survive in our land. But we fight and resist.

As you may know, the capitalist development in my country is permeated with blood throughout its history. This includes the fact that

there was a military dictatorship in Brazil between 1964 -1985. But democratic struggles of the working class in the 1980s succeeded in securing important social achievements that were brought together through the Federal Constitution of Brazil approved in 1988. We succeeded in approving the need for a social function of private property, education and free public health for all, democratic freedoms,

labor rights and greater popular participation in decisions.

Although the current constitution is applied selectively, it still protects most of the rights historically conquered by the subaltern peoples in Brazil. What is at stake today with the Bolsonaro election is exactly the end of the republican cycle that began with the 1988 constitution. 30 years later ,capitalism plunges Brazil again

into a cycle of high repression.

Even with all their problems and contradictions we recognize that the Lula and PT class conciliation governments introduced some poverty reduction measures and invested more in social rights than all previous governments. So how was it possible for Brazil to elect a fascist president who defends the military dictatorship and the persecution to the left even after 13 years of the government of a party that was born of the unions and the landless movement? Bolsonaro did not come out of nowhere! We must remember two fundamental problems: the post-dictatorship democratic transition and the waning of PT's popularity from 2013 onwards.

First, Brazil, unlike Argentina, had a transition to democracy conducted by the military itself. They gave themselves an-amnesty for their crimes against humanity, they ensured that the first presidents continued their policy, and the majority of the population had negative memory of the military dictatorship. They promoted a conservative common sense which praised the dictatorship as a time of economic progress and social order, devaluing the persecution and violations of rights that occurred. Officials like Bolsonaro kept defending the policy of the dictatorship without suffering any retaliation.

Secondly from 2013, when the international economic crisis had serious effects on Brazil, the PT governments were widely challenged by popular mobilizations that brought millions of people to the streets. Intellectuals close to the PT claim that these protests were conservative and started the new fascist wave in Brazil. In my opinion this analysis is incorrect and dishonest. The so-called days of June 2013 were popular demonstrations unleashed in the context of the preparation for the World Cup and began with protests against the increase of the prices of public transport and the criticisms were extended to the withdrawal of investment in health and education for the World Cup of 2014.

The problem here is that if, on the one hand, there was a new generation of

young social activists who formed in the leadership of those protests, and I am an example of this, a young university student from the periphery of one of the great cities of Brazil. On the other hand, the extreme right went to the streets and participated in those demonstrations - arguing that the fight against corruption as the main demand. The general response of the PT government was the widespread repression of demonstrations, the use of new coercive legislation and the new national force, a military force created by Lula for use in military occupation of favelas (poor neighbourhoods) and large demonstrations.

Initially the direction of these manifestations that questioned the government and the project of the PT to govern was from a left perspective, even though there was great questioning of the traditional organizations of the left the general tone was defence of improvement of the life of the poorest ones: more investment in health, education and leisure. However with the cooling of the large demonstrations there was little organizational balance left. Even with some growth of the PSOL and movements like the MTST (Moving Homeless Workers Movement) the following years were about growth and organization of the far right, while the idea of getting rid of the PT was growing. What was done through the impeachment process of Dilma Rousseff, led in the congress by a deputy who today is imprisoned for corruption, and through the imprisonment of Lula, orchestrated by a Judge (Sergio Moro) who made this a political trial, and fulfilled so well his mission that he prevented the election of Lula as president, that last week he became the new Minister of Justice of Bolsonaro.

What is happening today in Brazil is the conclusion of a process of capital recovering from its crisis in an extremely violent way. Today Brazil faces its biggest financial crisis in history. Starting in 2013, a dispute about the causes and solutions of this crisis began. The fragile bases of the recent democracy in Brazil, the inability of the radical left to create an alternative pole to the PT project, and the great capacity that the far right

has had to organize (in Brazil and in the world) provide the basis for understanding why Bolsonaro was elected in Brazil.

My family is an example of poor workers who gave Bolsonaro his victory. For them Bolsonaro represents change. In a country where rates of violence have surpassed those of wars such as those in Iraq and in Afghanistan Bolsonaro, with his speech "good bandit is dead bandit", represents security. For my relatives, Bolsonaro represents the fight against corruption. In a country where all traditional parties are plunged in corruption, where even the PT has gained parliamentary support for its government through corrupt relations with traditional parties and has been placed by the media as the great example of a corrupt party, it matters little whether there is evidence that Bolsonaro and his party are also corrupt, what matters is to take the PT out of government.

Bolsonaro's surprising election is explained by the anti-petism, fomented by the large media but also by the leap of organization that the far right has been given worldwide. The widespread use of fake news in social networks, often financed by entrepreneurs outside of regular campaign funding - a crime in Brazil - was Bolsonaro's main way of organizing a passionate army of militants who are today the basis of Brazilian fascism. There are many similarities to Trump in the way he use hate speech against LGBT groups, quilombolas, indigenous, landless and homeless, promising security and prosperity for conservative Christian families.

But there are also big differences with Trump, both in the neoliberal agenda that Bolsonaro and his new economy minister want to effect, ending social security and state-owned enterprises, but also in the greater aggressiveness of hatred toward the left. Bolsonaro, in addition to ending public universities and labour rights, also announced during the campaign, and reaffirmed one day after the election, that his government will pursue, to arrest the expulsion of all "reds" from the country, pointing mainly to the PT and PSOL. He intends to resume the

persecutions of the military dictatorship, he has already stated that he intends to kill 30,000 people and it is okay to die "innocent", everything to free Brazil from communism and the left. He also pledged to attack all popular governments in Latin America, such as Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia.

For this he will have a wide support network. Most of the bourgeoisie is with him. Most conservative evangelical leaders are with him, like Bishop Edir MacÃdo, Owner of Universal Church of Kingdom of God (UCKG, who has 30 churches in the United Kingdom) and owns the second largest communication network in Brazil. The military leadership is with him. The Judiciary summits have already shown that they will not face it.

But do not doubt, we will resist! Today we in PSOL have no doubt that the alternative is popular mobilization and on the streets. We will not succumb to fear of what is to come. We are counting on the formation of a broad democratic and anti-fascist front that opposes parliament and the streets

against Bolsonaro's government measures, including counting on parties and sectors traditionally linked to the bourgeoisie, but that do not support the Bolsonaro project. We want all Democrats against Bolsonaro and Brazilian fascism! We understand that only a broad front in defence of democracy can oppose the force that fascism has won in Brazil.

PSOL, our party, has grown and demonstrated strength as a pole of organization of the popular movements that will resist in the next years. We grew up in these elections for the national congress and in the main states of the country. We have built an alliance with the indigenous movement and the homeless workers movement that is the best new factor on the Brazilian left. We believe it is possible to push the legitimacy of Fascist rule to the limit. 70% of Brazilians are against any pension reform and the Bolsonaro government will try to apply an ultraliberal reform that wants to end welfare and put a system of savings similar to Pinochet in Chile that filled the pockets of bankers and today starves the retirees.

The moment is terrible, 10 dead by the fascist paramilitary groups in 1 month. Our resistance must be intelligent, we do not want any more martyrs! For this your solidarity is fundamental! We need that our condemnations of Bolsonaro be spread as widely as possible, we need your shelter in the most difficult times. We need international networks of assistance to the movements in Brazil. Why we will not give up! Our hope is not over!

Against the shadow of fascism has the flame of millions of Brazilians who went to the streets on October 20 to show that in Brazil there is popular resistance. This is our strength!

For the memory of Marielle, Moa do CatendÃ and dozens of social fighters who were murdered for defending our people in recent months, we have no right to retreat! By the blood of our indigenous ancestors, black Brazilians and caboclos, we will not retreat!

Comrades, more than ever, internationalism is a necessity. We need your solidarity!

Source [Socialist Resistance](#).

## No one is illegal - Solidarity with the Migrant Caravans

18 November 2018, by [PRT, Mexico](#)

Solidarity with migrant sisters and brothers suffering from hunger, thirst, disease and exhaustion has been expressed by thousands of people who have supported them with food, water and clothing to mitigate their hunger and thirst and the inclement weather. Impelling all the actions of support and solidarity in the towns and cities they pass through is a task born out of social consciousness, that they should not be left on their own. This solidarity of the peoples is preventing diseases from worsening and reducing the risk factors. Thus, the passage of caravans is touching the hearts of those who understand that today these are women, men, LGBT+ people, young people, adolescents, girls and boys who are in the middle of a tremendous

humanitarian crisis of forced migration. And it is becoming clear, too, that these caravans are only the concentrated expression of what about 250 million people who are forced to migrate in any corner of the planet experience.

The first large caravan started in Honduras, in October of this year, made up of thousands of people, almost half of them women and children, passed through Mexico City and now continues its journey to the northern border with the United States. They had overcome the obstacles of police violence on the southern frontier of Mexico, the threats and assaults of criminal groups, the disappearance of a

hundred at the hands of armed groups, extortion of all kinds and a xenophobic hate campaign and racist discrimination promoted and stimulated by the US government of Donald Trump and the right-wing. Those who feed reactionary and fundamentalist ideologies through different media, stimulate prejudices, fears and rumours that proliferate as part of the dominant ideology, which penetrate even amongst ordinary people, awakening selfish individualism and alienated competition that obscures the knowledge of reality.

Against those who think that the caravan is a great media montage and the product of an orchestrated

operation, we denounce the growing economic, political, insecurity, murder, femicide and disappearances in Honduras that have caused this growing organized migration. Likewise, we denounce the misery and unemployment generated by neoliberal policies and the systematic repression of a government established by the military dictatorship, which mounted a coup against the timidly progressive government of Manuel Zelaya, in 2009. This is coupled with the high levels of criminal violence that exists in Honduran cities, such as San Pedro Sula, considered the most violent city in all Latin America. All these are the immediate causes of the current forced migration.

The other caravans on the way, from El Salvador and Guatemala, also show that terrible conditions of survival, as in large regions of Mexico, lead to a degree of despair to thousands of people who see no other perspective than to cling to a possibility of improvement by fleeing their countries. Although without any security, especially because of the racist, xenophobic and discriminatory policies that lead the Trump government to militarize the border with Mexico with heavily armed soldiers, also with armed, racist, right-wing supremacist and fundamentalist groups of civilians, who have already committed atrocious crimes against Latin American migrants.

So far, more than three caravans, totalling more than 10,000 people, have decided to cross Mexico these days with the aim of reaching the United States; and everything indicates that more people will follow with this objective. Although we must emphasize that this forced displacement has been happening for many years, but in a clandestine manner. Thus, according to official figures, from January to September 2018, more than 41,000 Hondurans and Hondurans who travelled through Mexico were registered, although the great majority have already been deported by the Mexican government.

What is new now is that instead of this permanent and long term "ant" migration, it is now a mass, collective migration which faces together the

great risks and dangers of murder, femicide, sexual violence against women and disappearance that crossing Mexico involves. It should be noted that, for more than a decade, this led families and mothers of Central American migrants disappeared in the Mexican territory to organize an international movement for their search. Therefore, the current collective, massive mobilization of broad sectors of the Central American peoples is an escape from the catastrophic conditions imposed by capitalism in the region and the extreme violence it has unleashed. It is a social response that has decided to change these conditions, to jointly walk a long and dangerous path in search of a dignified life.

Given this situation, Trump's threats only encourage an attack or confrontation on the border with Mexico. We consider that both the outgoing Mexican federal government and the incoming one have the obligation to guarantee respect for the human rights of migrants as they pass through the country, and we hold them responsible for not guaranteeing their right to freedom of transit. and their human rights, in addition to protection, security, medical attention or transportation in transit through Mexico.

## **For an anti-capitalist alternative and social and political solidarity with migrants**

Faced with this serious humanitarian crisis, the only effective response is to reject the consideration as a "problem" of migration and to satisfy the social needs of millions of women, men, LGBT+ and children, migrants and indigenous peoples. We demand that the richest countries are host countries, as other countries in the world already are.

We demand the right to migrate, to have freedom of movement, transit

and residence. As internationalists we demand the human rights of all people to live with dignity and enjoy all the political and social rights of the country in which they reside. The constitutional reform on human rights approved in Mexico in 2011 establishes precisely that these rights are recognized not only for the Mexican population, but also for a foreign population residing in Mexico or passing through the country.

In turn, migration should be a freely adopted option. However, millions of people are forced to migrate to escape misery, poverty, misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, war, ecocide, ecological crisis, lack of perspectives and so on. All people should enjoy full rights, including, but not limited to, the right of asylum for those fleeing war and persecution.

We support the self-organization and struggles of migrants, starting with their specific and particular demands, but seeking to build the necessary links with class, gender and anti-racist discrimination issues and showing how this is a single interconnected process. We promote experiences of mutual aid between the exploited and discriminated class and their common struggles, either by building social and union struggles that include workers of all kinds or through collective projects, such as self-managed housing projects, cooperatives, solidarity associations and informal groups of economic and social mutual aid.

As internationalists we consider that freely decided migration and the mixing of populations are positive for societies. Building links between popular and social movements in the countries of origin and host countries is a vital part of the development of social movements of resistance to capitalism, ties that point to the possibilities of a new world based on sorority, solidarity and mutual aid.

Because no human being is illegal, let us strengthen solidarity and internationalist struggle with the migrants who are on the road today.

- Enough of racism and xenophobia!
- Sorority and solidarity
- For a workers and peasants'

# A Podemos Budget?

17 November 2018, by [Eoghan Gilmartin](#), [Tommy Greene](#)

It is perhaps telling of liberals' current disarray that, in a recent newspaper column designed to demonstrate the supposed "resurgence" of political centrism across the West, one of its key British proponents ended up acting as an unwitting cheerleader for its rivals on the Left. [1]

In his *Independent* column last month, Blairite Labour MP Chuka Umunna sought to contrast the "ugly extreme" Left to the successes of the new centrism, citing the case of Spain. He claimed that the bolder, more attractive measures in the recent Spanish budget agreement owe to Pedro Sánchez's center-left Socialist Party (PSOE), which was elected as a minority administration last June. [2] Yet in so doing, he papered over left-wing grouping Unidos Podemos's unmistakable fingerprints on all three of the reforms he highlights in the article.

Umunna's bungled analysis was quickly jumped on by a number of UK and Spanish commentators, raising awareness of Podemos's achievements in a deal which had up to then received scant media coverage outside of Spain. [3] [4] Invoking the budget's proposed 23 percent minimum wage hike, "[further] government spending on public services" (including a 1.3 billion in unemployment and disability benefits), "a 3 percent tax on big tech companies and a tax on the super-rich," Umunna stumbled on contributions Ione Belarra, one of Podemos's lead negotiators in the budget deal, claimed as "undoubtedly ours." [5]

However, Umunna's article does point to a fundamental danger in this new scenario of cooperation on the Spanish left. An initial "honeymoon" poll surge, reflected in an October 25 CIS poll that put the PSOE ahead with a ten-point lead, suggests it is the center-left party and not Podemos who have been the main beneficiaries of

this new arrangement so far. [6] Pablo Iglesias's formation is now having to confront some of the challenges and paradoxes raised by its decision to back a Sánchez premiership in the vote of no confidence which brought down the previous right-wing Popular Party government. [7] [8] [9]

Since Podemos smashed open Spain's two-party system almost three years ago, the electoral arithmetic has made for a slim chance of any majority force emerging in the country. In adopting something like a "Portuguese model" of left-majority parliamentary co-operation, Podemos is seeking to directly shape policy at a national level. But this maneuver also involves handling a blueprint from one of the few traditional social-democratic parties in Europe that has avoided Pasokification (the fate of Greece's once-mighty Pasok, which fell from 44 percent to 4.7 percent in five years) or outright annihilation.

Iglesias and the party leadership seem to be betting on a strategy of "co-governance" leading to formal coalition after the next general elections, to be held no later than early 2020. Yet a number of questions surround this emerging "Iberian model" and whether it can continue to develop into a viable anti-austerity alternative, offering Podemos the chance to effect transformative change nationally. [10] Indeed, there are now increasing doubts over whether the budget deal, which still needs to gain final approval from the Spanish parliament, can win the necessary support of Catalan nationalists.

## Concrete Gains

Before anything else, it is important to recognize that this budget agreement represents clear gains in a number of policy areas for Unidos Podemos. [11] The minimum wage hike is the largest

ever in the history of modern Spain. [12] As well as the 1.3 billion extra for unemployment and disability benefits, around 1 billion is dedicated to science and education, minimum and noncontributory pensions are to be raised by 3 percent, certain rent controls and housing price caps will be introduced, and there will be an equalization of the time granted by legal paternity leave with the break currently afforded to mothers. At Podemos's Autumn University, the head of the party in the European Parliament Miguel Urbán told Jacobin the deal's main achievement has been to "halt the wheel of austerity, and to show that it is possible not only to just stop the wheel but to at least begin turning it in the other direction."

The agreement has yielded considerably greater social returns than the putative coalition deal the PSOE had offered center-right Ciudadanos during the electoral deadlock in 2016. Back then, the proposed raise in the minimum salary was only 1 percent (as opposed to the 23 percent hike in the current agreement). At the time Podemos refused to accept the deal, believing the PSOE was trying to subordinate it as part of broad centrist bloc. Belarra told Jacobin that: "[although] it was very tough in communicative terms, and we received a lot of blows [from the media], we were right to reject that deal then and even though our relationship with the PSOE continues to be a difficult one we're in the right now with this new [budget] deal."

A degree of crisis in the new PSOE government, after two high-profile ministerial resignations since June (with another potentially on the way), has afforded Podemos a significant degree of leverage in negotiating a deal this time around. With the PSOE having no appetite for early elections, according to Belarra "they had to

acknowledge us as equal partners.” As Podemos MP Txema Guijarro put it: “Sánchez went further not because he is a left-winger” but because he has to ensure that his government survived.”

The PSOE’s fragile majority hinges on the support of Catalan and Basque nationalists who had backed Sánchez as prime minister primarily in order to oust the Popular Party administration, which had been responsible for the crackdown in Catalonia. Now there are serious doubts about whether these groups will side with the government on the final budget vote (due to take place over the coming months). This is down to the recent decision by state prosecutors to bring to trial detained Catalan leaders on charges of rebellion and the misuse of public funds. [13] Iglesias is now pressuring Sánchez to make a move on the question of political prisoners, betting on the Catalans’ willingness to ultimately reach an agreement so as to avoid new elections.

Even if the budget passes, there are clearly limits to the gains: Podemos’s leader in Andalucía, and a key figure in the radical Anticapitalista wing of the party, Teresa Rodríguez gave the deal a “six out of ten” rating. [14] After ten years of regression and austerity, she sees the agreement as an important first step but one which fails to address two key priorities for Podemos: overturning recent labor reforms and regulating an energy sector dominated by large conglomerates. For her, the deal also fails to go far enough in terms of reversing the deep cuts to public health care and education over the last decade.

This points to the fact that Podemos had to accept that Sánchez and the PSOE had no appetite to confront the EU or significantly challenge the Fiscal Compact Treaty, which commits member states to a general budget deficit not exceeding 3 percent of GDP. This budget deal assumes a deficit of 2.2 percent of GDP higher than that which had been previously agreed upon with Brussels. But it is one that Sánchez’s pro-European administration believes should not be met with major objections.

## Electoral Hegemony

Yet beyond these limits, the wider dilemma for Podemos is that while both it and the PSOE have been pushed into greater cooperation in recent months, these parties remain rivals struggling for hegemony on the Spanish Left. According to Guijarro, for Podemos “the objective is still the sorpasso [overtaking the PSOE]” — this is the basic condition for the transformation of our country.” On the opposing side, Sánchez’s strategy is to reduce Podemos to a manageable junior partner below 15 percent in the polls.

Having survived its worst crisis since the return of Spanish democracy in the 1970s — its support nearly halved between the 2008 and 2015 elections — the PSOE’s aim is now to place itself again at the center of Spain’s political regime, building a broad consensus for moderate progressive reform. Yet, as Podemos MP Manolo Monereo noted recently, this requires first having to “defeat” Iglesias and his comrades, with PSOE’s position remaining precarious as long as there is “a major force on their left flank.” [15]

Without questioning the power and privilege of the country’s oligarchy, Sánchez is aiming to polarize the political field around the opposition between his government and the Spanish right, thus leaving Unidos Podemos very much as a secondary actor. [16] This approach has been particularly effective in terms of emotive symbolic issues such as the planned removal of General Franco’s remains from the basilica at Valle de los Caídos.

This is where the differences open up within Podemos over their exact strategy towards their center-left rival. While the budget agreement has given Podemos renewed momentum, according to party’s radical Anticapitalista wing there is also the danger that it ends up further “legitimizing” the Sánchez government. [17] As Urbán, another leading figure in the Anticapitalista faction, explains, this is not a moment

for “euphoria” or self-congratulation, but rather “the polls tell us that so far it is the PSOE who have profited most in electoral terms from the [joint] successes” of recent months.

The October 25 poll from Spain’s Centre for Sociological Research has the PSOE as the country’s largest party, on 31.4 percent, compared to Unidos Podemos in fourth place on 17.3 percent. Another recent poll from Metroscope gives the PSOE a more measured, though still substantial, lead of 25.2 percent to its rival’s 17.7 percent. [18]

For Urbán this risk of “subordination” to the Socialist Party has to be countered with a two-pronged strategy. First, the party must closely guard its political independence; he is thus wary of Iglesias’s discourse of co-governing with the PSOE and the idea of “a Portuguese-style coalition.” “Thank heavens we are not in the government and have not taken any cabinet positions.”

“Specific, one-off agreements,” such as the budget deal, are necessary so as to secure further gains for the social majority and to ensure the Right remain out of office. Yet, in a “moment of political polarization across Europe,” what counts electorally for an insurgent force like Podemos is to continue positioning itself as “a clear alternative” to the neoliberal center. In an interview last year with Jacobin, Urbán pointed towards the electoral success of both La France Insoumise and the Five Star Movement in Italy, which for him have to be seen in terms of their refusal to participate in this type of united front with a moribund center-left. [19] As he put it then: “Mélenchon did not move, did not adapt his campaign to [Hamon’s call for a pact], and in the end was seen as the more credible challenge to [the Establishment].”

In this sense, Urbán believes Podemos must concentrate more “on selling our oppositional work, as we have begun to do better over the last few weeks, saying if there is a 900-euro minimum wage, it is because of Podemos.” Beyond that, the party “needs a clear program which, like Jeremy Corbyn’s, speaks of social and ecological control in strategic sectors” while at the same

time confronting the PSOE more robustly on a series of issues (like the monarchy, repealing Spain's gag laws, and the labor reforms introduced by the Right) that can expose the PSOE's internal contradictions.

Urbán sees the PSOE as caught between its position as "a party of the regime [of Spain's elite-managed consensus since its transition to democracy in 1978]" and a party that still has a largely working-class base. Yet heightening tensions around this contradiction cannot merely involve "a parliamentary strategy"; it also requires "being able to work with emerging processes of social organization." After a three-to-four-year ebb in social mobilization, the Spanish street is beginning to witness greater movement once again with new struggles emerging around precarious labor, women's rights, and pensions. For Urbán, working towards an accumulation of social forces is the second plank in the strategy Podemos needs:

If we think that we are simply better parliamentarians than them, we will lose! However, we have something they don't: social movements ... it is the street which will engage the Socialists' base, pushing it into open contradiction with its party hierarchy on core issues like labor reforms. We in Podemos have to think how we can encourage such mobilization[s], aiding it without instrumentalizing it.

## Marking the PSOE's Path

Guijarro, a close ally of Iglesias, agrees that further pressure from below is vital for Podemos to make advances in the coming months. He also acknowledges the risk of subordination, quoting one leading PSOE figure, for whom "the Popular Party is the adversary but Podemos the enemy" to be defeated. Yet Guijarro insists "we cannot simply withdraw from the game. Instead, we have to assume the risk" of engaging with "the PSOE's margin of action" so as to be better able to determine their future direction. As Iglesias put it at the party's autumn university:

You have to construct an alternative to neoliberalism through governing. Politics is not about having the more radical program, but rather is about securing results. Clearly, I would have liked to have obtained more than what is in this agreement but in politics you are not what you put in your program but what you achieve. To confront the extreme Right and [hard-Right Italian interior minister Matteo] Salvini you have to be capable of governing. [20]

This discourse around co-governing and Iglesias's recent insistence on a comprehensive coalition deal after the next general election, no matter which party comes out on top, has to be seen in terms of the failure to negotiate a left-wing coalition after the 2015 elections. The breakdown in talks created a wave of disenchantment among voters and was used effectively by the media to smear Podemos as merely a party of protest. In this respect, for Guijarro part of the importance of recent cooperation with the PSOE is that "it demonstrates Podemos's ability to reach agreements" and allows the party to better position itself as "a governing force."

After parental leave in the summer, Iglesias has begun to look increasingly influential in cross-party negotiations "some might even say dominant" particularly over the past couple of weeks since the initial draft budget agreement was negotiated. He has visited leading Catalan and Basque political leaders (some in prison) and has phoned exiled former Catalan President Carles Puigdemont. [21] Despite the cabinet being exclusively made up of PSOE members, right-wing circles have begun to refer to Iglesias as the new government's "Deputy Prime Minister," and one Popular Party minister went as far as to label him the "fucking boss" of the new government. His role has been played down in press statements by Sánchez's camp, and the question of whether the Catalan formations end up backing the budget deal will be a litmus test of sorts as to the real extent of his influence. Whatever the outcome, it appears Iglesias is doing his best to win public opinion over to the idea that he and his party should be at the helm.

Yet for Guijarro, as Podemos moves towards next spring's local and regional elections, it also has to stress two elements that go beyond this commitment to co-governance, the better to differentiate itself from the PSOE. First, while highlighting its achievements in recent months, Podemos also has to communicate to voters that:

this is the best possible agreement with the PSOE in power. It is as far as a Socialist-led government can go. If you want more, vote for us! You have to vote for us! Ensure we win so as to introduce a more definitive turn [away from austerity].

This, again, will be easier if there is increased pressure from the streets amplifying popular demands. But Guijarro believes that "even in the implementation of this agreement" the limits to the PSOE's commitments to social progress will become obvious.

Secondly, the weakness of the Spain's institutional regime means the PSOE will also be confronted with more transcendental questions as crises inevitably arise, ones to which they can offer no clear answers given the party's ties to existing power structures. Guijarro believes these questions will be another key opening for Podemos, referring to the current row surrounding corruption in the monarchy as an example of such an opportunity.

With the PSOE refusing to back an investigation into scandals surrounding former king Juan Carlos de Borbón, as well as the Catalan parliament's decision to censure the current monarch, Felipe VI, Podemos believe the time is right to force a debate on the future of this institution. Polling data show that a majority of PSOE voters are in favor of a new republic while 71 percent of Spaniards associate the monarchy with either the Right or extreme-right. [22] [23] This is a terrain on which Podemos believes it can make advances throughout the coming months.

While recent polls provide some cause for concern, Guijarro remains optimistic, believing the party's broad electoral base, anchored largely in Spain's precarious youth, is not

accurately represented in projected voting intentions. Indeed, even the CIS poll has Podemos as the largest party among voters under thirty-five.

Yet, although Podemos may thrive in campaign mode once elections are called (as it did in 2015), there is clearly a need to seize the initiative and push on from this budget deal. The agreement, should it pass, represents a “a concrete opportunity to improve [working] people’s lives” according to Belarra and a significant step forward in the context of the new parliamentary disposition. The core challenge now facing Iglesias is to test the limits of Podemos’s current arrangement with the PSOE, without collapsing it like a house of cards.

Source *Jacobin*.

## Footnotes

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# Rally for a collective political power for people from below

15 November 2018, by [Movement for Empowering People from Below](#)

However, the President’s decision to prorogue the Parliament has created a situation of anarchy and uncertainty and has opened up the space for MPs to trade in their loyalties. Due to the President’s arbitrary actions, the cost of the political battle of the elite is

now being paid with common people’s lives. Therefore we demand that the President should convene the parliament and end the crisis without taking any more lives of our people.

However, it should also be noted that

this power tussle is taking place in the context of Yahapalana government failing to deliver on the promises it made. The Yahapalana Government executed a highly unpopular economic policy under the direction of the international monetary institutions

and a major portion of the government's activity was reserved for a battle between the President and the Prime Minister. The Yahapalana government covered for the crimes of the previous regime and failed to give any meaning to the idea of justice. The run of the Yahapalana government has come to an end bringing the autocratic and repressive Rajapakse regime, which has no alternative economic vision, back into power although they were ousted by majority votes in the 2015 elections.

In the middle of all these changes we should note that there were many people's struggles in the last three years on a number of issues. Privatization of education, enforced disappearances, manpower labour, privatization and sale of national assets, micro credit and indebtedness, EPF robbery and labour law reforms, privatization of water, cuts on the fertilizer subsidiary, government's

lackluster intervention in getting a fair price for farmers' crops, Fisheries' community struggles, A fair wage for estate workers, land grabs in North and constitutional reform are some among the many issues that people struggled on. However, the Yahapalana government which treated all these struggles with indifference are reminded to today of democracy when their power is challenged.

This power grab by the former President Mahinda Rajapakse shows that the political elite are no longer capable of adding any meaning to democracy and their concerns are entirely limited to power tussles in the elite sphere. Regardless, people's aspirations for democratic rule of people are not defined by the treacheries of the political, economic and social elite. There we state that against the politics of the elite we stand for a united movement of people's struggle from below. We

stress that with the possibility of racist and authoritarian Rajapakse regime coming into power the rights of our brothers and sisters from minority communities are in a serious threat and therefore we commit to form a united front of people's struggles to protect their rights and spaces for dissent. The political elite have put all of us in a deep economic and political crisis, endangering the democratic process of the country.

Therefore, we state that this crisis compels all progressive, democratic forces to join in a united struggle for an alternative vision of politics completely independent of the two mainstream parties UNP, SLFP, AND SLPP based on the people's power from lower strata of the society. We invite all to join in a united movement based on equality, democracy, justice, solidarity and freedom.

*Friday 2 November 2018,*

## **Migrant Caravans Challenge the Continent's Governments**

13 November 2018, by [Dan La Botz](#)

The thousands of migrants organized in caravans and walking north from Central America, through Mexico, and to the United States—some 3,000 miles—have raised a challenge to the governments and to the people of North America. Driven by poverty and violence, their long march is an implicit critique of the Central American governments that have failed to protect them and have made it impossible for them to earn a living. At the same time, it is in its very form a denunciation of Mexico, since they must travel in caravans because of the violence that migrants face in Mexico from both criminals and the corrupt police. And when the caravan reaches the border, it will be a challenge to the United States to adhere to its laws and international agreements that allow migrants to present petitions for refugee or asylum status.

Beyond all that however, the simple act of walking north is a courageous

and defiant act of resistance against the economic and political system that envelopes North America, with its "free markets," its authoritarian governments, and its failure to meet the basic human needs of millions. The migrants have put contemporary capitalism and imperialism on trial.

The migrants—men, women, and children—formed the caravans in late October. Migrants have for years traveled in groups because of the danger in both Central America and Mexico of being beaten, robbed, raped, kidnapped, or murdered by either criminals or police, but these caravans of thousands represent a new development. Usually migrants pay thousands of dollars to smugglers known as coyotes or polleros who arrange to take them across the Mexican and U.S. borders. These new migrant caravans, however, at first simply forced their way across the Mexican border, overwhelming border

police, or crossed the Suchiate River. They have compelled the Mexican government to permit them to enter the country.

In Mexico, migrants have been supported by local governments, the Catholic Church, and NGOs such as Pueblos Sin Fronteras (Peoples Without Borders), which have helped to provide them with water and food and also aided in choosing the best routes and campsites. The NGOs have also helped with the many who have become exhausted, gotten sick, or been injured. Irineo Májica, the director of Pueblos Sin Fronteras, reported that Mexican police had roughed up both men and women in the caravan. "Never in the history of the caravans have we seen such violence. I understand that the Mexican government is desperate, but violence is not the solution," said Májica. At times groups have broken off from the caravan to find their own

way or to take advantage of passing flat bed trucks, riding, crowded on the trailers. There are reports that as the caravan moved along some 100 migrants have gone missing and some believe they have been kidnapped by the criminal cartels.

As the migrants come, Mexico's incoming President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who will take office on Dec. 1, proposed an international development program for Central America to get to the root of the issues that cause the migration problem, and promised that his planned public works programs would create 400,000 jobs for Mexicans and immigrants. Speaking in late October, he said, we will have jobs for all, for both Mexicans and Central Americans. Faced with migrants challenge and under pressure from U.S. President Donald Trump, out-going Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto offered the migrants a program called, "Estás en tu casa" or "You are at home," that would provide asylum, work permits, identification cards, medical care, and schooling. At the same time, he made that plan contingent upon the migrants remaining in the southern Mexican states of Chiapas and Oaxaca. The caravan held meetings to discuss EPN's offer, which was rejected by the group as a whole. Most wanted to continue on. As one man said, "These states are overwhelmed by poverty, in Mexico the jobs are up north." Hundreds, however, accepted the Mexican offer and dropped out of the caravan.

At this moment, two caravans, several thousand migrants altogether, have now reached Mexico City where the Mexican government has offered them shelter in the Jesús Martínez "Palillo" stadium. Portable toilets have been set up, but they haven't been adequate for the numbers of people and visitors, creating unsanitary conditions. Edgar Corzo Sosa of the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) says that, "Pregnant woman, and above all, the newborns, are the most vulnerable group. There is no census, it's complicated, but a third of the caravan is made up of children, and there are altogether about 5,000 people"

President Donald Trump, campaigning feverishly, attending 17 election rallies, principally to support Senate candidates in the midterm elections, made the caravan the center of his campaign. He called the caravan an "invasion," asserted that the migrants were members of Mara Salvatrucha or MS-13, "hardened criminals" and he claimed that there were "Middle Easterners" among them. Trump threatened to send 15,000 U.S. troops to the border and said that U.S. soldiers could fire on migrants if they threw stones. He has threatened to cut off aid to the Central American nations from which the caravans have come and the American president also raised the idea of using his executive power to end constitutional birthright citizenship in the United States.

## What Caused the Caravan Crisis?

American imperialism is at the root of the current migration crisis. The story of the United States in Central America is a long one going back to the nineteenth century, but the most recent chapter begins in 1981 when U.S. President Ronald Reagan supported right-wing governments in Guatemala and El Salvador while also fighting against a popular revolution in Nicaragua. U.S. weapons poured into those countries during the civil wars there that lasted until the 1990s. Those wars took hundreds of thousands of lives and left parts of those countries in ruins.

Peace in these Central American nations was negotiated in the mid-1990s, just as the United States and the Central Americans governments were negotiating the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), a treaty that opened their economies to foreign competition. The treaty devastated local industries and agriculture, leading to vast unemployment. Farmers lost their farms; factories threw workers out on the street.

More than a decade and a half of war had flooded the region with heavy weapons and the disbanding of the various armies left thousands with no

means of employment. The United States government set up a chain of drug dealing operations that were used to fund the Contra War against Nicaragua and those continued after the war ended. In the 1980s, the United States also began to deport Central American gang members in groups like the MS-13 and M-18. Many of these men and women had had no contact with the countries to which they were being deported, and once back in Central America they established branches of the gangs they had belonged to in the United States. This toxic mix of groups trained in violence, easily available heavy weapons and criminal drug activity has made the "northern triangle" Central American countries of Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala some of the most violent countries with the highest murder rates in the world.

The most recent imperialist intervention in Central America occurred when former President Barack Obama and his then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton sponsored a military coup in Honduras against the democratically elected leftist president Manuel Zelaya. Since then, the antidemocratic government of President Juan Orlando Hernández has instituted a neoliberal model that has deepened the economic dependence on the United States and worsened living conditions for millions of Hondurans. Hernández has also criminalized the organizers of the caravan who have attempted to respond to the humanitarian crisis that so many Hondurans have been living.

Today, a new ruling elite dominates Central America. As Aaron Schneider and Rafael R. Ioris wrote in NACLA, after the extraordinary violence in the Honduran election of 2017, there has been "a growing consolidation of power by a new kind of right-wing alliance in Honduras and across Latin America: an alliance that brings together the power of the traditional landed elites and that of the financial elites who have benefited more recently from globalized neoliberalism. This alliance emerged amid the ashes of the Cold War and the dawn of the Washington Consensus..."

# Today, Poverty and Violence

Poverty has been and remains endemic in most of Central America where about one-third of the population lives in extreme poverty. Extreme poverty is defined by the United Nations as “a condition characterized by severe deprivation of basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information.” The World Bank recently put this in economic terms, describing those in extreme poverty as earning less than \$1.90 per day.

As the International Labor Organization wrote a year ago, “Over 50 million young people in Latin America and the Caribbean face a labor market characterized by unemployment, informality and a lack of opportunities.” About half the people in Latin America work in the informal economy—in Central America the rate is between 40 and 80 percent—that is to say people work for employers who often ignore labor laws and provide no benefits, or people are self employed in micro-businesses or as peddlers. The lack of jobs and decent pay, mean a life of poor housing and bad health, while families face insecurity and children are put at great risk of malnutrition that can affect both their physical and mental development.

Climate change is also playing a role in the Central American migration. According to *Scientific American*, a drought this year deprived some 2.8 million people in the region of their food. The drought has affected the so-called “dry corridor” of Central America, that runs through southern Guatemala, northern Honduras and western El Salvador. Olman Funez, a young farmer from Orocuina in southern Honduras said, “The drought has killed us. We lost all our corn and beans.”

The choices made in Washington and New York, decisions to promote so called “free markets” or to continue to permit the expansion of carbon fuels such as coal and petroleum, have brought misery to Central America,

exacerbating poverty and setting people in motion, moving out and moving north, going to where they can find jobs.

Violence in the Central American nations is also a way of life, and it has been increasing recently. Guatemala has been violent for years, but the terror has increased recently. While anyone might be murdered at almost any time, peasant and worker activists are often the victims of violence. Between May 9 and June 8, seven leaders of peasant organizations were murdered in Guatemala.

As Simon Granovsky-Larsen writes in NACLA, “Data collected by human rights organizations over the years show a relatively consistent pattern: outside of police or military shootings at protests, one rights defender has been killed in Guatemala every month or two all the way back to 2000. The campesino murders of 2018 obliterate any predictability with shocking violence. Guatemala has not seen anything like this since the official end of its armed conflict in 1996.” The violence against peasant leaders is intended not only to stop their labor organizing, but also to deter peasants from politically challenging the government.

A popular democratic rebellion against Daniel Ortega’s authoritarian regime in Nicaragua was violently suppressed by his government with arrests, torture, and hundreds of deaths, led tens of thousands of Nicaraguans to flee to neighboring Costa Rica. Political violence in some states has combined with the criminal violence found throughout the region creating an expanding blood bath. Survivors of the slaughter have joined the migration through Mexico toward the United States to escape the misery and violence that enveloped them.

## The Challenge Facing the Caravan in the United States

The migrant caravans may face its greatest challenge at the U.S.-Mexico

border when migrants attempt to present their applications for refugee or asylum status. The immigrants must present their application for asylum to an immigration judge, which means they must be given an immigration hearing. Economic refugees, those who come simply because they want to work and earn a living are not eligible for refugee or asylum status. The U.S. law defines refugees or those seeking asylum as “a person who is unable or unwilling to return to his or her country of nationality because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.”

The United States today offers hope to few refugees. Under President George H.W. Bush the government accepted between 125,000 and 142,000 refugees. In the 2000s, George W. Bush and Obama years, the United States admitted about 80,000 people each year. However, under the Refugee Act of 1980, the president has the responsibility, in consultation with Congress, to set a maximum number of refugees who will be admitted to the United States each fiscal year. This year only about 22,000 refugees have been admitted. Trump has said that that number will now be 30,000 for 2019.

Trump has declared that, “The United States will not be a migrant camp and it will not be a refugee holding facility.” He has threatened to close the U.S. southern border altogether, though for economic reasons though he seems unlikely to do so. Trump’s Homeland Security used the U.S. Border Patrol to “systemically deny entry to asylum seekers,” according to an immigration rights group. The Trump administration’s policy is that all adults crossing the border without inspection or without immigration documents are to be arrested. When they are arrested children are now routinely separated from their parents, as thousands have been, among them hundreds of small children. Trump’s most recent step week, based on national security from threats coming from abroad, has been to order that any migrant who crosses the border illegally be denied asylum. Civil rights groups argue that many of

Trump immigration policies are illegal and they are challenging them in court.

The U.S. border is now largely militarized, with thousands of Border Patrol agents backed up by the National Guard and now some U.S. Army troops. Except along the Rio Grande River, there is a nearly continuous border wall between the United States and Mexico. It is possible to climb the wall or cross through the gaps, though cameras and radar monitor the area, and many who attempt to cross are captured, though hundreds also die in the desert every year. Thousands make it to the other side, to a life in the legal shadows, constantly under the threat of arrest and deportation.

The caravan, nevertheless, moves on, now heading into the dangerous arid regions of northern Mexico dominated by drug cartels and the corrupt police who work with them. Meanwhile, throughout the United States groups of humanitarians' religious and political' have been organizing to go to the border, to greet the migrants and to show solidarity with the migrants. They will be protesting government policies and attempting to welcome those who come as refugees and asylum-seekers.

## Migration as Class Struggle

This caravan is not the first and will not be the last. As Laura Weiss wrote recently, "The use of caravans as an activism' and survival' strategy was popularized in Central America. Since 2008 Central American mothers whose children disappeared while crossing through Mexico have carried out an annual caravan through Mexico to create awareness about their struggles. In 2012, the poet Javier Sicilia and the Movimiento Por La Paz con Dignidad y Justicia (the Movement for Peace with Dignity or MPJD) ran a caravan through Mexico and into the United States to draw attention to drug war violence after his son was killed, and a number of similar caravans zooming in on drug war violence and abuses followed in later years." Caravans in Mexico go back decades: caravans of peasants, of teachers, of miners. They are versions of the religious peregrinations that form part of Central American and Mexican culture: people walking in their faith. Walking to where the Virgin once visited the earth, to where the saint helped the poor and downtrodden. Walking with God.

We do not usually think of walking as a form of rebellion or class struggle, but it often surely is. The caravan has been called an exodus, like the exodus of the Jews from slavery in Egypt. Black people in slavery in the United States took up the story of exodus, seeing themselves like the Jews of Egypt, living in slavery, dreaming of freedom, and they sang in their famous hymn, "Let my people go!" Today the migrants are engaged in their exodus, walking toward freedom, though they are finding that Pharaoh is not only in Egypt, not only in Central America, but also in Mexico and in the United States. Still the caravan moves on, holding the migrants in the embrace of hope, inspiring them to struggle, inspiring us to stand in solidarity with them. We are, after all, all of us, implicated in this caravan, in this walk toward freedom.

[1]

November 12, 2018

[New Politics](#)

## Footnotes

[1] [Spanish Language Version](#)

## Why the shack dwellers' movement poses a threat to the ANC

12 November 2018, by [Azad Essa](#)

New York, United States - S'bu Zikode, the leader of a shack dwellers' movement in Durban, South Africa, said he received a tip-off from police in July that he was being targeted and his life was under threat. [1]

Since then, the Abahlali baseMjondolo (AbM) organiser has been living underground, away from his family, between safe houses.

"I had been receiving threats from a number of local ANC councillors via AbM members and others, warning me not to step into their communities ... the ANC have basically created no-go

zones," Zikode told Al Jazeera on the sidelines of an event in New York on September 29 to raise awareness on his story. [2]

ANC is South Africa's ruling party, led by President Cyril Ramaphosa.

Zikode says AbM members routinely face censorship, intimidation and even murder by local city officials as they attempt to pressure them into providing housing, improving living standards or preventing the violent eviction of people in informal settlements - all charges the city denies. [3]

"The police have confirmed that there is a hit on me and offered me state witness protection but I had to refuse because when I asked them for how long, they said until elections [in 2019].

"This means that they will protect me in order to neutralise me from my work ahead of the election ... I couldn't do it," Zikode said.

On Monday, AbM held protests in South African cities and New York against what it terms as state repression, threats and assassinations. [4]

A police spokesperson said around 3,000 people rallied in Durban, where AbM is headquartered.

AbM says six of its members have been killed since 2017.

It also alleges that three other members from the Eastern Cape have also gone into hiding, citing mounting threats on their lives.

AbM says their requests to President Ramaphosa and General Bheki Cele, the minister of police, for a Commission of Inquiry into the killings of AbM members have gone unanswered.

But a spokesperson for Zandile Gumede, the mayor of eThekweni, the metropolitan municipality including Durban, dismissed AbM's claims. The mayor is the regional chairperson of the ANC.

"This is an old, repeated, fabricated allegation by Abahlali ... they must approach relevant security agencies if they have evidence instead of the media," the spokesperson said. "Making such a serious allegation without going to court will not assist anyone. The failure to report such is counterproductive and equivalent to defeating ends of justice," Gumede said.

Colonel Thembeke Mbhele, a spokesperson for the South African Police Services (SAPS), confirmed to Al Jazeera that police had opened "a case of intimidation" in Durban, raised by the organisation, but said she had no knowledge of Zikode being tipped off by members of the police force.

Bheki Ntuli, the ANC's regional spokesperson, did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

AbM members have been killed over the years for their work because they do it outside of a political party or electioneering process

Axolile Notywala, general secretary of the Social Justice Coalition

Since its inception in 2005 at the Kennedy Road settlement in Durban, AbM members say they have faced hostility from police and the ruling ANC government, particularly city

officials.

This is the fifth time Zikode has gone into hiding since the organisation, which now has 55,000 members, was formed.

Activists working with poor and marginalised communities in KwaZulu-Natal, the province of which Durban is the capital, say that there is a history of systematic violence against the AbM.

In 2016, two ANC councillors and a hired hitman were found guilty of murdering Thuli Ndlovu, an organiser with AbM. [5]

Ndlovu was shot dead in front of her daughter by a gunman who had been offered \$1,000 and a home to kill her.

In 2017, a court found a police officer guilty of killing 17-year-old AbM member Ngobile Nzuza during a protest in Cato Crest, an informal settlement 7km south of Durban. [6]

"Abahlali members have been killed over the years for their work because they do it outside of a political party or electioneering process," Axolile Notywala, general secretary of the Social Justice Coalition (SJC), told Al Jazeera.

"They have [direct] experience of corruption and lack of service delivery, therefore speaking out against the ruling party is dangerous," Notywala said.

AbM focuses on impoverished and working-class communities, traditionally the ANC's voter base.

"We were not expected to be so vocal and radical and to speak against the ruling party. The ANC behaves like they own the poor. And when we speak, we offend them, because they have always claimed to champion us," said Zikode, the AbM leader.

Since 2014, at least 100 people have been killed in politically motivated murders in KwaZulu-Natal, the home province of former president, the ANC's Jacob Zuma. [7] [8]

"Zuma was like a warlord in KZN," Zikode says. "We don't have that much of confidence in President Cyril

Ramaphosa to change the economy but he might be able to tackle the violence ... unlike Zuma, he has some fear for international reputation."

## 'AbM keeps politicians on their toes'

With the heartbeat of the economy in urban centres, black South Africans have moved to cities in search of employment and opportunities.

But the lack of affordable housing has meant millions resort to living in informal settlements, often on vacant land on the outskirts.

According to the PEP, a non-profit organisation that supports communities living in informal settlements, around 12 million South Africans live without proper housing. [9]

In April, the World Bank said South Africa was the most unequal country on earth. More than half the country lives below the poverty line. [10]

Youth unemployment has also reached record highs. [11]

"As long as there's still poverty and exclusion, the [AbM] movement is here to stay since it plays a critical role in a political landscape ... they keep politicians on their toes," Baruti Amisi, CEO of KZN Refugee Council, told Al Jazeera.

Zikode said people occupy land "so they can get closer to dignity".

Twenty-four years since the onset of democracy, most land remains in the hands of white South Africans, who make up less than nine percent of the population.

In December, the ANC resolved to expropriate land without compensation, but Zikode said the ANC is using the issue to win votes. [12]

"They have lost credibility; the question of land has been raised because the ANC wants to restore trust and confidence. After the

elections, all of this will be put aside.

"As much as we agree with the concept [of expropriation without compensation] we have a lot of questions. For us, it suggests they will take land from white elites and give it to black elites, and this will not benefit landless, homeless and ordinary people," Zikode said.

When it comes to the future of AbM, Zikode regrets that in the organisation's 13 year-history, "we haven't been able to organise houses for our people".

He hopes to build a larger base to push for change. But first, he has more immediate challenges.

"Reality will hit when I return to South Africa; I return to uncertainty," he said.

Additional reporting by Lizeka Maduna

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# Amid Growing Clampdown on Dissent and Free Speech, Hong Kong's Youth Is Pushing Back

11 November 2018, by [Kunal Purohit](#)

Amidst increasing curbs on dissent and free speech in Hong Kong, youngsters like Tse are silently pushing back. This has meant that Hong Kong's political struggles are slowly, yet surely, taking a distinct turn. Four years ago, protesters wanted democracy while being under Chinese rule; now, an increasing number want independence from China.

Tse, who was just 16 when the movement broke out, is a good exemplar of this shift. She was a part of the movement because she believed that genuine democracy would alleviate Hong Kong's issues. The movement was a cry for universal suffrage, for citizens to be able to elect their own leader, as against the current system where its chief

executive is elected by the legislative council from a list of pre-screened, Beijing approved candidates. [1] Back then, protesters like Tse did not mind being a part of the Chinese state. This is no longer true.

In the last two weeks alone, Hong Kong has witnessed repeated tense stand-offs between protesters and the government. The most visible was the unprecedented ban on the Hong Kong National Party (HKNP) for advocating independence from China. [2] The week before that, there were protests over allowing Chinese forces to conduct immigration procedures on Hong Kong territory for the newly-opened high-speed rail line connecting mainland China to Hong Kong. [3] Protesters said that this was a sign that China was tightening its grip over

HK.

The latest was last week when the Hong Kong authorities declined to renew the visit of the Financial Times' Asia editor, Victor Mallet after he chaired a talk by pro-independence activist Andy Chan in August at the Foreign Correspondents' Club in HK, where he is the vice-president. [4] [5]

These instances have only widened the gulf between youngsters towards China. In fact, a recent study showed that over 70.9% of those between 18 and 29 in Hong Kong want to be identified as 'Hong Kongers', rather than Chinese or even Hong Konger in China, from 59.8% people at the end of 2014 - after the Umbrella Movement. [6] This is the highest ever proportion of people wanting to be

identified as Hong Kongers ever since its colonial handover.

### **Campus activism**

Identity issues aside, the political conflict over Hong Kong has frequently played out on university campuses across Hong Kong over the past year, especially, and it continues to do so. On Friday, students at HK's Polytechnic University called a hunger strike after the university authorities tried to censor pro-independence messages on a bulletin board managed by students. [7] These messages emerged anonymously after the HK government banned the HKNP.

Angry at the university's attempts to cover these messages up with paper, students fought back and tore the paper down. On October 5, they announced their decision to go on a hunger strike until the university backs off from censoring political graffiti. By Saturday morning, student groups from six different HK universities had joined forces with the protesting students. A day later, 23 HK lawmakers came out in support of the protesting students. [8] On Sunday, the hunger strike was called off after both camps said an "agreement" had been reached - no details have been given. [9]

Such conflicts are now increasingly common. The students' union of the Chinese University of Hong Kong saw banners advocating independence from China crop up across the campus on the first day of the academic year. [10] William Chan, a student of physics and the external vice-president of the university's student union, says that they faced similar pressure from the university to remove the banners, but they resisted.

### **Hopeless and helpless**

For people like Chan, such outbursts are a result of the growing frustration among young people like him in HK. "The failure of the Umbrella Movement and subsequent smaller protests have made young people helpless and often they don't know what the way out of this is." Chan says many have grown radical in their politics as a result of this helplessness, demanding independence from China

rather than democracy within it, as the original demand was.

This helplessness that Chan talks about is a recurring theme in the activist circuits in Hong Kong. Activist Joshua Wong, 21, whose party "Demosisto" seeks greater economic and political economy from China, and who was one of the leaders of the Umbrella Movement, says that the HK government's repression through imprisonment has added to the frustration.

"People are feeling downhearted and depressed because they see how those who speak out, even if it is only for democracy and not independence, face imprisonment and criminal charges. Right now, over 100 activists, politicians and scholars currently face charges," says Joshua. He, himself, faces multiple charges and has been imprisoned for over 100 days over the last two years. Joshua says he knows activists from the Umbrella Movement who now seek independence from China. "They saw first-hand the brutality of the police force and the abuse of power during the movement. That changed their opinion."

Joshua believes that though the young are more frustrated than ever, they don't want to participate in political activities just yet. "Four years ago, they rallied because they had hope," says Joshua. "Now it is replaced with fear."

Another factor which might accentuate the frustrations of many young people in Hong Kong is the rising level of poverty and inequality. Two weeks ago, Oxfam, in its Hong Kong Inequality Report revealed that the situation is worse than ever before: the richest in HK now earn over 44 times more than its poorest. [11] In the city, known for clichés around its glittering skyline, over 1.3 million live in poverty, the report estimated. It also revealed how Hong Kong, which has the dubious distinction of being the world's most expensive real estate market, has seen housing rents increase by over 80% in the last decade alone. [12]

All this has only contributed to the frustrations among many young Hong Kongers who demand a more

responsive state and a governance system more accountable. That's why pro-democracy parties like the League of Social Democrats are trying hard to tap into these issues and enthrone more people into being more active. "For most people struggling to make ends meet, it would benefit them much more if the political movement responds to their everyday struggles as well," says 29-year old Raphael Wong, the vice-chairman of the party. Raphael, who was also one of the leaders of the Umbrella Movement, says that the party takes up issues of social justice and welfare and gets them addressed, by campaigning, reaching out to people and advocating with the government.

### **Hovering dark clouds**

Amidst all this, though, many fear that the curbs on free speech are only going to grow. Last week, the Hong Kong government announced that separatist slogans won't be allowed in one of the most popular protest sites in the city - the Civic Square, at the government headquarters. [13]

Even the ban on the HKNP, for instance, is being interpreted as a sign of things to come, says Raphael. "The HKNP was never very popular and didn't have a big base. Hence, Beijing wanted to make an example out of them to make all of us toe the line." Raphael's words find an echo with his co-activist Joshua, whose party Demosisto is already courting fire from Beijing. A pro-Beijing legislator and member of the Basic Law Committee in HK which advises the Chinese government on the city's constitution, Priscilla Leung Mei-Fun, last week said that Demosisto should be the next in line to be outlawed. Joshua says that the outfit expects a reprisal from Beijing and the HK government, even though it only seeks universal suffrage and not secession. [14]

"It is a matter of time, a few months or a year or so. But they will act against us," he says.

More than the action against outfits, though, what many in Hong Kong are fearful of is a new national security law that has been on the anvil, dealing with acts of "treason", "secession"

and ‘sedition’ under Article 23 of Hong Kong’s Basic Law, which governs its function. [15] If enacted, activists fear that such a law would criminalise any form of political dissent against Beijing. Plans to introduce it in 2003 as the ‘National Security Bill’ were shelved after mass protests by Hong Kong citizens and pro-democracy legislators. However, pressure is now slowly building up on Hong Kong’s administrators to enact it. [16] In August, Beijing’s head of Hong Kong affairs, Zhang Xiaoming, nudged the government here to consider bringing in the controversial law, to which HK’s chief executive Carrie Lam agreed, but insisted that it would come at “the right time.” [17] More recently, the Basic Law Committee’s chairman, Shen Chunyao, also called for the law to be enacted soon. [18]

Tam Tak Chi, leader of the pro-democracy People’s Power political party, says that there is little doubt that the law is coming. “That is the big battle ahead. It is coming very soon because they’ve already started to create the atmosphere around it with the ban on the HKNP.”

### More curbs, more protesters?

Many believe that the increasing clampdown on political freedom might be the final trigger needed for another mass movement in Hong Kong. Raphael, of the League of Social Democrats, says that more and more youngsters are turning radical in demanding independence because the cost, he says, is the same. “You’ll be punished for speaking out anyway, doesn’t matter if you demand democracy or independence.”

Demosisto’s Joshua agrees that this increased repression will draw more people out. “But the negative effects of Article 23 and other repressive moves that we see coming are higher than the momentum it might offer to the campaign. That is my real fear.”

The Wire

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**MST’s João Pedro Stedile: “We have to go**

# back to doing grassroots work”

10 November 2018

"We leave this process with closer ties and organized capacity and strength to resist this professed fascist offensive," said João Pedro Stedile, from the national coordination of the Landless Workers' Movement (MST) about the result of Brazil's 2018 presidential elections.

In an interview with the Brasil de Fato Radio immediately after Jair Bolsonaro's victory in the runoff election, Stedile pointed out that, despite the defeat, progressive forces won politically, as a strong unity has developed over the past few weeks. In his opinion, Bolsonaro's government, which will start on Jan. 1, 2019, will be similar to the Pinochet regime in Chile in its fascist nature.

"It's a government that will continuously use repression, threats, intimidation. It will unleash the reactionary forces that exist in society. On the other hand, they will try to give complete freedom to capital in a neoliberal program. However, that formula is not viable, it does not provide social cohesion, and it does not solve the population's basic problems," Stedile said.

**Brasil de Fato: What can you say to the more than 46 million people who voted for candidate Fernando Haddad, who was endorsed by the MST?**

We are still in the heat of the moment [after the results came out] and, first and foremost, we have to keep calm and understand the context of class struggle, and not feel defeated by this result. The ballots may have legitimized Bolsonaro, but that does not mean he had the support of the majority of the people. There is a high level of absenteeism, 31 million [voters]. Haddad had 45 million [votes]. That's 76 million Brazilians who did not vote for Bolsonaro.

Therefore, the Brazilian society is divided. Even the results of the election, from what I could see from previous opinion polls, it was clear

that those supporting Haddad's platform are the ones who earn less, between two and five minimum wages, those with low level of education. And clearly the richer and wealthier voted for Bolsonaro.

But there is also a clear difference between regions in the elections. When we look at Brazil's map of elected governors, 12 progressive candidates who won [out of 27 states] support people's organizations, from Pará state [in the North] to governor Renato Casagrande in Espírito Santo [in the Southeast]. The Northeast and all that area in the Amazon are a hub of resistance in terms of regions, which clearly shows the people there do not want to follow the paths of Bolsonaro's fascist project.

Finally, as a brief analysis, everyone is talking about it, aside from the election results, last week consolidated a political victory for the left and people's movements. We had numerous demonstrations of all organized forces. Unions, intellectuals, students, universities.

Never in Brazil's history have there been more than 500,000 women all over the country, in 360 cities, taking to the streets to say "Not Him," "No to Fascism," so I believe the analysis is that it is not a political defeat. We suffered an electoral defeat, but we leave this process with closer ties and organized capacity and strength to resist this professed fascist offensive.

**Despite Bolsonaro's braggers, we know the institutions have limits. He has said that he plans to designate the MST and the MTST [Homeless Workers' Movement] as terrorist organizations. Do you see this as a real possibility?**

I think Bolsonaro's government will be similar, if we draw a parallel, to the Pinochet regime in Chile. Not in the way he came into power, but for its fascist nature. It's a government that will continuously use repression, threats, intimidation. It will unleash

the reactionary forces that exist in society. On the other hand, they will try to give complete freedom to capital in a neoliberal program. However, that formula is not viable, it does not provide social cohesion, and it does not solve the population's basic problems.

Brazil is going through a serious economic crisis, which is the root of all this process. Since 2012, the country has not grown. And as it does not grow, as it does not produce new wealth, social, economic, and environment problems increase.

With his ultra neoliberal program, where he only stands for the interests of capital, he may help banks, make banks continue to profit, help transnational corporations to hijack what is left of what we have here, but, as they will not solve people's real problems in terms of employment, income, labor right, pension, land, housing, that will intensify contradictions.

That will lead to social chaos that will allow people's movements to go back to the offensive line, with mass mobilizations. And, deep down, in addition to what is in the Constitution - which he will not respect very much -, what will protect us is, not running to hide. What will protect us is the ability to bring the people together, keep fighting with the masses in defense of rights, of improving living conditions. And people's mobilizations will protect our activists and leaders. Let us not be scared. The contradictions they will have will be much bigger than the possibility of repressing with impunity.

**There is another struggle, which is related to the elections, but has been put on the back burner since the election process started: ex-president [Luiz Inácio] Lula [da Silva]'s illegal, unfair imprisonment. What is the prospect for people's movements for this other battlefield?**

We've all seen what happened, president Lula was kidnapped by capital through a court system that is completely subservient to these interests. He was illegally imprisoned. There are many others - not only politicians, but ordinary citizens - who remain free pending trial, as stipulated in the Constitution, which only allows imprisoning someone after their conviction is no longer appealable.

In Lula's case, it is still pending trial with the Superior Court of Justice (STJ) and then with the Supreme Court. Then they did not let him run for president when he was registered as a candidate. Other 1,400 candidates could run with the same conditions as Lula, but he was banned from running, and finally, they forbid him from speaking [with the media], while any ordinary criminal [in jail] can grant an interview to Globo [Brazil's largest media conglomerate]. But they banned Lula from speaking to the people. Actually, they knew Lula is the major people's leader that could bring massive forces together with the Brazilian people, and that would lead to a debate about projects. It's clear that part of Lula's voters, who believe in Lula, are workers who were tricked by a campaign based on lies, and they ended up voting for Bolsonaro.

For the left and people's movements, we have a huge challenge from now on, to organize people's committees all over Brazil, organize a truly massive movement, and organize a truly international campaign for his release and his nomination for next year's Nobel Peace Prize, as this is the campaign spearheaded by Nobel Peace Prize [laureate] Adolfo Pérez Esquivel.

We are going to have a huge task to organize these committees and make this campaign a people's banner. Obviously, there will be other challenges that we, the left and people's movements, will have to face in the coming cycle in order to come together as it has been suggested, we have to turn the Brazil Popular Front, the People Without Fear Front, maybe bring everyone together in a People's

Antifascist Front for Democracy.

It could be an even broader instrument than Brazil Popular Front itself. We have a lot to fight for from now on. This is class struggle. It looks like a soccer game in a long tournament. You lose match, but can win another one. But the key is to gather strengths and organize our people. That's what changes the correlation of forces.

### **How is the left after this battle? Parties, movements, Fernando Haddad himself?**

I was personally engaged, as well as our movement and the Brazil Popular Front, and what we clearly witnessed over the past two weeks gave us new encouragement, a new interpretation to what is happening in Brazil. A lot of people were mobilized, regardless of parties and movements, which means there is energy in society and we will be able to resist fascism.

Now we cannot reduce things to parties and keep wondering what will happen with one or the other. It's not about people. Class struggle is about class, so it's the dynamic of class struggle that changes the correlation of forces and that will solve people's problems. Amid class struggles, new leaders and new references emerge. We cannot cling onto these interpretations.

"Haddad has the means [to run] in 2022." "Ciro has the means." "Ciro Gomes did well in the first round, but then he threw all that away when he decided not to get involved in the political battle in the second round. "Ciro's [political] lifespan lasted three weeks. That's how class struggle works.

I think the left and people's movements who have very specific causes, women, housing, land, unions, we have to be collected and look into things, with critical assessments and self-criticism, and restore our historical working class agenda to face the challenges of life and history.

This campaign made one thing clear:

we have to resume grassroots work - Mano Brown [renowned Brazilian rapper] said it and he was right. If we had had the patience, over the past six months, to go door to door on the outskirts, where the poor people live, I believe we would have had a different election result. People understand, but no one is going there to talk to them.

We have to understand that what changes the correlation of forces is not a speech, is not a WhatsApp message. What changes the correlation of forces and solve people's real-life problems is organizing the working class and the people to engage in mass struggle and solve their problems.

If we lack jobs, we have to fight against unemployment. If LP gas prices are too high, we have to fight to lower them. That requires mass struggle. Likewise, the left stopped its political education work. People were tricked by the lies of Bolsonaro's WhatsApp campaign. Why? Because there is no political awareness to know what is a lie and what was part of that game. That can only be tackled with political and ideological education. When people are aware and have knowledge, they can make up their own minds and don't wait for anyone's guidance.

We also have to further strengthen the beautiful work you do here at Brasil de Fato, with a radio station, newspaper, compact newspaper, online. Strengthen our people's outlets. Now is the perfect time for it.

Finally, we have to start a new conversation in the country, about a new sovereign project for an equal, fair society. Because this campaign was based on lies and on the fight against lies, we did not talk about platforms, we did not talk about a structural project for the country. Now we have to bring that conversation back, and rebuild, over the next months and years, a people's unity around a project. A platform of solutions for the people, because the government will not do that.

[Mst](#)

# The Irish government needs to stop protecting property developers and start looking out for its people

9 November 2018, by [Oliver Eagleton](#)

Ten years after the financial crash, Irish politicians have doubled down on the narrative of ‘recovery’. The centre-right Fine Gael government claims to have beaten the recession and established a ‘Republic of Opportunity’, wresting economic sovereignty back from the IMF after years of punitive austerity. Yet, with the country’s official homeless population reaching 10,000, an acute housing crisis threatens to undercut this optimism.

Rent prices have risen by 12 percent this year, with the nationwide average now at €1,261 per month. The rate of illegal evictions has jumped to five per week, but the government refuses to pass anti-eviction legislation or fund social housing projects. Instead, it sits on 350 vast – yet dormant – sites with no plans to develop them, and allows 198,000 homes across the country to lie empty. In lieu of affordable accommodation it has approved the construction of 79 luxury hotels throughout Dublin, and in 2017 it sold one of the most apposite areas for social housing to private energy company, which proceeded to build an expensive, inefficient and environmentally damaging incinerator.

Meanwhile, the state’s Land Development Agency – tasked with tackling the crisis – has stated that only one in ten new homes will be social housing, whereas 60 percent will be reserved for commercial development. Last month, it did nothing to stop the sale of 15,000 mortgages to Cerberus Capital and Lone Star – vulture funds with a history of enforcing mass evictions and accelerating gentrification. Ireland’s largest housing charity has estimated that at least one family is pushed into homelessness every day by these disastrous policies.

Fine Gael’s strategy is motivated by its desire to attract foreign investment (which would decline with the introduction of stricter rent controls or tenants’ rights) and its middle-class voter base, many of whom are single-ownership landlords. So far, the party has shown that these imperatives outweigh the costs of a protracted housing shortage.

But now, as a network of housing activists begins a campaign of large-scale civil disobedience, the government’s complacency is being tested. On August 7, a coalition of student groups, migrant organisations and renters’ unions gathered in Dublin. With the support of leftist parties such as Solidarity and People Before Profit, they marched to an inner-city property from which 40 Brazilian migrants were evicted last May, gained entry, faced down police officers, and reclaimed the vacant house.

Their occupation marked the inception of Take Back the City – an activist movement which is fighting the effects of FG’s manufactured crisis by seizing buildings and combatting evictions across Ireland. Although the rate of tenants defying eviction orders has risen by 25 percent in 2018 alone, these acts of resistance have been mostly local and spontaneous. TBTC promises to translate such energies into a coordinated political intervention. They have pledged to target empty properties until the state brings them into public ownership through compulsory purchase orders, builds social housing to meet demand, and caps rent prices at 20 percent of income.

Once a court injunction ordered the protesters to leave the inner-city house, they staged a sit-in at the offices of housing minister Eoghan Murphy and occupied a second

property on Frederick Street. This time, TBTC’s widespread endorsements from charities, community groups and local residents emboldened them to ignore the landlord’s eviction notice. They stayed there for three weeks, with hundreds turning out to support their efforts, until a gang of security guards descended on the residence. These private-hire enforcers wore balaclavas and used electric saws to force their way inside the house, assisted by a police riot squad and public order unit. One activist had his hand cut open with an angle grinder after being thrown down the building’s stairwell. Another suffered a concussion and tissue damage to his neck after he was assaulted by five policemen. By the end of the evening, six activists were arrested and four needed medical attention. This pattern repeated itself over the following days, as militarised police units were deployed to turf two families out of their homes. When footage surfaced of the riot squad violently beating Frederick Street occupiers, the Irish justice minister announced plans to criminalise the filming of policemen.

This intimidation of peaceful protestors is reminiscent of Ireland’s anti-water charge movement, which saw 188 people arrested between 2014 and 2015 for campaigning against the new domestic tax. Last year, 23 anti-water charge activists narrowly escaped life sentences for ‘false imprisonment’ after they led a sit-down protest in front of a government minister’s car. But just as this shamelessly political policing galvanised popular support for Ireland’s anti-austerity movement (forcing the government to abandon its water charges policy), the attacks on housing activists have been equally counterproductive.

Since the Frederick Street eviction,

support for TBTC has surged, with rallies attracting thousands and offshoots emerging in Belfast and Waterford. Numerous families in precarious accommodation have contacted TBTC, which has been leading grassroots resistance to evictions, providing occupation workshops and raising awareness in the national media. At the time of writing, a countrywide ‘day of action’ is underway, with dozens of marches calling on the government to tackle the crisis. Activists have occupied two new houses in the capital, and assembled for a major

demonstration on October 3.

If TBTC maintains this momentum, it could increase support for Ireland’s progressive parties, reshape the housing debate, and pressure councils to issue compulsory purchase orders. Last week, an independent report commissioned by the Department of Finance recommended the urgent use of Compulsory Purchase Orders to buy up vacant homes. FG has already introduced legislation to increase the state’s capacity to forcibly acquire property. The problem is that this measure is often used to transfer privately owned farmland to

multinational corporations; when it comes to housing rough sleepers, the government is far more reluctant to exercise this right.

As pictures of homeless families sleeping in police stations circulate on social media, the government’s steadfast protection of landlords is stoking public anger. Only through TBTC’s brave and inspiring use of direct action – supplemented by parliamentary efforts from left parties – can we challenge this alliance.

[Red Pepper](#)

## A Letter to Brazil, From a Friend Living Under Duterte

8 November 2018, by [Walden Bello](#)

Dear friends:

I’m writing to you on the eve of your going to the polls to determine the future of your wonderful country.

I think it’s no exaggeration to say that the fate of Brazil hangs in the balance. It’s also hardly hyperbole to assert that the election will have massive geopolitical significance, since if Brazil votes for Jair Bolsonaro, the extreme right will have come to power in the Western Hemisphere’s two biggest countries. Like many of you, I’m hoping for a miracle that will prevent Bolsonaro from coming to power.

When I visited Rio and São Paulo in 2015, I observed that the political rallies mounted by the opposition to then-President Dilma Rousseff contained a small but vocal fringe element calling for a return to military rule. Little did I suspect then that that fringe would expand into a massive electoral movement in support of a self-proclaimed advocate of strongman rule.

### The Amazing

### Twins

It’s amazing to many of us here in the Philippines how similar Bolsonaro is to our president, Rodrigo Duterte.

Duterte has spoken about how he wished he’d raped a dead female missionary. Bolsonaro told a fellow member of parliament that she didn’t *deserve* to be raped by him. Duterte has spoken in admiration of our dead dictator Ferdinand Marcos and decreed his burial at our heroes’ cemetery. Bolsonaro has depicted the military rule in Brazil over three decades ago as a golden age.

A friend asked me a few days ago, only partly in jest, “Is there a virus going around that produces horrible boils like Bolsonaro and Duterte?” I thought about her metaphor and thought there was something to it, but rather than being the result of a communicable disease, I think that authoritarian figures emerge from internal suppuration in the body politic.

Before I go further on this, however, let me just give you a sense of what’s happening in the Philippines, since this could very well prefigure Brazil’s future if Bolsonaro gains power, as the polls now indicate, on October 28.

### Is This Your Future?

Our lovely Philippine president promised to “fatten the fish in Manila Bay” with the cadavers of criminals if he got elected.

He may not have delivered on his promises to improve the economic and social welfare of our people, like ending contractual employment or banning mining, but on this promise he has delivered: The number of the alleged drug users and dealers he’s murdered, mainly through extrajudicial execution, is between 7,000 and 20,000, the actual figure being toward the higher end.

Even if we just take the lower end, the number of those killed would place the Duterte anti-drug campaign as one of the most murderous enterprises in the recent history of Southeast Asia – with first place going to the Khmer Rouge genocide in the late 1970s, and second place going to the Indonesian military’s massacre of Communists and alleged Communists in the mid-1960s, both of which claimed hundreds of thousands of victims.

Underpinning Duterte's anti-drug campaign is an eliminationist perspective based on the president's view that shabu "the local term for meth" "would shrink the brain of a person, and therefore he is no longer viable for rehabilitation." These people are the "living, walking dead," who are "of no use to society anymore."

Elsewhere, I have described Duterte's approach as "blitzkrieg fascism," in contrast to "creeping fascism." In the latter, the fascist leader begins with violations of civil and political rights, followed by the lunge for absolute power, after which follows indiscriminate repression.

Duterte reverses the process. He starts with massive, indiscriminate repression "that is, the killing with impunity of thousands of alleged drug users" "leaving the violation of civil liberties and the grab for total power as mopping-up operations in a political atmosphere where fear, coupled with a desire to cozy up to a strongman, has largely neutralized the opposition.

In the past 30 months, the president has removed the chief justice of the Supreme Court; achieved undisputed control of both the House of Representatives and the Senate; imprisoned his chief political opponent in the Senate and is about to imprison another; forced most of the media into self-censorship mode; gained the support of most of the rank and file of the military and the acquiescence of the high command; and put a third of the country under martial law. There's been little outcry from the public on these moves; indeed, his popularity ratings remain quite high.

This last item, the continuing popularity of the president, leads me to the subject of what Brazil and the Philippines have in common.

One cannot explain the emergence of Duterte without taking into account the terrible disappointment with the record of the liberal democratic republic that came into existence with the ouster of Marcos in 1986.

A deadly stranglehold on the democratic process came about owing to several developments. One was the

elites' hijacking of the electoral process as a mechanism to compete among themselves while perpetuating their collective class rule over the people. Another was the combination of the absence of land reform and the imposition of Washington's neoliberal structural adjustment policies, which produced continuing high levels of inequality and poverty.

When you add to this witch's brew a third ingredient "the failure of successive administrations to address the crime problem" "then it's not surprising that more than 16 million voters, some 40 percent of the electorate, saw the tough-guy, authoritarian approach that Duterte had cultivated for 30-plus years as mayor of the southern frontier city of Davao as precisely what the country needed.

As the novelist Anthony Doerr said of pre-war Germans, Filipinos were "desperate for someone who can put things right." Our middle class, it must be pointed out, was the sector that was most enthusiastic about Duterte, the same middle class that 30 years earlier had led the ouster of the dictator Ferdinand Marcos.

## **Brazil's Dreary Descent**

Brazil has experienced the same dreary descent into democratic crisis. Liberal democratic politics became mainly a means by which the entrenched elites protected their wealth and power.

Even the progressive President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva dared not put in place measures of social and economic reform, but tried to perform an end run with a state-financed cash distribution program for the poor, the Bolsa Família, which, while alleviating poverty significantly, did little to change Brazil's status as one of Latin America's most unequal countries. Also, through anti-democratic parliamentary shenanigans and judicial manipulation, the center and center right impeached Rousseff and made sure Lula would not again become president.

Corruption there has been as pervasive as in the Philippines, but here one cannot simply blame the right. One of the biggest disappointments for progressives, not only in my country but globally, was the way your Workers' Party (PT), which had caught people's imagination in the 1990s as an insurgent force against corruption, became itself enmeshed in corruption, notably the \$3.7 billion Petrobras kickback scandal, in which so many members of the PT were involved.

In this regard, a pro-PT friend told me during my visit to São Paulo, "The PT rose to power as a party known for our militant stance against corruption. Now we're made to look as if we invented corruption." I can understand his dismay, but the PT has only itself to blame. Engaging in corrupt practices, even when the aim is to gain votes to push progressive legislation in parliament, as some PT supporters justified it, ends up destroying the moral compass of a progressive party.

When you add to right-wing intransigence and the PT's succumbing to the system's pervasive corruption the failure to meaningfully address escalating drug-related crime, especially in Rio and other major cities, then Bolsonaro, like Duterte, becomes less of an enigma.

You know all of this, of course, but I simply repeat it to underline the fact that liberal democracy has lost the confidence of vast numbers of people in both our countries, and they have voted "or are about to vote" "into power people who have essentially promised to end it. If there's anything pro-fascist forces the world over have learned from Hitler, it's that one can come to power through democratic means. But once in power, make sure you never provide the electorate with the opportunity to snatch it from you.

## **How Do We Respond to the Rise of the**

# Extreme Right?

How can the left respond?

The first line of defense for pro-democracy forces is to ensure that the extreme right doesn't come to power. Having failed that, we now face the challenge of how to remove these forces from power—of course, through democratic means.

Allow me to propose some steps that we can take to regenerate the appeal of democracy.

First of all, the times call for a progressive politics that goes beyond demanding a return to the old discredited elite democracy, where equality was purely formal, to one that has as its centerpiece the achievement of genuine economic and social equality, whether one calls this socialism or post-capitalism. This program must call for stronger state and civil society management of the economy—one that moves it beyond capitalism, with a strong dose of radical income and wealth redistribution, while championing democratic processes, secularism, diversity, and the rights of minorities.

Secondly, while a great many people, especially from the middle classes, share what we might call, to borrow a term from Antonio Gramsci, an “active consensus” supporting authoritarian politics, a great many of the poorer

and more marginalized classes either keep the extreme right at arm's length or limit their support to “passive consensus.” We must focus our counter-mobilization on these sectors.

Third, while we must strive to educate the public on the roots of crime and people's participation in the drug trade in poverty and inequality, democrats must not be seen as insensitive to people's concerns about crime. We may not agree with his solution, but we cannot ignore Thomas Hobbes's insight that one of the reasons the state came into existence was in response to people's desire for protection of their life and limb. Moreover, while it is the middle class that is most afraid of crime, it is the poor who suffer most from it.

Fourth, right-wing parties and personalities, like Duterte and Bolsonaro, are strongly misogynistic at a time when women's struggles for their rights are on the ascendant throughout the world. So it is very critical that women in great numbers play a central role in the politics of the anti-fascist movement. Women, when mobilized, are one of the strongest bulwarks against fascism.

Fifth, many progressive and liberal personalities and parties that played key roles in the old liberal democratic political arena have been discredited, along with the liberal democratic system. The Philippine liberal icons Cory Aquino and her son Noynoy Aquino belong to the past, just like the

PT figures Dilma and Lula. Thus, while we must construct broad coalitions, it is imperative that new faces, new political formations, and new ideas come to represent the progressive response to fascism. The youth, one must emphasize, are a central battlefield in this conflict, and we're losing ground among them.

Let me end this missive by repeating what I told a recent conference on human rights here in Manila:

The world we are in today is one that is pretty much the same as in the 1930s, when forces of the extreme right are on the offensive and the fate of progressive democratic politics hangs in the balance. The last few years have buried Francis Fukuyama's deterministic idea that liberal democracy was every country's future, just as before Fukuyama momentous events buried the equally deterministic notion that socialism was the wave of the future. The future emerges from the clash of movements and ideas, one that is marked by great uncertainty and contingency. There is no guarantee that our side will prevail, but we will certainly lose unless we resist in a way that combines determination, passion, and wisdom.

In solidarity,

Walden Bello, Manila, Oct. 25, 2018

[The Nation](#)

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# The new undesirables

7 November 2018

Presiding over an otherwise vacuous British Conservative conference characterized by empty “techno-utopian babble”, Sajid Javid and Theresa May did announce one big policy intended to rally its base, the electorate and, in turn, the nation. [1] [2] [3] This was the formal call to end free movement within the EU, decreeing in turn a new threshold in how immigration to the country would be regulated. A threshold that would “harmonize” European

migration with the restrictions that non-EU citizens are already subject to.

Whilst not unexpected, this move does represent a drastic restriction on immigration. That such a move has been enacted by a Tory party so committed to emphatically capitalist visions of a post-Brexit future does raise accordingly intriguing questions about what we might describe as being a “neoliberal nationalism”? Indulging a shameless bout of ad hominem, it could for instance be

pointed out that Javid was formerly an illustrious member of the investment banking classes. [4]

## Globalisation and the Nation State

At first glance, this seems like a paradox. After all, it's frequently suggested that neoliberalism involves a departure from the nation-state: that globalisation renders the borders of

nation states increasingly defunct. All that shall prevail is the free movement of capital, goods and labour. All else that was solid shall melt into air, including, therefore, the nation. [5]

But the thesis that globalisation sounds the death knell for the nation-state is at best overstated and at worst entirely misplaced. It is already erroneous in the simple sense that the nation-state's role is in fact elevated within neoliberalism. It acts as the security regime that polices and mops up the human debris of a capitalism unleashed; and as the state that facilitates businesses' access to domains they've hitherto been denied (public sector provisions) or have found difficult to access (certain 'hot' geopolitical zones). [6]

But the 'globalism' conceit is also misguided in the obvious sense that we do not have anything resembling the free movement of capital, goods and labour. [7] As has been widely documented, the movement of capital and goods are subject to conditions that routinely privilege the more politically powerful states. [8] And as regards labour, it is resoundingly the case that a principle of free movement does not prevail anywhere. Indeed, contrary to certain commonsensical impressions, even within the EU certain mobility, employment and welfare controls are occasionally implemented: restrictions on how work can be applied for, how welfare can be accessed, and how free movement can be delayed upon a new country's accession to the Union.

We need to question therefore the idea that neoliberalism is the untethering of capitalism from the nation-state. Already, we sense in the above a more complex and contrary understanding. One where nationalism is always in play, and where the outsider and the border are as relevant as they have ever been.

## Nationalism and neoliberal visions

The word 'nationalism' covers all manner of sins. However, in terms of the recurring definition that permeates Valluvan's previous

thinking, nationalism is, in the final instance, the recourse to politically understanding a society's perceived problems through extensive *negative* reference to the presence of those who do not belong - outsiders who are often construed along their many ethnoracial guises. [9] In this context, we need to consider how neoliberalism is endowed with certain moral precepts that designate these outsiders undesirable, ominous, and a problem to be formally addressed and/or thwarted.

There are two principle aspects to this. The first involves already established racialised non-white communities being further 'pathologised' - falling short when appraised against the 'moral-economic' logic unique to a neoliberal temperament. [10] These are the stereotypes that routinely represent certain minority groups as work-shy, prone to welfare dependency, susceptible to nihilistically destructive lifestyles, and/or as groups who remain excessively attached to 'traditional' values that do not accord with the neoliberal call to freedom. It is however the second principle, concerning the wider anxieties regarding immigration as a specific political issue, where this recent policy move by the Tory government is best deciphered.

One might expect champions of neoliberalism to back freedom of movement, with their supposed focus on the 'free exchange' of market goods and labour power in a dynamic, muscular system. But the way in which neoliberal ideologues suggest immigration ought to be handled runs counter to some key intuitive understandings of the neoliberal programme. Neoliberalism is *not*, contrary to popular understandings, pro-immigration. Any permissiveness that it allows for regarding immigration is instead filtered through a moral appraisal respective to neoliberalism's guiding virtues of competition, entrepreneurialism and the gloriously 'responsible' self: an imperative to filter ideal migrants that was gestured at by the late social critic, Bauman, in his inventive 'vagabond' versus 'tourist' heuristic. [11] The real world example that best reveals this perhaps abstract

assertion is the increased embrace of what is often termed an 'Australian' styled 'points-system': free movement not for people per se, but for the kind of labour force deemed most valuable according to certain moralised economic principles. Javid/May's recent proposal is simply another iteration of this wider regard for the 'points-system' as political panacea.

Even robust anti-immigration nationalists like Nigel Farage have praised this technocratic ideal of 'metric-power', demonstrating in turn the powerful appeal that a neoliberal understanding of migration has in our political mainstream. [12] [13] Other attitudes grounded in notions of obligations or even compassion might be sourced from other competing, even conservative, ethical repertoires - for instance, a remade legacy of Church teachings regarding hospitality, refuge and sanctuary. [14] But these are forfeited for the overriding interests of economic utility. Conservatism, nationalism, and neoliberalism become, in this simple move, one and the same thing.

## The points system

The sociologist Will Davies has offered a typically generative commentary on why the 'work-permit' driven points system appears so attractive to so many merchants of anti-immigration alarmism. Davies notes how a point-system agenda attempts to clarify and simplify the terms by which immigration is to be regimented. [15] "The points system is to calculate different human capabilities according to the economic metaphor of human capital." Each prospective migrant must be evaluated solely on the terms of how much value they add. This is of course an appeal to economic technocracy, formally deferring to the decision-making powers of a market-responsive state bureaucracy. But, in order to gain popular traction, this system of assigning migrants 'value' does invariably rely on more popular notions of who counts as valuable and desirable.

The first obvious casualty of any such point system being further normalized

as the guiding logic of immigration policy, is the idea of the refugee or asylum seeker. They are no longer someone inherently deserving of support or compassion, irrespective of the impact on the 'host' nation. They are simply another possible vehicle of labour power.

This in turn summarily buries any even residual vestige of a more radical 'no borders' principle. It is here we can begin to grasp how neoliberals can mobilize a particularly candid, matter-of-fact dehumanization when considering immigrants (and, by further implication, refugees). Consider here Ian Duncan Smith's remark, in the context of a 2017 Newsnight interview about Brexit and immigration, that 'we [have] had a huge number of very low-value, low-skilled people coming through the EU'. [16] (In an anticipation of this week's announcements, he went on to explain that exiting the European Union would now allow for a more purpose built filtering of who would in fact be given entry to the United Kingdom.)

The broader doublespeak in these and similar statements is supposed to imply that the Conservative's new immigration policy represents a progressive pivot *towards* the world in its entirety, dissolving the difference between EU and non-EU citizen. But the logic evoked here does in fact further embed the undesirable status of the world's darker-skinned peoples. In the course of excluding the European migrant, in their different guises of poverty (the ones being repulsed here are after all the overworked, underpaid and routinely shamed Poles, Sicilians, Romanians, and Roma alike), the precise political logic that it normalizes carries with it a particularly resonant denigration of those also already racialised as non-white. When seen along the terms of optimal economic citizenry - those who are able to convey the ideals of independence, enterprise and offer premium skills - darker-skinned people and the stereotypes fixed to their bodies already constitute a symbolic antithesis. [17]

It is for precisely this reason that migrant rights groups are often reluctant to press an economic

argument about the contribution of immigrants - that immigrants leave us with 'fiscal gains/surpluses', etc. [18] These interventions leave intact an analysis of human worth in instrumental, mechanistic, and economic terms - which risks playing into a longer history of treating racialised minorities not as humans, but as machines or beasts of burden to be put to work for profit. Economic talk of utility and contribution simply reinvents that cruel history in the dryly mechanical terms of the neoliberal age.

A more precise attentiveness to the arguments put forth by figurehead neoliberals is revealing here. These are the action-oriented thinkers who call for the nation to be streamlined, noting how immigration, whilst itself permissible, must be subject to vital neoliberal checks. [19] Who is in fact being given entry, what do they do once here, and what should the upper limit be. For instance, even though the more frenzied Right railed *against* Carswell for somehow being 'pro-immigration', what Carswell was routinely advocating was precisely this surgically neoliberal resolution to the ills of immigration:

'Britain needs a point-based immigration system, similar to that in Australia. An eVisitor visa scheme would make it easy for legitimate visitors and tourists to enter the UK. Parliament would annually agree on a quota of those that would be allowed to permanently settle - and in time acquire citizenship. Places would be allocated on the basis of the skills that those first generation Britons would bring with them.' [20]

This is scarcely a pro-immigration position. It is instead a call to direct migrant flows by the sole criteria of the alleged human capital gains that the nation-as-enterprise would most require.

Similarly, it is to be noted that the global trade utopians in the Empire 2.0 mould who champion Brexit - Liam Fox, Ian Duncan Smith, Michael Gove, Nigel Farage, and Boris Johnson - all speak about the need to make Britain a slick engine of capital accumulation. [21] Central to that aspiration is the management and

restructuring of its core stock (i.e. the national population). Needless to say, the destitute Eritreans, Pakistanis, and Arabs who've braved the unforgiving seas hardly elicit confidence when seen against these broader criteria of shiny capitalist success.

Of course, this new neoliberal politics of the nation does make certain symbolic exceptions to reflect contemporary shifts in concentrations of global capital - not least a recoding that recognizes the rise of China and East Asia more broadly alongside a carefully calibrated reading of say India's economic possibility. These are no longer homogeneously painted as a hive of menacing foreign perils, but in more complicated terms as also a wellspring of future growth and trade. Their people might still be racialised and subject to border policing and 'compliant' environment policies in the UK, but their pockets are invitingly deep. It is for instance interesting that Carswell, in the course of his anti-EU, pro points-system vision for immigration, made explicit rhetorical mention of India and Singapore.

'Since 400 million EU citizens have a right to come, lowering immigration numbers means making it harder for non-EU people to enter the UK. [22] Thus do we prioritise a EU citizen with a criminal record over someone with a doctorate from India or Singapore. It makes no sense.'

Such ostensible openness to a world, one that refuses to privilege Europe, has a notionally inviting ring to it. It is also a resounding and pernicious misnomer (see for instance May's refusal to relax visa regulations during a 'charm' offensive visit in India). [23] Whilst a select Indian doctor, Ghanaian IT engineer and Chinese investor might be picked off selectively (via a points system), they represent anomalies in the popular neoliberal gaze - wherein the bulk of those who threaten to allegedly burst through the port patrols at Calais or ask for student visas that might allow them to work do not satisfy even the most basic neoliberal approximation of an attractive skills portfolio or character matrix.

Decades of popular racism and its constitutive stereotypes render these various migrant figures, and their corresponding racialised communities who are already resident here, unwanted and disposable. Under this global points-system regime, a start-up investor from Qatar might indeed be courted to shower a London property development with money and lifestyle. But, by the same reckoning, the impoverished migrant worker and their predecessors who might be already living in the same area become all the more expendable. These are racialised figures that can only be found fundamentally wanting when subject to a neoliberal moral appraisal. Some weasel words by its Tory proponents, and their apologists, about the new immigration policy now being fairly squared across the world will accordingly not do. The policy summarily excludes the European poor. And it emphatically rejects the wretched of the earth.

Red Pepper

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# Practical internationalism: solidarity in Germany with the Algerian anti-colonial liberation struggle

6 November 2018, by [Hans Peiffer](#), [Manuel Kellner](#)

**In the 1950s and early 1960s, with your comrades from the section of the Fourth International in**

**Germany, you put solidarity with the Algerian revolution at the centre of internationalist work.**

**Why?**

The Algerian war of liberation was

from 1955 to 1962, and from 1956 we did this solidarity work. The Algerian revolution confirmed in a striking way our political appreciation of the rise of the anti-colonial movement in the poor and dependent countries.

In our view, liberation from colonial domination would have to evolve towards social liberation, towards the overthrow of the capitalist system. Our internationalist convictions meant that these struggles would start in different countries in order to finally lead to a process of socialist revolution on a global scale.

The World Congress of the Fourth International adopted a resolution referring to the "dialectic of the three sectors of the world revolution" in which, in equal parts, anti-colonial liberation, the socialist revolution in the rich capitalist countries and the political revolution against bureaucratic domination in non-capitalist countries (the USSR and the Eastern European countries) were seen as battlegrounds, and it was said that successes in one of these sectors would have positive effects for movements in the other two sectors.

This was in contradiction with the position of the official Communist Parties, as the Soviet leadership subordinated the interests of the world revolution to the great power interests of its own state, within the framework of the so-called "peaceful coexistence" which meant supporting revolutionary movements outside the territory it controlled only in exceptional cases and in limited ways.

In the case of the Algerian revolution, the conditions for acquiring full state independence seemed to us particularly favourable, because the right wing of the FLN, represented by Ferhat Abbas, which aspired only to partial sovereignty, preserving imperialist domination, was relatively weaker than the wing aspiring to full independence at all levels. Our view was therefore that the struggle for independence could, to the extent of its success, lead to a broader social revolution.

Moreover, Germany, the neighbouring country of France, of the colonial power, had particularly close relations

with that state within the European Economic Community. This implied a specific responsibility for German revolutionaries to support the fighters for Algerian liberation.

**You were in contact with senior FLN members and you supported the FLN at the material and organizational levels.**

The office of the Fourth International was in Paris at the time. Through this office it was then not complicated for us to make contact with leading members of the FLN. In France, they were of course forced to work underground, and we often helped them to cross the borders to consult with us in Germany. Part of our solidarity work in Germany was also illegal; the transport of documents important for their work, the exchange of information between militants in Germany and France, the transport of money.

For example, in February 1960, one million Deutsche Mark (DM) was withdrawn from a Deutsche Bank subsidiary in Frankfurt/M to finance the work of the FLN in Germany. This money was transported in a suitcase by our leading member, Georg Jungclas, known as "Schorsch" and the leader of the Fourth International, Michel Raptis, known as "Pablo". The distrust of the bank's employees was great, given the extraordinary amount for a cash withdrawal. But at the end of the day the operation was successful. It is from this episode that the title of the book *Kofferträger* ("Suitcase Carriers"), published later, was drawn. [1] Our comrade Jakob Moneta (1914-2009) was at that time a social attaché at the German Embassy in Paris and this position allowed him to provide various services of transmission of mail.

We also helped to receive, store and transmit weapons for the Algerian war of liberation. To do this we used a garage belonging to our comrade Helene Jungclas, known as "Leni", the wife of "Schorsch".

**You published the magazine *Freies Algerien* ("Free Algeria") and carried out other public activities of solidarity.**

The work of legal solidarity for the Algerian revolution in Germany was for us just as important as the work of clandestine support. To explain the aspirations of the Algerian liberation struggle in the German workers' movement and the German public in general and to propagate them, we published a magazine, *Freies Algerien*, which appeared from 1958 to 1962. There were 22 issues in all, each of eight A4 pages.

In this review, among other things, we called for the donation of money to the FLN to support its liberation struggle. There were articles on Algerian history and reality, on the course of the war in Algeria, information on activities of solidarity with the struggle in France and Germany, including activities within the trade unions of the DGB (Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund) federation, the youth of the DGB and the left wing of the Social Democratic SPD as well as the Falken (Falcons, a youth organization linked to the SPD) and the Naturfreunde (Friends of Nature, an organization linked to the labour movement). We also published policy papers, FLN positions and interviews with FLN leaders. Often these texts were taken from *El Mujahid*, the organ of the FLN. For all this, we had to do a lot of research and translation work. The packaging and dispatch of the magazine were carried out and organized by the Cologne comrades of the German section of the Fourth International.

In public and in the mass organizations of the workers' movement in which we were active, we were doing propaganda, organising public solidarity meetings, providing speakers, distributing publications from the FLN, proposing resolutions of solidarity with the Algerian liberation struggle. Especially in the youth organisations of the workers' movement, we continually succeeded in putting the Algerian liberation struggle on the agenda. In the factories, in which we worked at that time, we also distributed our magazine *Freies Algerien*.

At the demonstration of May 1, 1958 in Cologne, we presented for the first time the flag of the FLN, which our

comrade "Leni" had sewn the day before. We walked in the demonstration waving this banner and shouting "Freiheit für Algerien!" ("Freedom for Algeria"). We then often brandished this flag, also in other cities, during other public meetings and events.

In November 1958 a meeting between French President Charles de Gaulle and the West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer was held in Bad Kreuznach (Rhineland-Palatinate). Our comrades "Schorsch", Michy Beinert and Helmut Schauer arrived with an FLN banner attached to a Volkswagen "Beetle" with the inscription "Freiheit für Algerien!". Reactionary bourgeois journalists tore up the banner and the flag. But our comrades also distributed a postcard of solidarity calling for support for solidarity activities: "May 1, 1958 demonstration of young workers in Cologne, solidarity, aid for Algeria". For distributing this postcard, the three comrades were arrested by the police, but they were released fairly quickly.

On 1 November 1959, on the fifth anniversary of the beginning of the Algerian uprising, we deposited a wreath in commemoration of the victims of colonial domination in Algeria in Cologne. We were about twenty comrades. I wanted to deliver a speech. Then two members of the plainclothes political police who had hid behind a bush arrested me. I was detained for several hours at the police station. They wanted to submit me to questioning, but I refused to answer them. After a few hours, they released me. The local Cologne press reported on my arrest by publishing photos where the faces of the two plainclothes police officers were well identifiable (without being concealed by a black bar). The leaders of the Cologne police were very upset, because after that, these two men could no longer serve as plainclothes policemen.

### **You also raised money for the FLN?**

But yes, of course, I've already talked about it. We called for the FLN to be supported with financial donations and we received a little bit of it. But we were a small organization and our

opportunities to raise money were not very large, especially in comparison with mass organizations or, more importantly, with the sums that governments could have given. In this field, our contribution was therefore rather modest.

But we also helped to obtain spare parts and accessories for the production of weapons. For example, "Schorsch" found chemical substances in Denmark, the funding of which was provided by the FLN itself.

### **You also worked in a weapons factory in Morocco and helped to manufacture weapons for the FLN.**

In the years 1957-58 the French colonial power was getting better and better at cutting off the FLN's arms supply lines. Because of this, the project to produce weapons ourselves had been developed in Morocco, which became formally independent of France in 1956, in the hinterland of the ALN (the armed organization of the FLN), which could, at the time, circulate freely in this neighbouring country of Algeria

The FLN/NLA therefore addressed Michel Raptis, known as "Pablo", a Greek comrade who was at that time Secretary of the Bureau and the most important leader of the Fourth International (after independence, he was an adviser to the Algerian government and Ben Bella). With Schorsch Jungclas, Raptis organized the mobilization of volunteers in the Fourth International organizations and their supporters to make possible the production of weapons in several locations in Morocco. That was a success, and it was important for the FLN's struggle.

Myself, I worked in 1960 for six months at one of these weapons factories in Morocco. There, we produced mostly machine guns and grenade launchers for the FLN's struggle. ALN fighters took care of our protection. Alongside comrades from various countries, there were also skilled Algerian workers residing in France in this factory.

### **What experiences do you find most important in this work?**

The relationship between Algerian skilled workers and colleagues from foreign countries was good and very cordial, despite linguistic barriers and cultural differences. Militants from the Fourth International came from different countries: Argentina, Venezuela, France, the Netherlands, Greece, England and Germany.

This experience of understanding and international cooperation for solidarity in the fight against oppression and exploitation and for a better world was very important for all the comrades present, both for the Algerian workers and for us other activists from other countries. National and cultural differences were in the background as part of this solidarity cooperation, and everyone was burning to learn from colleagues in other countries and to pass on their know-how.

We spent our leisure time together, playing football for example, but we also often discussed politics and exchanged our experiences. Today, where human beings from different countries, continents and cultural spheres are drawn against each other by the dominant classes and their political powers and relays in the name of religions and other ideologies, it seems all the more important to organize new experiences of internationalism lived intensely among similar lines.

That is why I am still active in the ranks of the Fourth International and I strive to pass on my experiences to the new generations. An experience of major importance in this sense seems to be our work in solidarity with the Algerian struggle for independence of that era.

In conclusion, I would like to say to the Algerian workers and youth that the Algerian revolution, if it has achieved state independence, has nevertheless stopped halfway: it remains economically dependent on imperialism, and the power of the owners of big capital remains unbroken. I can only imagine the completion of the Algerian revolution as a socialist revolution.

# Solidarity With The Latin American Migrant Caravan Headed for the U.S.

5 November 2018, by [Alliance of Middle Eastern and North African Socialists](#)

We, the Alliance of Middle Eastern Socialists, express our solidarity with the caravan of migrant/refugee families and individuals who are coming to the United States border from Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala, fleeing poverty, violence, persecution and authoritarian regimes. We understand their pain and suffering, their hopes and aspirations.

The current caravan of 7000 and more is in many ways similar to the caravans of millions of refugees that have fled Syria since 2015 to escape the destruction of the Syrian revolution by the criminal Assad regime, its backers, Russia and Iran, other imperialist powers as well as counter-revolutionary forces such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda. Even though the Obama administration and now the Trump administration have claimed to be opposed to the Assad regime, they never supported the Syrian revolution but wanted the continuation of the Assad regime with or without Assad in order to guarantee what they called "stability" in the region. Furthermore, in the name of bombing ISIS, the U.S. army has killed several thousand innocent civilians in both Syria and Iraq. As a result of attacks by the Assad regime, its allies, and all the forces mentioned, half the population of Syria or 12 million is now either internally displaced or living as

refugees in other countries.

The refugee crisis that we see today around the world is the largest since World War II. It encompasses not only Middle Easterners and Latin Americans but also Africans fleeing poverty, persecution, war, and South and East Asians, especially Rohingya Muslims, who have been the victims of a campaign of genocide by the Myanmar military government.

In all these cases, we see refugees being dehumanized and treated as "the other" and the enemy.

The real enemy and the main cause of the growing refugee crisis however is capitalism and its system of oppression which promotes exploitation, injustice, inequality, alienation, war, and uses racism, Islamophobia, patriarchy, sexism, homophobia, and anti-Semitism to prevent the majority suffering from the ills of capitalism from coming together and creating a humanist alternative to capitalism.

We Middle Eastern and Latin American socialists have to admit that the so-called anti- U.S. imperialist governments, but in reality authoritarian and capitalist states in Latin America and the Middle East, are part of the problem. They have used an anti-imperialist language to cover over their exploitation of the masses.

In the U.S., Trump uses the language of opposition to free trade and globalization to demonize workers in other countries who are coming here as refugees and in search of a better life. How can we challenge this?

Socialists need to clarify that opposing neoliberalism as a form of capitalism does not mean opposing the free movement of peoples across borders. In order to oppose capitalist globalization, an exploitative and oppressive system, we need to reach out to refugees and migrants fleeing poverty and injustice. We need to develop international networks of communication and solidarity to challenge the dehumanization and alienation that is at the root of capitalism and its system of oppression, whether private or state based.

Faced with the current simultaneous attacks on Blacks, Latinos, women, gays, lesbians, transgender people, Muslims and Jews, we cannot separate the struggles against racism, white supremacy, neofascism, sexism, homophobia, Islamophobia and anti-Semitism from the struggle against capitalism and vice versa.

We Middle Eastern and Latin American socialists need each other in that effort. As part of that effort, we express our solidarity with our sisters and brothers in the migrant caravan.

## The Caravan "Crisis" – Myth and Facts

5 November 2018, by [Solidarity Steering Committee](#)

It's a myth, of course, that the refugees are an "invasion force" coming to infiltrate the United States

"illegally." Quite the contrary, they want to reach regular ports of entry and make their applications for asylum

– a right they have under U.S. and international law.

Asylum seekers who make illegal

crossings, and immediately surrender to border patrols, have been doing so only because the Trump administration has cynically closed the legal entry points “leaving refugees stranded for days, or forced to turn back into the hands of predatory gangs. (On these atrocities, see an interview with attorney Jennifer Harbury on Democracy Now.) [1]

It’s also a myth that the caravan, or immigration “legal” or otherwise, are any kind of real “crisis” for the United States. That’s just a part of the stream of racist lies spewing from the mouth of Donald Trump and rightwing media “while Democratic politicians mostly run away from the issue.

There is, however, a very real crisis in the countries of Central America. Honduras, where the largest number of the current caravan refugees come from, is a stark illustration. People are traveling together for protection from the threat of thieves and sex

traffickers. Before that, parents have been sending their children, unaccompanied, on the deadly dangerous northward journey to escape the clutches of gangs demanding that kids join them, or die.

The crisis in Honduras didn’t just “happen.” You can say it’s been brought to us by the two most recent U.S. presidential candidates, Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump.

In 2009 a coup was staged that overthrew the elected president of Honduras, Manuel Zelaya, mainly because his reform policies threatened the landed oligarchs of that country. That coup, warmly applauded and emboldened at the time by U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, effectively returned Honduras to the rule of death squads and drug lords. One result was the murder of the leading indigenous human rights and environmental activist Berta Cáceres,

and many others.

In 2017, the Honduran people voted the coup president Juan Orlando Hernandez out of office. On election night, the vote count was “suspended” and when it resumed, the results were “flipped” to put him on top - a blatant, open fraud that was approved and duly congratulated by the Trump White House. No wonder that the popular enthusiasm of the Honduran people has given way to despair and organized flight.

The United States created this crisis. Let the refugees in!

*November 2, 2008*

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# The Google Walkout: An International Working-Class Movement

4 November 2018, by [Dan La Botz](#)

Signs on placards or on the walls read “Don’t Be Evil,” or “Times Up Tech,” One woman wrote, “My outrage won’t fit on this sign.” Nearly everywhere workers held short rallies where women read the movement’s demands. Looking at the many photos and videos of the walkouts and rallies, as well as reading the Google workers comments, it is clear that this was a mass working class movement. [1] [2]

The walkout, which lasted several hours in many places, represents one of the largest international worker job actions in modern labor history. Seldom in recent decades have workers either unionized or non-union workers such as these engaged in such a global, crossborder action. It is also the largest action by tech workers in the United States since this industry was born a few decades ago. And it is one of the most significant expansions of the #MeToo movement

into workplace. The Google walkout’s international character, the fact that these are highly skilled technical workers, and that this was a fight for women make this an event of enormous significance for the labor movement.

Google workers have carried out a strike and out of it, created union “if not yet a union. Will the Google workers recognize this as a labor movement? And will organized labor in the United States be able to embrace Google workers who do so without smothering or strangling them in the conservative labor bureaucracy? Whatever happens, we have had a demonstration of a grassroots workers movement of tremendous potential.

## Sparked by Anger

## at the Company Policies

A New York Times investigation into Google’s handling of sexual misconduct cases sparked the protests. The Times reported that after Google management of learned of credible allegations of sexual harassment by Andy Rubin, the developer of the Android phone “including one of forced oral sex” he left the company with a \$90 million settlement. [3] [4] Rubin denies the allegations. Google’s women workers, many indignant and some infuriated by the reports, joined by their male coworkers, began to organize over the issue, and then issued the call for the walkout.

The Google workers demanded:

• An end to forced arbitration in

harassment and discrimination cases; a commitment to end pay and opportunity inequity;

â€¢ A sexual harassment transparency report disclosed to the public;

â€¢ A clear inclusive process for reporting sexual misconduct safely and anonymously;

â€¢ The chief diversity officer to report directly to the CEO and make recommendations to the board of directors;

â€¢ The appointment of an employee representative to the Google board.

## The Company's Response

Sundar Pichai, Google's CEO, attempted to identify himself and the company with the walkout. Speaking by web conference at the DealBook Conference in New York, Pichai said,

"Obviously, it's been a difficult time. There's anger and frustration in the company. We all feel it. I feel it. At Google we set a high bar and we didn't live up to our expectations."

Pichai attempted to deflect anger about the Rubin settlement in 2014 by arguing that the company had made important strikes since then. In his conference appearance, Pichai insisted Google had taken measures to tackle sexual misconduct across the company since Rubin left in 2014. "Let me be clear, these incidents are from a few years ago. We have always as a company, and it's been important to me ... that we draw a hard line on in appropriate behavior," he said. He alluded to 48 employees who had been terminated after allegations of sexual misconduct, among them 13 senior executives. "But," he conceded, "moments like this show we didn't always get it right."

Google's workers seem unlikely to be assuaged by Pichai's words. They're

demanding to have a voice on the board, new policies, and no more nonsense. At one Google site the protestors could be heard chanting, "Women's rights are workers' rights." Googlers have entered the workers' movement. And hopefully they will help to change it.

November 3, 2018

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# Québec solidaire prepares to confront a new government of austerity and social and ethnic polarization QS caucus 2018

3 November 2018, by [Richard Fidler](#)

The oath of allegiance to the Queen, required by the British North America Act (now the Constitution Act) in order to take their seats in the Assembly, was conducted behind closed doors, presided over by the secretary of the Assembly.

In a public ceremony held in the former chamber of the Legislative Council (the appointed upper house abolished in the 1960s) the 10 MNAs pledged their "real" loyalty "to the people of Quebec." Then, to the acclaim of many supporters of Quebec sovereignty, both QS and non-QS, they promised to introduce a bill to abolish the oath to the Queen, described by the party's co-leader Manon Massé as "anti-democratic" and "archaic."

Although symbolic, it was an auspicious gesture reflecting Québec solidaire's determination to present a real progressive alternative to the new government of the Coalition Avenir Québec, sworn into office the following day.

## A repositioning of Quebec's economic elite

Winning 37.4% of the popular vote â€" 25.8% of the eligible electorate, given the high abstention rate â€" the Coalition Avenir Québec holds 74 seats, a comfortable majority of more than 60% of the 125 in the National

Assembly. Once again, the undemocratic first-past-the-post electoral system produces a result quite unrepresentative of the voters' choices. Doubts are widespread, therefore, that the CAQ will adhere to its pre-election pledge to institute some form of proportional representation which, had it applied to the October 1 results, would have held it to minority government status. There is less doubt, however, about how the CAQ will use its parliamentary majority to implement its unabashedly pro-business and ethnically divisive program.

Founded seven years ago, the party is an amalgam of former Liberal and PQ supporters assembled around a core element, the former right-wing Action

démocratique du Québec (ADQ), which split from the Quebec Liberal party in the early 1990s in the wake of the demise of the Meech Lake attempt at constitutional reform. It supports some vaguely articulated form of Quebec autonomy but not independence. The CAQ is very much the instrument of François Legault, a former Parti Québécois minister and before that a prominent businessman, founder and CEO of Air Transat. He personally selected the party's candidates. At least 32 of the party's deputies "43% of its caucus" are from the business and managerial milieu. [1]. And well over half of Legault's cabinet, announced October 18, are business people or journalists in mainstream or business media.

The party is the product of a repositioning of the nationalist sector of Quebec's economic elite after the narrow defeat of the 1995 referendum on sovereignty, writes Bernard Rioux, an editor of the left-wing on-line journal *Presse-toi À gauche*. [2] Successive PQ leaderships led the way, postponing their hopes for a sovereign Quebec to an indefinite future while aligning their party increasingly with neoliberal globalization, support of free trade and privatization of public enterprises, establishment of fee-based public services, reduced taxation of the wealthy, continued exploitation of fossil fuels and concentration of media ownership. Legault, having abandoned the PQ, simply aligned his new party with the federalism of the vast majority of the Québécois bourgeoisie, which sees the Quebec government as its prime instrument for gaining a strengthened role within the Canadian ruling class and through it with global capitalism.

Rioux summarizes the CAQ's agenda for its four-year mandate. Among promised measures:

• Privatization of public services, especially in education and health care, for example by continuing the expansion of private clinics allowed by both PQ and Liberal governments.

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• Greater inequality in the distribution of wealth through tax reductions for business.

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• Support for gas and oil exploration and exploitation, and rejection of any plan for environmental transition to renewable energy sources. Legault supported the Energy East pipeline project, cancelled for now following mass protests.

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• Regressive nationalism that caters to white male identity. During the election campaign Legault promised a 20% reduction in immigration quotas and threatened to expel applicants for citizenship who failed to pass tests on language skills and Quebec "values" within three years. Since the election he has promised to prevent state employees in "positions of authority," including teachers and not just cops, prison guards and judges, from wearing signs denoting religious belief. In this he expands the scope of the Liberal government's Bill 62, which prohibited citizens from wearing face coverings when receiving or dispensing public services "a measure clearly aimed at Muslim women in particular. (Now law, it has yet to take effect pending a constitutional challenge.)

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The CAQ promises a pro-business orientation that will wean Quebec off federal "equalization" payments that offset relatively low government revenues with income derived from higher-income provinces such as the petro-province Alberta. At present Quebec gets the lion's share of such payments, almost \$12 billion or about 62% of the total Ottawa gives the six have-not provinces. Overall federal transfer payments, including cash for health care and social programs, total \$24.3 billion, or 22% of Quebec government revenues in the current fiscal year. However, the CAQ's fiscal framework, tabled during the election campaign, projected federal transfers of \$25.6 billion in 2022-23, the final year of the CAQ's mandate. Indeed, it is hard to see how significant progress in reducing this dependency on federal transfers can be achieved without huge cutbacks in government expenditures. The CAQ promises to cut at least 5,000 employees from the public payroll, but that might be only a beginning.

The CAQ's right-wing anti-immigrant populism has some parallels with the

new parties that have emerged in Europe in recent years, as well as with the Trump conquest of the Republican party. These formations are most successful in channeling working-class voters' discontent over their declining economic status toward a scapegoating of immigrants and other vulnerable populations that distracts from the deepening capitalist austerity they implement. Their electoral success reflects the failure of the old reformist and social-democratic left to present a credible alternative to the rightward drift of capitalist politics.

However, the CAQ does differ somewhat from other right-wing populist formations in Canada such as Doug Ford's "Progressive Conservatives" in Ontario or Jason Kenney's merging of Wild Rose with his Conservatives in Alberta. These parties are known more for their virulent rejection of environmental regulation, verging on climate change denialism, than for attacks on immigrants and ethnic minorities. Canadian capitalists generally encourage limited immigration in order to compensate for the shortages in skilled and low-wage labour they face. The CAQ's seeming indifference to climate change resonates with its Ontario and Alberta counterparts, while its focus on ethnic identity and immigration issues is its main difference with the Quebec Liberals. The Canadian ruling class as a whole can congratulate itself in any case on the emergence for the first time since the Parti québécois was founded 50 years ago of a new party of governmental alternance that is not "separatist."

As for the Quebec Liberal party (PLQ), the other party of alternance, it suffered the worst election defeat in its 151 year history. Although the party won 25% of the popular vote, it won only 12% of the vote among the Francophone electorate. It finished fourth in 33 of the 125 ridings and behind Québec solidaire in more than 40. [3] Almost all of its 29 MNAs represent predominantly Anglophone and Allophone (immigrant) ridings on the island of Montréal. Ironically, the main cause of voter hostility to the party related to the harsh austerity program it applied, particularly in the first three years of its mandate. Since

Legault's CAQ promises much the same, popular discontent may rise before long.

## Shift to the left within the pro-sovereignty spectrum

The combined PQ-QS share of the popular vote (respectively 17% and 16%) was roughly equivalent to the percentage of Québécois supporting independence in recent years, and about the same as in the previous election, in 2014. But it represented a sea change within the movement.

For the PQ it was the worst result since the party was founded 50 years ago; for QS, it was a major breakthrough. QS gained 7 seats, 4 at the expense of the PQ and the other 3 from the PLQ. The PQ was wiped off the map in Montréal, while QS is not only the second party there but won four seats outside the metropolis: two in Quebec City, one each in Sherbrooke and Abitibi. Although the two parties each have ten seats (the PQ picked up one on a recount, and will rank third in the National Assembly ahead of QS because its popular vote is larger) the PQ is still a major force within the pro-sovereignty movement. It boasts 80,000 members compared with QS's 20,000. The PQ ranked second in the popular vote in 34 ridings, QS was second in 14.

However, QS was stronger among voters under the age of 35, according to exit polls. And when the Quebec Electoral Officer sponsored a mock vote during the campaign in more than a thousand high schools and youth organizations, QS won the most support among the 81,375 young people who voted: 26.15%, followed by the PLQ and CAQ (just over 22% each) and the PQ (15.37%). [4]

Some PQ leaders, realizing the party's error in its venomous attacks on QS during the election campaign, are now openly suggesting their party should seek "convergence" with QS. And they are not alone.

Claudette Carbonneau, a former

president of the CSN union central and now chair of OUI Québec, a united front of sovereigntist parties and trade unions, said an exploration of prospects for convergence should be high on the agenda of the Assises nationales de concertation (national joint-action conference) the coalition plans to hold soon on the future of the independence project:

"If QS and the PQ don't find an original way to combine their efforts around some essential issues, they will condemn themselves to a certain marginality with respect to climate change, the urgency of a massive reinvestment in our public services, without overlooking their responsibility to bring about independence, indissociable from these objectives." [5]

Pierre Dubuc, editor of the left publication *L'aut'journal*, goes further. Acknowledging "the strategic adroitness of QS" in bringing independence to the fore and giving it substance through the fusion with Option nationale last year, [6] Dubuc deplores the fact that once again the division of the independentist and progressive vote paved the way to putting the Right in power. [7] Failing the advent of proportional representation, he says, "it is overridingly important that independentists and progressives unite within a single party," albeit one that "allows the expression of different tendencies." Dubuc thinks the PQ decline began when Pauline Marois in 2010 banned the presence of a left-wing "political club" within the PQ, the SPQ Libre, which he founded and led as its Secretary. Dubuc has operated politically for almost two decades as a harsh critic of Québec solidaire and its predecessors for "splitting the independence vote." He still cannot bring himself to acknowledge the futility of his own attempts to reform the Parti québécois.

The election results reopened a deep division within the Bloc Québécois, the pro-sovereignty party in the federal Parliament. The call by the party's MPs to support the PQ candidates, and not QS, [8] led one member of the BQ national bureau to resign. Jocelyn Beaudoin, the membership

representative on the bureau, charged in a letter to the party's executive that the Bloc had decided not to choose between the parties in the election "knowing that if it did it would divide the members." It was a major lack of political judgment, he said. "At the first opportunity we might have had... to adopt a constructive approach, the party shoots itself in its foot."

The Bloc's vice-president Gilbert Paquette, for his part, charged that the MPs had committed a "strategic error" in not first consulting the party's leadership bodies before issuing their statement. That statement, and Gilles Duceppe's attack on Manon Massé, had "reinforced the impression that the Bloc sees itself as a kind of appendix of the Parti québécois," Paquette charged in a letter to the BQ executive and MPs. Both Paquette and Beaudoin, the latter a former president of Option nationale, were strong supporters of Martine Ouellet, the BQ leader forced out by the party's MPs earlier this year because of her insistence that the MPs fight for Quebec independence and not be content with defending "the interests of Quebec" in the federal Parliament.

The Bloc is currently trying to refound itself in a process due to conclude in January that was seen as a first stage toward a reunification of sovereigntist forces both federally and provincially. [9]

No doubt pressure will continue to build on QS to coalesce with the PQ. But for now QS is focused on constituting itself as "the real official opposition" to the CAQ government. "We are a new political movement... and that can't be reduced to inter-relations with the PQ," said QS spokesman Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois. "QS is not a sub-category of the PQ," he told a press conference. "So all the mathematical calculations where you try to add the votes are without foundation." [10]

André Frappier, a prominent QS member and former president of the Montréal postal workers (CUPW), puts the issue of QS-PQ relations in historical context: [11]

"In 2017 we decided as we had done

two times previously to run candidates in all the ridings because what we defend is based on the peoples' struggles for social justice and control of their destiny, and for a Quebec that belongs to those who inhabit it. [12].

"The PQ abandoned this terrain a long time ago, and has proved this a hundred times. Its anti-union laws in the 1980s, the neoliberal austerity of [PQ premier Lucien] Bouchard in 1999, the secret contracts [PQ premier Pauline] Marois' government signed with [the oil company] Petrolia on Anticosti Island and the return to zero deficit of [PQ finance minister] Marceau, the cuts in social assistance by [PQ minister] Agnès Maltais, the total abdication of that government when dealing with the mining companies, and its continuation of [Liberal premier Jean] Charest's Plan Nord. And to complete things, the charter of Quebec values that divided Quebec in order to win votes, and stigmatized an entire part of the population and Muslim community in particular."

Talk about a convergence between the PQ and QS is essentially a false debate, Frappier argues.

"The change in alternance of the neoliberal parties with the election of the CAQ and the failure of the PQ in relation to the project of Quebec sovereignty presents us with an inescapable observation. The future of Quebec society can only proceed through a political party that is linked to social mobilization for control of its fate and in opposition to right-wing policies. The only party in the running is now Québec solidaire.

"The social change needed to fight against control by the oil companies, multinationals, financial institutions, against corruption and tax evasion, can only be realized by a left party like Québec solidaire. It requires as well the mobilization of the population conscious of the role it must play, of the trade unions, of the women's movements, the ethnocultural communities, environmental groups and other social movements....

"We must emerge from the cycle of defensive struggles and defeats that have characterized politics for

decades."

## And "a party of the streets"?

With its ten MNAs, Québec solidaire will be focused very much in coming months on shaping its parliamentary intervention, developing expertise in various policy fields, and learning how to make its principles and program relevant and understandable to a much wider audience. However, as Frappier argues, the party also faces a huge challenge in developing the other component of "a party of the ballot box and the streets." Much can be said about this, but here I will simply draw attention to three texts, available on line, that can help to orient this needed debate in QS.

**"Parliamentary action and social struggles - The experience of the Portuguese Left Bloc"** is an important contribution by a founding leader of a party that has many similarities to Québec solidaire in a country not much larger than Québec. Francisco Louçã is a Left Bloc member of the Portuguese parliament and a former Bloc candidate in the 2005 presidential election. With just over 10% of the popular vote, the party has 19 seats in the Assembly of the Republic under a system of proportional representation. [13]

By electing MPs, Louçã writes, "the Bloc has taken a leap forward, becoming a reference party for the popular struggle." Institutional representation requires close attention to developing technical skills and professional teams to support the party's parliamentary work, which now includes municipal action. But "this has a significant cost: a significant part of our most experienced activists are taken up in institutional involvement."

"These institutional machines therefore absorb much of our activist capacity. It is never clear in advance whether or not this will lead to adaptation to the system, but this institutional standardization generates pressure in this direction. These possible forms of adaptation may be varied: resignation to very limited

measures in the name of maintaining the positions acquired; refusal to criticise the institutions or their management in the name of possible future agreements; the idea that politics advances in small steps; fear of public opinion which leads to not presenting a socialist alternative which leads to other institutional forms; desire to avoid the risk of conflict for fear of losing. All these forms of adaptation distort a left-wing policy based on popular representation."

The Bloc has made little progress on representation within the social movements, he adds. It needs to build organized forces in the unions and workplaces, and figure out how to get young people to "join us and find ways of training and political action." And Louçã explains the relation between this question and the struggle for socialism, which the Bloc sets as its goal.

"Capitalism is a mode of production, of reproduction of the conditions of production and of representation of the conditions of production and reproduction. This definition underlines the essential point: there is no capitalist production without the system reproducing itself and for this reason it mobilizes its representation, which is based on the alienation of work, social relations, life, relations with nature, but also in the alienation of electoral representation and voting. The separation of the worker from the product of their work, from the control of their life, from their social and even electoral power is the foundation of the conformism on which bourgeois hegemony is based. That is why left-wing politics is a social movement and aims to strengthen itself in the perspective that its ideas and proposals also have an impact on elections; that is why it does not give any ground in the dispute over hegemony; that is precisely why the socialist strategy can only triumph in the social struggle....

"[T]he success of this electoral option does not demonstrate that representation is a sufficient condition for socialist politics. Designed as an instrument to accumulate forces, it is useful. Conceived as a form of conditioning and loss of critical sense

and social alternative, it fails. The left only exists through social protagonism, through conflict or strategic intervention in class struggle. In other words, it needs to be part of the class movement. This is how it always measures its strengths.”

What this can mean in terms of Québec solidaire is discussed in a recent article by Alexandre Leduc, a staff advisor to the Quebec Federation of Labour and a leader of QS in the Montréal riding of Hochelaga-Maisonneuve who was elected to the National Assembly on October 1. [14] Leduc identifies two major aspects to the work of a QS riding association: support and animation [which can be translated as initiation].

“The role of support,” he writes, “is aimed essentially at publicizing and participating in actions already organized by groups or citizens’ coalitions. This requires little organizational effort but it does not help to put the party up front.” However, the examples of support he presents later in his piece include such activities as preparing briefs on local issues; calling on party members to support artists fighting eviction from their loft studio; joining in the massive protests of parents who formed human chains around public schools to defend their facilities against government cutbacks and urging these citizens to continue the fight in other areas such as health care and culture; and joining with workers facing factory closures in a fight to reopen them as worker cooperatives. It is unclear why Leduc thinks the party as such gains little credibility or support from such efforts.

“The role of animation,” he writes, “allows an association to organize political action on its own basis and subsequently reap the benefits. In this way, the association builds its credibility among the groups and citizens in its neighborhood or region.” As an example, he cites the association’s circulation during the 2012 provincial election campaign of a petition to get the public transit agency to improve service on two bus routes, an action undertaken in the absence of any mobilization on this issue by others. The petition was

successful, and the service was improved.

The distinction between support and animation seems a bit formal to me. The common ingredient in both is the party’s identification of a goal that advances or defends social policy or a public service, a willingness to work towards that goal, and wherever possible to work with others in fighting for it. Where other forces are involved, the party can also link the immediate goal with its broader program of fundamental social change.

Finally, I think QS would benefit greatly by reviving and debating a draft proposal on “Québec Solidaire and the social movements” that was submitted by the QS Policy Commission for discussion at a party convention a few years ago; it was then withdrawn from the convention agenda ostensibly for later debate but since then shelved indefinitely. I think it presents some valuable ideas on how the party might structure its intervention in the social movements, including the trade unions. It is appended to the following article: [“Quebec election: A seismic shift within the independence movement?”](#)

## Program development

On two key programmatic issues, in my view, Québec solidaire needs to give further thought. One is its strategy for Quebec independence. While progress has been made on the linkage between the party’s program “its projet de société” and Quebec sovereignty, and with it the mandate of its proposed Constituent Assembly, there is still no thinking about the strategic issues facing the movement during the Assembly’s proceedings and following a successful referendum ratifying the draft constitution elaborated by the Assembly. QS needs to confront the reality of a federal state determined to thwart any moves that challenge its integrity. This is a complex issue and I will address it in a subsequent article. It should be on the agenda in the general review and updating of the QS program that the party plans to carry

out in 2019.

An immediate issue however is the need to correct the party position on secularism.

Quebec’s new premier, François Legault, threatens to implement as a priority the CAQ’s plans to prohibit the wearing of “religious signs” among state-employed persons in positions of “coercion” (cops, prosecutors, judges and jail guards) or “authority” (including elementary and secondary school teachers, and perhaps others).

Québec solidaire has waffled on this issue for many years. The party claims to adhere to the principle of separation of church and state. In 2009, the resolution adopted at the party’s first convention on program stated that the party distinguishes between the need for state neutrality toward religious belief or lack of belief, and the freedom of individuals “to express their own convictions in a context that favours exchange and dialogue.” As I reported at the time:

“Delegates voted in favour of allowing ‘state agents’ (employees and officials) to wear religious insignia (a crucifix, hijab, whatever), but added some caveats that leave much to subjective interpretation and enforcement by employers: ‘provided they are not used as instruments of proselytism’ and do not interfere with their droit de réserve (duty of discretion), or ‘impede the performance of the duties or contravene safety standards.’ Delegates rejected other resolutions that would impose no such restrictions or, alternatively, would impose secular dress codes on civil servants, and they rejected as well a proposal to refer the whole issue for further decision at a later convention.” [15]

While these caveats were problematic, QS leaders in subsequent years went further and began adapting to other parties’ attempts to impose dress codes not only on state employees but on citizens from minority ethnic communities.

In 2011, the sole QS member of the National Assembly, Amir Khadir, voted with the other parties for a PQ motion to ban Sikhs from entering the

legislature because their ceremonial kirpans were to be deemed “weapons.” [16] Ironically, the motion was prompted by an incident a month earlier when four members of the World Sikh Organization were turned back by security guards when they came to testify to a parliamentary committee in favour of the right of Muslim women to wear face coverings when receiving government services “which a Liberal government bill then under debate would have denied.

In 2013, when the National Assembly was again debating the PQ government’s now-infamous Charter of Values, QS leader Françoise David tabled a bill that if adopted would have enacted a “charter of secularism” that banned “state agents” from wearing signs indicative of personal religious belief. David described this as an “historic compromise.”

Although in 2017 the three QS MNAs voted against the Liberal government’s bill 62 prohibiting citizens from wearing face coverings when receiving or dispensing public services, they called instead for adoption of a “genuine” charter of secularism. QS leader Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois said their position was a “compromise” that takes a harder line than the Liberals in that it would bar people who wear overt religious symbols such as turbans and hijabs from working as judges, jail guards and cops. [17]

These positions, which clearly violate the QS program adopted by the membership, have prompted a number of protests from defenders of civil liberties, including a very strong “Open Letter” addressed to the party by a number of QS members including prominent human rights lawyers. [18]

Unfortunately, during their swearing-in on October 17, the new QS MNAs told reporters that they intend to support the “compromise” that would ban religious signs for persons in authority. [19] But at least one “Catherine Dorion, representing Québec-Taschereau” said later she was not really sure what her position would be.

These issues should be on the agenda of the QS National Committee meeting, now scheduled to take place December 7-9. The party’s reaction to Legault’s forthcoming legislation will be an early test of the adherence to basic democratic principles of its new parliamentary deputation.

October 20, 2018

[Life on the left](#)

## Footnotes

[1] Shannon Pécourt, “Un gouvernement de ‘patrons,’” [Le Devoir](#), October 15, 2018

[2] <http://www.pressegauche.org/Victoire-de-la-CAQ-recomposition-du-champ-politique-et-les-defis-de-la-nouvelle>

[3] Konrad Yakabuski, “Quebec’s Liberals contemplate a future on the fringes,” [The Globe & Mail](#), October 18, 2018.

[4] <https://www.electionsquebec.qc.ca/provinciales/fr/resultats-electeurs-herbe.php>

[5] “Leçons et perspectives pour indépendantistes,” [Le Devoir](#), October 6, 2018

[6] See “Québec solidaire clarifies its support for independence but new debates lie ahead,” [Life on the Left](#), December 12, 2017

[7] <http://www.lautjournal.info/20181005/autopsie-dune-defaite-annoncee>

[8] See Richard Fidler, “Solidaires Score Important Breakthrough in Quebec Election,” [The Bullet](#), October 2, 2018. When former BQ leader Gilles Duceppe attacked QS leader Manon Massé, the Quebec City BQ endorsed two QS candidates who were former leaders of Option nationale, now a part of Québec solidaire. The Bloc’s MPs then issued an

endorsement of the PQ candidates.

[9] Marie Vastel, “La bisbille au Bloc continue,” [Le Devoir](#), October 5, 2018 : “The Quebec election revealed that the cleavage between the two camps that opposed the BQ old guard to Martine Ouellet and her allies “closer to the ON legacy with their desire to do more in promoting sovereignty” had not completely disappeared.”

[10] <https://www.ledevoir.com/politique/quebec/538203/qs-pq>

[11] <http://www.pressegauche.org/Quebec-solidaire-une-victoire-historique>

[12] See “Québec solidaire: No to an electoral pact with the PQ, Yes to a united front against austerity, for energy transition and for independence,” [Life on the Left](#), May 28, 2017

[13] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Left\\_Bloc](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Left_Bloc)

[14] <https://www.cahiersdusocialisme.org/soutien-ou-animation-quel-role-pour-une-association-de-circonscription-dun-parti-politique-comme-quebec-solidaire/>

[15] “Quebec left debates strategy for independence,”

[16] <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/kirpan-banned-at-que-national-assembly-1.1113333>

[17] <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/bill-62-niquab-burqa-liberal-coalition-avenir-quebec-parti-quebeois-quebec-solidaire-1.4389899>

[18] <http://www.pressegauche.org/Lettre-ouverte-a-QS-mettre-fin-aux-louvolements-sur-les-signes-religieux>

[19] <https://www.ledevoir.com/politique/quebec/539295/qs-prete-serment-a-la-reine-en-cachette>

# Europe's Political Turmoil (Part I)

2 November 2018, by [Peter Drucker](#)

Often the mainstream media act each time as if this roll of the dice will be decisive. Yet it never is.

Sometimes there's good news, sometimes bad. In June 2016 the British referendum to leave the European Union ("Brexit") produced a thin margin for Leave, after a campaign dominated by immigrant bashing and narrow English nationalism.

Last year the pundits heaved a sigh of relief when the Dutch far right Freedom Party only came in second in parliamentary elections in March and an even greater one when neoliberal centrist Emmanuel Macron defeated far right leader Marine Le Pen in the second round of the French presidential election in May.

Since then though, the rise of the far right has continued. The Austrian Freedom Party made big advances in parliamentary elections in October 2017 and secured key positions in a right-wing coalition government.

In an even bigger blow, the German far right, which hadn't passed the threshold for parliamentary representation since the 1950s, won 12.6% of the vote for its current incarnation, Alternative for Germany (AFD), in the Bundestag elections in September 2017. The ensuing, endless negotiations to form a coalition government produced a resurrection of the same deeply unpopular Christian Democratic-Social Democratic "grand coalition" that had just been soundly punished at the polls.

In Italy, the far right League emerged in the March 2018 elections as the biggest party on the right. In a new coalition government with the neither-left-nor-right populist Five Stars Movement, the League secured a dominant position, with its viciously anti-immigrant leader Matteo Salvini as interior minister.

In the Swedish elections in September, the far right Sweden

Democrats again won a record share of the vote as its media image shifted from a party of neo-Nazi losers to a party of fed-up professionals. Although as of this writing Sweden still has no government, the center right has already allied with the far right to vote out the center left government and elect a center right speaker of parliament.

Meanwhile in Eastern Europe, the far right-controlled governments in Poland and Hungary continue to consolidate their hold on power, purging the courts and civic institutions of their opponents, despite ineffectual attempts by the European Union to rein them in. The far right is expected to emerge with a big bloc in the new European Parliament to be elected next May.

## Roots of the Far Right

Mainstream commentators are continually asking, "Has the far right peaked?" Their generally superficial analyses rarely give any reason to suppose it has done so yet.

Analyses usually concede that far right gains reflect suffering by broad swathes of the population, especially after the economic crisis that broke out in 2007-8. The pundits wring their hands a bit about the realities that European societies are steadily growing more unequal and that wages continue to lag behind profits.

Some even admit that the problem didn't start in 2007. Many regions that were once Europe's industrial heartlands have been social wastelands for decades. The devastating effects of Margaret Thatcher's first policies were felt in the 1980s in the North of England — a region where Brexit won a solid majority in 2016.

However, the cracks in the establishment's neoliberal consensus after 2008 were short-lived. Its

offensive soon gathered steam again.

The ideologists turned back to doing what they're paid to do: justifying the status quo. They resurrected the worn-out mantra that after one or two more unavoidable bouts of pain, the neoliberal medicine would finally lift all boats and dry up the breeding grounds for far right politics.

This is the outlook underlying the fresh wave of anti-social "reforms" by French President Macron. These have already led to a sharp fall in his approval ratings, lending credence to the prediction that a vote for Macron in 2017 was a vote for Le Pen next time around.

Even in parts of Europe where the current recovery seems strongest and unemployment is approaching record lows, wages are still not catching up. [1] Nor have cuts to social programs been significantly undone or major housing shortages eased. On the contrary, skyrocketing rents in a number of metropolitan regions are increasing homelessness.

It becomes all too easy for working people to blame immigrants for undercutting their wages, for squeezed small businesspeople to blame immigrant shopkeepers for stealing their business and for the native-born in general to see immigration as a threat to the welfare state. [2]

In less narrowly economic terms, the crisis has undermined many men's sense of masculinity, which they blame on women and LGBTIQ people. National cultures were only firmly established in the 19th century, but have since become fundamental to many Europeans' sense of identity. However they now seem to be under threat from a combination of cosmopolitan neoliberal elites and people from other nations, whether within Europe or beyond.

Muslims, people of color and EU bureaucrats in Brussels make a convenient, composite scapegoat. The

upshot is steady gains across societies for nationalism, racism and reaction, including (invariably male) racist violence on the streets. [3] (3) Politically, this means that in virtually every election where a significant far right party takes part, its share of the vote is a new record high.

Of course, it would make more sense for voters to blame capitalism for their troubles than Muslims or Eurocrats. But sensible explanations on their own don't convince people. Progressive arguments have to be made and pushed by progressive movements. The weakness of labor and other social movements, and therefore of a left alternative to neoliberalism, is one more central factor behind the rise of the far right.

The causes of this weakness go deeper than this article can account for. Not all European trade unions have been consistent proponents of givebacks and class collaboration over the past four decades (though many have).

The left-led Greek unions, for example, launched one general strike after another over the past ten years in opposition to the assaults that have chopped off a quarter of Greek GDP. The French unions, though seriously divided, have provided some outstanding examples of resistance to austerity, on occasion, notably in 1995, beating back proposed neoliberal "reforms."

Right now, however, social resistance to neoliberalism is at low ebb in Europe. Even the most radical labor movements have not yet hit on the right combination of militancy, creative tactics, organizing of new sectors (which demands far-reaching feminist and anti-racist strategizing) and political breakthroughs to win lasting victories.

New radical left parties have not yet managed to forge strong links with labor, and social democracy's ties to the unions frayed long ago. As a result, the European center left has been collapsing and so far the radical left has not been growing proportionately. Much of the far right's electoral gains come from cannibalizing the left's previous base of voters.

## Pasokization

Greece has given a name to the crisis of European social democracy: *Pasokization*.

PASOK, the Greek social democratic party that ruled the country for much of the 40 years after the fall of the colonels' junta in 1974, was virtually destroyed by its complicity in imposing austerity from 2011 to 2015. From 43.9% of the vote in 2009, it emerged with only 4.7% in 2015. Similar decimation has since occurred in one country after another.

The French Socialist Party, which won the presidency and control of both houses of parliament in 2012, won only 6.4% in the first round of last year's presidential election.

The Dutch Labor Party, in 2012 the country's second-biggest party with 24.8% of the vote, was punished last year for its junior role in a neoliberal austerity government by plummeting to 5.7%. Less dramatically, the German Social Democrats fell last year from 25.7% to 20.5%. The Swedish Social Democrats fell this year from 31.0% to 28.3%, their worst result in a century.

In country after country, the center left has responded by trying to steal the far right's thunder. In Denmark the Social Democrats are now even trying to outdo the far right's anti-immigrant proposals.

For a while, far right gains seemed to be mainly at the expense of the center left, with the center right holding its own. Following the Brexit referendum, for example, as the Conservative Party did its best to champion Brexit, the far right UK Independence Party saw its standing in the polls fall.

In the Netherlands last year, the traditional right did a credible job of stealing the Islamophobic and Euroskeptical thunder of the far right Freedom Party, thus keeping the far right in second place.

But this year the German Christian Democrats, identified with Chancellor Angela Merkel's perceived welcoming attitude toward refugees, faced their own electoral thrashing, falling from

41.5% to 32.9%. Center right parties have responded by rushing even further right.

In Germany the most right-leaning component of the Christian Democratic family, the Bavarian Christian Social Union, threatened for weeks to torpedo the new grand coalition unless new restrictions were imposed on refugees (a demand that Merkel and the Social Democrats largely acceded to). Increasingly it seems, in the words of the poet Yeats, "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold." [4]

## Rising Dangers

The long-standing taboo on alliances between the center right and the far right now looks increasingly fragile. Austria broke with it as long ago as 2000.

Already it is plausible to ask, "Suppose that in French and Dutch elections due by 2022, the center parties lose big once more, while the far right and perhaps the radical left gain?" If traditional right-wing politicians have to choose between their supposed commitment to human rights and their rock-solid commitment to neoliberal economics, which way will they go?

Alliances with the traditional right could open up the far right's road to power in a number of additional European countries. At least initially, in that scenario the far right would be somewhat constrained by the ground rules of constitutional systems. But even within constitutional limits, the far right in power could do enormous damage, especially in pushing through much of its racist program.

After all, the United States' virtually unbroken record of 230 years of constitutional rule was compatible with 75 years of African-American enslavement, and another century of African-American and Native American disenfranchisement. Western European governments, even those without any far right ministers, have already shown striking ingenuity in finding legal ways to oppress their own racialized populations.

Ways have been found, for example, to

strip naturalized European citizens of their European nationality, and in some cases to then expel them from Europe. Hundreds or thousands of non-Europeans, some of them refugees under international law, are drowning in the Mediterranean because European governments refuse to allow them entry by normal means of transport.

Denmark's right-wing government, with parliamentary support but no governmental participation by the far right, is now among other things requiring children of non-European origin to spend 25 hours a week out of contact with their own families, so that they can be inculcated in "Danish values," and considering doubling the penalties for crimes committed in legally-demarcated "ghettos." [5]

In some countries building minarets has been banned; in others it's halal meat, recalling campaigns against kosher butchers that were a feature of European pre-World War II anti-Semitism.

At this point we can only imagine how far extreme right ministers could or would go in instituting what Le Pen calls "national preferences:" discrimination in housing and social services against people with one or two non-European parents. And while today's parliamentary far right has not often had its own, open paramilitary branches, fascist and racist thugs already have extraordinary leeway in many parts of Europe to attack and even kill racialized people.

Bourgeois constitutionalism, of course, historically often excluded women and LGBTIQ people. On issues of gender and sexuality, however, the European far right today is sometimes inconsistent, and not always in continuity with earlier fascist traditions. Sara Farris has shown how the French, Italian and Dutch far right sometimes claims to defend European women and LGBTIQ people, even those of immigrant origin, against Muslim men and other men of non-European origin. [6]

At the same time, the far right, in

Western as well as Eastern Europe, has taken up the pope's attack on "gender ideology" and his defense of the traditional bounds of masculine and feminine roles. The Dutch far right Freedom Party is now being challenged from its right by Thierry Baudet's blatantly misogynist Forum for Democracy.

While the Dutch and Scandinavian far right seem to have reconciled themselves to same-sex marriage, Le Pen's National Rally has vowed to roll it back if it comes to power in France, and the far right in Eastern and much of Southern Europe fiercely opposes it.

McCarthyism in the U.S. showed how compatible constitutional rule can be with wholesale attacks on the radical left. So far, in recent years the European far right has not focused its fire much on Marxists, often preferring to target people whom right-wing ideologues call (peculiarly) "cultural Marxists" (meaning advocates of "identity politics"). But it would be foolish for the radical left to imagine itself permanently immune.

Curiously, while wiping out the independent labor movement was historically a top priority of fascism, unions have so far not been particular targets of the contemporary European far right.

In Turkey, for example, amidst the sweeping repression that has hit so much of Turkish society, unions have continued to organize, bargain and sometimes even win concessions by threatening strike action.

But the record of the far right in government shows how foolish unionists would be to count on favorable attitudes from that quarter. Far right parties that flirt with economic populism [7] while they are in opposition almost always show their true, pro-business colors once they arrive in power. Geert Wilders in the Netherlands, for example, who declared before the 2012 elections that not raising the retirement age was his one "non-negotiable demand," dropped it within hours of starting talks on providing parliamentary

support for a right-wing coalition government.

Against the Current

## Footnotes

[1] "The Labour Market: All Work and No Pay," *The Economist*, September 8, 2018

[2] For a case study of this dynamic in Amsterdam, see Paul Mepschen's PhD dissertation, *Everyday Autochtony: Difference, Discontent and the Politics of Home in Amsterdam*, University of Amsterdam, 2016.

[3] See Ivan du Roy and Rachel Knaebel, "En Allemagne, en Italie ou en France, l'extrême droite tue par dizaines," [https://www.bastamag.net/En-Allemagne...](https://www.bastamag.net/En-Allemagne)

[4] William Butler Yeats, "The Second Coming" (1919).

[5] Ellen Barry and Martin Selsoe Sorensen, "In Denmark, Harsh New Laws for Immigrant Ghettoes," *New York Times*, July 1, 2018.

[6] Sara R. Farris, *In the Name of Women's Rights: The Rise of Femonationalism*, Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2017. Farris draws on Jasbir K. Puar's earlier work on "homonationalism" (*Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2007 & 2017), but Puar focuses mainly on the United States and does not write from a Marxist perspective.

[7] Farris (op.cit, pp. 57-77) argues that the currently common practice of referring to far right parties as "populist" places undue weight on formal, stylistic features that these parties share with some parties of the left and center, instead of on the class and social content of their programs.

# The Constitutional Root of Racism

1 November 2018, by [Malik Miah](#)

Yet my answer is still incomplete. The source of institutional racism is rooted in the U.S. Constitution itself.

It is easy to argue that I'm being ahistorical. Look at the progress, even with the zigs and zags. Aren't African Americans better off, even if their net wealth is only a fraction of white people's?

Let's look at how institutional racism was consciously incorporated in the language of the Constitution.

## Original Documents

By the late 1700s the slave trade was on the decline, considered immoral by many educated and enlightened politicians in the United States and Europe. Slavery and racism, however, were powerful economic advantages for increasing property owners' wealth. U.S. capitalist development was built on the enslavement of Africans, benefitting Northern and Southern farmers and traders.

While the Constitution never used the words "slavery" or "slaves," the document did include provisions defending that inhumane institution.

Article I, Section 2, Clause 3 allocated Congressional representation based "on the whole Number of free Persons" and "three fifths of all other Persons." Articles IV and V, and the 12th Amendment (the last added to the Constitution nearly 80 years after the signing of the original document), also addressed the issues of slavery, slave rights and the slave trade without using the words.

The Founding Fathers knew that race and racism lay at the economic base of the new country. The decision to give enhanced political power to the slavocracy was based on a common view held by whites that Africans were inferior to European whites.

Northern delegates were opposed to

chattel slavery, but freely accepted counting slaves as three-fifths of a human to give the slavocracy more representatives in the new Congress. The concepts of federalism and state rights were thus fully tied to slavery, race and racism.

States' Rights for White Supremacy

From 1800 to the 1860s and the crushing defeat of the pro-slavery Confederacy, laws adopted by Congress and rulings of the Supreme Court upheld slavery and racial discrimination. The presidents all supported or accepted the racist ideology.

President Lincoln and the new Republican Party openly opposed slavery and supported its abolition. Although Lincoln was careful in his words because of white racism in the country, the Radical Republicans were for immediate abolition.

There were no civil rights acts adopted before the Civil War. Since then there have been eight laws or amendments to the Constitution for civil rights. Why so many?

States could limit or block the laws under the Constitution's state rights protections labeled as Federalism. The federal government has mainly accommodated the states.

The most important way to allow freedom of choice is the right to vote without restrictions. The United States is the only major bourgeois democratic country that does not have a national voting rights standard. States' rights protection is the source of that denial.

The first post-Civil War civil rights act was the Thirteenth Amendment, which abolished chattel (human) slavery "a great victory for humanity. But it left it up to the states to implement what happens to the freed people. It included the notorious phrase, "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within

the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction." (my emphasis)

What happened next was that former slaveholders sought to bring back de facto slavery. They pushed laws that limited freedom. Freed slaves never received land (a major demand). The right to vote was limited. Freed slaves never received a way to sustain themselves on their own.

Mass incarceration is an ironic byproduct of the exception phrase in the 13th Amendment. Some 20 percent of Black males today cannot vote because of prison records.

## Civil Rights Laws

The first empowering Civil Rights Act, adopted by Congress in 1866, guaranteed the rights of all citizens to make and enforce contracts and to purchase, sell or lease property.

The 14th Amendment was adopted by Congress in 1868 and ratified by the states in 1870. It was written to include and protect the rights of freed slaves. It declared that all persons born or naturalized in the U.S. were citizens, and that any state that denied or abridged the voting right of males over the age of 21 would be subject to proportional reductions in its representation in the U.S. House of Representatives.

The 15th Amendment was adopted in 1869. It forbade any state to deprive a citizen of his vote because of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.

The Reconstruction Civil Rights Acts were adopted in 1870, 1871 (two) and 1875 to enforce the new amendments that nullified sections of the original Constitution.

Among other things, these acts placed all elections in both the North and South under federal control; barred discrimination in public accommodations and on public conveyances on land and water;

prohibited exclusion of African Americans from jury duty; and banned discrimination in voter registration on the basis of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.

They established penalties for interfering with a person's right to vote. That gave federal courts the power to enforce the act and to employ the use of federal marshals and the army to uphold it.

From Counterrevolution to Modern Civil Rights

The counterrevolution began soon after federal troops left the South. It included using extralegal terrorist groups like the Ku Klux Klan to successfully end the possibility of Black equality.

By the late 1880s, the door was shut. Southern states passed "Black Codes" to deny Black rights and dignity, later codified as Jim Crow segregation laws.

It took 75 years to get the next Civil Rights Act in 1957. Seven years later President Johnson signed the 1964 Civil Rights Act. It came after the March on Washington in 1963 and the growing power of the movement.

In 1965 the modern Voting Rights Act was adopted with teeth. In 1968 a law against housing discrimination was adopted by Congress.

Blacks began to shift from the Republican Party in the 1960s. Those who could vote had once identified with Lincoln's party, not the pro-segregation Democrats. The alliance between northern Democrats and southern Dixiecrats kept the issue of civil rights off the agenda, until the power of the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s forced a shift by the Democratic Party leadership who saw urban Blacks as a new voting bloc.

It led African Americans in droves to join the Democratic Party " thousands are now elected officials " and white southerners to leave and change the corporate Republican Party in the 1970s.

## Key Lessons

What does this history explain about institutional racism and the role of the U.S. Constitution? Race was key in all

decisions by the ruling class (liberals and conservatives) " that is, to maintain white supremacy and Black inferiority.

Although amendments are possible that remove or mitigate the worst features of the Constitution, those amendments can be nullified in practice, and the original language still remains.

It's time to review the power of states over basic human rights that affect every citizen and resident.

Voting and civil rights should be based on common standards nationwide, where states can make them stronger but never weaker. Fundamental change requires extralegal mass action directed at the institutions and governing parties of the state.

The U.S. Constitution is where institutional racism was encoded from its origins. It's time to tell the truth and stop the uncritical celebration that rationalizes the glacial " and always reversible " march toward equality.

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