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China to take over Kenya's main port over unpaid huge Chinese Loan

31 December 2018, by **Henry**

In November, African Stand reported on how Kenya is at high risk of Losing strategic assets over huge Chinese debt and just after some few month the Chinese are about to take action. [1]

The loans have been granted for the development of the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR).

Also at stake is the Inland Container Depot in Nairobi, which receives and dispatches freight hauled on the new cargo trains from the sea port.

Implications of a takeover would be grave, including the thousands of port workers who would be forced to work under the Chinese lenders.

Management changes would immediately follow the port seizure since the Chinese would naturally want to secure their interests.

Further, revenues from the port would be directly sent to China for the servicing of an estimated Sh500 billion lent for the construction of the two sections of the SGR.

Precedent

In December 2017, the Sri Lankan government lost its Hambantota port to China for a lease period of 99 years after failing to show commitment in the payment of billions of dollars in loans. [2]

The transfer, according to the New York Times, gave China control of the territory just a few hundred miles off the shores of rival India.

It is a strategic foothold along a critical commercial and military waterway.

"The case is one of the examples of

China's ambitious use of loans and aid to gain influence around the world and of its willingness to play hardball to collect," says the New York Times of December 12, 2017.

In September 2018, Zambia lost Kenneth Kaunda International Airport to China over debt repayment. [3]

SGR Losses

In the likely scenario that China takes over the port, Kenya would be joining Sri Lanka -another debt-distressed nation- in losing a strategic asset.

It is possible because the SGR -operated by the Chinese, is a hugely loss-making venture, meaning it cannot generate enough money to repay loans.

SGR reported a near Sh10 billion loss in its first year of operations.

The Auditor General has warned that the eventuality is likely because of a lopsided loan agreement that greatly favours the China Exim Bank, who advanced Kenya the loan.

Specifically, Kenya got the short end of the stick in the agreement where any disputes arising from the debt servicing would be arbitrated in China.

An audit completed last month indicates that Kenya Ports Authority's (KPA) assets, which include the Mombasa port, could be taken over if the SGR does not generate enough cash to pay off the debts.

"The China Exim Bank would become a principle in (over) KPA if Kenya Railways Corporation (KRC) defaults in its obligations and China Exim Bank exercise power over the escrow account security," the audit reads in part.

Escrow account

An escrow account is a contractual arrangement in which a third party receives and disburses money for the primary transacting parties, with the disbursement dependent on conditions agreed to by the transacting parties.

According to the loan agreement, funds generated from the SGR were to be deposited in an escrow account – controlled by an unknown third party on behalf of KRC and China Exim Bank.

At the current estimates, KPA generates Sh50 billion a month or Sh600 billion a year in revenues.

F.T Kimani, the auditor, cited in his report that KPA's exposure is linked to a requirement that it feeds sufficient cargo to the Chinese-built railway

project.

Failure to provide the requisite cargo would mean Kenya has gone against a critical clause in the loan agreement of guaranteeing specified "minimum volumes required for consignment".

It is also indiscernible how KPA signed the loan agreement as a borrower, in one of the toxic clauses subsequently exposing its assets to the Chinese clamp.

"...any proceeding(s) against its assets (KPA) by the lender would not be protected by sovereign immunity since the Government waived the immunity on the Kenya Ports Assets by signing the agreement," the auditor wrote.

Repayments for the loans are slated to start mid next year on expiry of a five-year grace period.

[Africa Stand](#)

Student protests in Albania: "What we are witnessing is the direct effect of the neoliberal reform in education"

30 December 2018, by **Philippe Alcoy, Redi Muçi**

Last Thursday thousands of students took to the streets of Tirana and other cities around

What we are witnessing these days is the direct effect of the neoliberal reform in education that was implemented since July 2015. This reform was based on the idea that competition between universities in order to generate their own funds will lead to an increase in quality. In fact, the only thing that was bound to increase was the tuition fees. Thus, this semester, an extra fee was added for students who are retaking an exam. This was the spark that burned down the city. It started at the Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning, and the next day brought 15.000 students in front of the Ministry's

doors.

The list of demands starts with lowering tuition fees and increasing government spending for education, and goes on to include many other demands, such as better dormitories, removing corrupt professors from university, investing in laboratories and libraries... the list goes on.

Për Universitetin is one of organizers of the demonstrations in Tirana, what are your claims?

The Movement For University has been organizing numerous protests against this reform since 2012 when the idea was initially pitched, instead calling for a tuition-free public education. We have also raised many

issues faced by students in their university life, issues such as poor infrastructure and various abuses by lecturers that are frequently voiced by students during these days of protests.

The Movement considers that the only path to follow for the students is to reject any attempts for negotiating with the government and unequivocally calling for the abrogation of the existing law in education as the cornerstone for the initiation of a new reform that will be primarily based on the demands of the students.

How is the life of Albanian students today?

Many students in Albania live in dire

conditions. The tuition fee is one of the highest in the region, especially if one considers the average wage in Albania. Students do not have the benefit of a discount on anything at all. The dormitories resemble catacombs of previous centuries. They are run by party exponents who want to gain the maximum with zero investments. If one adds to this the miserable infrastructural conditions of lecture halls and libraries, their revolt seems long overdue.

How is the movement organizing? There are assemblies or places to discuss and organize?

The student protest has reached unprecedented proportions that were impossible to predict. At the moment there is a kind of positive chaos presiding over the daily protests where various pockets of chants have formed.

The biggest problem right now is the incessant attempts of opposition

parties militants trying to divert the energy according to the agenda of their party. This has spurred physical confrontations in many occasions with our activists, who gratefully have the support and protection of the mass of students. Nevertheless, there has been a fascinating coherence in the students' rejection of any negotiations with the government and any involvement of political figures from opposition parties.

What is the answer of the government?

Initially the Prime Minister called the students "dunces" for whom the taxpayers should not have to pay extra money. This, however, backfired spectacularly and ever since he has changed his rhetoric trying to lure in a negotiating team from the students, in the attempt to appear as if he is very concerned with their demands. Yesterday (8th of December) the Minister made an attempt to approach the crowd, but she was booed off the square.

In France students are blocking universities, organizing protests also against fees hikes for foreign non-European students; they understand that it is a step before a general fees hike for students. Which message would you like to send to student's movement in France in link with your mobilization?

The students in France are rightly concerned with this new measure, looking back at the history of tuition hikes in England, where from free education the Thatcher administration initially increased the fees for foreign students, and later for everyone else. The "Anglo-Saxon" aura has been the sugar-coating of the neoliberal reform in Albania too. Our struggle is common! Just like the *gilet jaunes*, the students ought to resist this neoliberal wave that is sweeping over our societies.

[LeftEast](#)

With its controversial pension reforms, Russia is looking after its rich

29 December 2018, by **Karine Clément**

This PR campaign was only partly successful. The street protests petered out, but Putin's United Russia party was punished at the polls. In September's regional elections, four candidates from Putin's party, all incumbent regional governors, were forced to take part in a second round of voting, which is unusual in Russia. In the Vladimir and Khabarovsk regions, the far-right nationalist opposition (the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, LDPR) won. The authorities annulled or postponed elections in Primorsky and Khakassia to stop the communists making headway.

The pace and scope of Russia's pensions overhaul are striking

compared to policies introduced elsewhere. By 2029, Russian workers will have to work five years more for their pension, as the retirement age will increase by six months a year.

In 1998, the South Korean government also increased retirement age by five years, but it was phased-in over 20 years. The government in Germany has raised the retirement age by a year, to 62, and France has raised it by two years, to 67, at a rate of one or two months a year.

Defenders of the Russian pension reform cite arguments heard elsewhere. The population is ageing. In 2017, according to official Rosstat statistics, there were 36.5 million

pensioners in Russia and an active workforce of approximately 83 million, a ratio of 2.3 workers to every pensioner. In 2002 the ratio was three to one. But this is a temporary phase: the generation from the chaotic 1990s will soon be joined on the labour market by the larger cohort born in the 2000s, a period of strong economic and demographic growth.

How long will pensioners live? The second demographic argument is that Russian retirement age has not changed since 1932, while life expectancy has improved markedly.

According to Rosstat figures quoted by Medvedev, average life expectancy was just 35 years in the early 1930s,

compared to 72.7 today; but the very high infant mortality rate in the 1930s significantly reduces the average for that period and taking it as a comparison makes it possible to present one of the lowest life expectancies in Europe as an achievement. In 1932, only a minority of old people got a pension, a right that was extended to all city-dwellers in 1956 and workers on collective farms and peasants in 1967. A baby born in the USSR in 1967 could expect to live to 69.3. In 2018 the new age at which men become eligible for a pension is a year and a half more than their current life expectancy of 66.5 years (for women life expectancy is 77).

Neoliberal economists object that the important figure is not life expectancy at birth, but the number of years that people can expect to live after retirement age. Research by Moscow's Higher School of Economics, cited by journalists and defenders of the reform, highlights the fact that those who have reached retirement age, even if it is deferred, can expect to live a further 13.4 years for men and 21.7 years for women. Demographer Anatoly Vishnevsky has pointed out that this has barely improved since the 1960s and may decline if working life is prolonged.

The "sandwich generation"

Another issue often raised is the societal role traditionally played by women, who leave the labour force at 55. The youngest belong to what sociologist Elena Zdravomyslova calls the "sandwich generation", with a pivotal role looking after their grandchildren, so enabling their children to work, and also taking care of their own elderly parents, for whom there is little state provision. How else does the government envisage enabling young mothers to work? And who will look after the elderly?

Supporters of reform make the economic argument that a longer working life will make it possible to raise pensions, which both reformists and their opponents currently regard as inadequate. The average monthly

pension is currently 13,300 roubles (approximately US\$203), around 34 per cent of the average wage, so 40 per cent of men and 66 per cent of women continue in paid employment for five years after they become pensioners. This practice existed at similar levels during the Soviet period, but pensioners then enjoyed better state provision " in 1976, the average pension was over half the average wage " and better access to healthcare.

Pension-age women continue to work in sectors traditionally regarded as "female" and under-paid, such as teaching, healthcare, social services and culture, while pension-age men resort to low-paid casual work. In his television address, Putin promised monthly pensions would average 20,000 roubles (US\$306) by 2024, but this is less generous than it seems; if inflation continues as it has the past six years, it only means spending power will remain static.

Putin has the image of a statist leader keen to restore top-down power. During his first two mandates (2000-08), the government regained control of strategic economic sectors ceded to oligarchs, especially oil and gas. A return to economic growth made it possible to pay salaries and pensions regularly again. This secured Putin's popularity with the middle and working classes, the "ordinary people" he likes to praise.

But many observers overlook the fact that since he came to power, Putin has carried out a modernisation of the social state, reining in public spending and establishing a tax system that favours business and the rich.

He set a flat rate of income tax at 13 per cent in 2002, reformed the health and education systems by subjecting (much-reduced) federal spending to efficiency and productivity criteria (2006-12), and adopting new labour laws which favour employers (2002).

The pension system has not been spared. In 2002 the government instituted the current, highly unfair, regressive contributory system: most workers pay 22 per cent of their gross salary into the state pension system, but those currently earning over

67,900 roubles (approximately US\$1,040) a month " the top 15 per cent " pay just 10 per cent of their salary above this threshold. In 2002 the authorities grafted a new mandatory funded pension system onto the existing structure, under which 6 per cent of pension contributions go to financial intermediaries or private pension funds.

In 2005 a protest movement unprecedented in post-Soviet Russia halted austerity-driven reforms and forced a government rethink; opposition focused on the monetisation of social benefits, the proposed reduction of benefits in kind such as transport and health, available to many. Rising oil prices made it possible to offer sweeteners such as maternity (family) capital, a US\$7,000 payment to mothers on the birth or adoption of their second child, and the launch of federal education, health and housing programmes. These were accompanied, temporarily, by higher pay for teachers and health workers and more state funding to improve housing.

After the 2008 crash

The global financial crisis of 2008 ended this. When recession hit Russia in 2014, after a fall in oil prices and western sanctions imposed after the annexation of Crimea, the Russian government relaunched austerity; first to be hit were welfare, health and education spending. Aid and tax credits were given to the biggest companies, though they made the most profit, and tax rates were reduced for the billionaires in Putin's inner circle, who were hit by the sanctions and are denied the right to travel to the West. According to Russia's Accounts Chamber, these tax breaks caused a federal budget shortfall of 11 trillion roubles (US\$168 billion). The budget for 2018 will be reduced to 15 trillion roubles (US\$230 billion).

The latest reforms " higher retirement ages, increased value added tax (up from 18 to 20 per cent), higher flat-rate income tax " are in

line with the trend for reducing welfare benefits and lower tax on capital, while increasing the tax burden on workers, especially the least well off. The authorities exhort people to make sacrifices for the sake of Russia's international prestige. But tapping other revenue sources would make it possible to leave the retirement age unchanged and increase pensions, especially as pensions are just 7 per cent of GDP, half the level in France, Poland or Portugal.

Russia's Accounts Chamber has recommended limiting the exemptions granted to large state companies that want to reduce the dividends they pay back to the state. For good reason: this sort of income fell by 75 per cent

in 2017, when it amounted to 667.6 billion roubles (US\$10 billion).

The main advocate for social causes in the Duma, Oleg Shein (formerly of A Just Russia, centre-left), has called for an end to tax loopholes, a single scale for social security contributions and robust action against businesses that commit fraud or conceal the size of their workforce from the tax authorities; some estimates put the number of Russians employed in the informal economy at almost 35 million.

Real income has fallen by around 10 per cent since 2014, but the government is more concerned with looking after the rich. Putin signed off the new pensions law in October,

which may have reduced the urge to protest, but the authorities have not emerged unscathed. Ilya Budraitskis, historian and left-wing activist, said: "Invoking 'the traditional values of the majority' and the 'spiritual bonds' to bind society together around its national leader is of no use when it comes to such an unpopular measure."

For many Putin supporters seduced by his image as protector of ordinary people, the evidence is now clear: the interests of the working and middle classes count for little compared to those of the economic and financial elites. Summer 2018 may have marked the end of the euphoria that began with the annexation of Crimea.

[Equal Times](#)

Protests in Hungary: "The slave labor law was clearly written to appeal to German industrial interests!"

28 December 2018, by **Philippe Alcoy, Gergő Varga**

Protests against what is being called Viktor Orban's "slave [labour] law" in Hungary are turning into a questioning of his entire regime. For nearly 2 weeks now, Hungarians have been taking to the streets in Budapest and in other cities across the country, protesting labour law reforms that will allow bosses to force workers to work up to 400 extra hours a year. For many observers, this movement is unlike others the country has experienced. We interviewed Gergő Varga, editor of the web site [Mérce.hu](#).

Demonstrators have denounced Orban's "slave [labour] law" as completely favorable to the bosses. Can you explain the law?

The slave labour law was quite clearly written to appeal to German industrial interests, raising the maximum amount of overtime per year to 400 hours and extending the payment

window up to 36 months. This could also be seen as a move to anticipate a crisis and to side with companies by making them more financially resilient if trouble comes.

The other law that sparked protests seeks to establish so-called "administrative courts," which would give Fidesz-appointed judges final decision-making power on a range of public spending and transparency issues. However, this wasn't framed in a meaningful way from the viewpoint of the popular classes - that it is designed to protect Fidesz's capital interests - and is presented as just another nail in the coffin of the rule of law and liberal democracy.

Even if Hungarian industry has benefited from investments made by auto-manufacturing multinationals, and many factories have opened in the country,

throughout Central and Europe (as in Hungary) there is still a large emigration creating labor shortages. Can this explain this new law?

Yes, this is quite clearly a trend, however it is not covered in a widespread way in mainstream Hungarian media, so there is no meaningful public discussion of these issues. Ukraine has already become a key source of labour migrants to Hungary (who are seen as more 'acceptable,' in contrast to immigrants from Muslim-majority countries, according to hegemonic right-wing discourses). For the government, the only way to keep up 'competitiveness' via cheap labor is to further cut existing protections. Interestingly, a lot of people who are not protected by union contracts already work insane hours, and are thus 'falling out' of the debates

over the labour law as no meaningful actor has expressed a strong stance on the issue. The unions are slow to come up with large organized actions, though it should be noted that at least some of them are trying their best.

Is the “slave labour law” the only reason for the protests?

I think the passing of these laws and the way they were passed, in spite of attempted obstruction by the opposition was the straw that broke the camel's back. The discussion is no longer about the laws individually, but a huge coalition of anger and hate towards the Orban regime has produced some bizarre protest scenes, initially with the so far unknown antifa pushing the cops around next to literal neo-nazis. Talk about shifting priorities!

The media is saying that the protests are organized by a large opposition, from the Green Party to the far-right Jobbik, along with citizen and youth organizations. Can such an “alliance” hold?

This is the most concerning part actually. Initially the protests were spearheaded by a new coalition, started off by university students forming a student union in solidarity with the workers, protesting together and trying to form a systemic critique of Orbán's regime by building on a material, interest-based platform.

However, the opposition parties (spearheaded by the extra parliamentary, Macron-allied Momentum!) have swooped in with street radicalisation actions, completely dominating the discourse and shifting the focus from material needs of the working class to a general resentment against Orbán's regime. The demands of joining the EU level prosecutors office are back on the table, there were nods of solidarity to the police workers (!) while expressing non-violence, denouncing previous “violent” protesters (those who spontaneously went out in the December cold for three straight nights to protest these

laws, and were violent enough to set some trashcans on fire and throw toilet paper at the riot cops... are now getting handed to the police by the protest organizers!).

Now the focus is on the state media, which is little more than a propaganda outlet for Fidesz, as opposition party members decided to try to get on air and got thrown out by security goons. The end result is that they were welcomed to join the protest against the labour law, and managed to completely turn the media narrative around (both government and opposition) in order NOT to talk about the labour law. So whoever this alliance is for, it is highly doubted among the left that they are offering anything besides token value to the working class or the youth.

But Jobbik is also influential, no? How can you explain that some liberal parties are accepting to march with them? Can they politically capitalize on the movement?

No, they are marginal, even though they can mobilize their supporters, or rather its their supporters mobilizing the party. There are a lot of Jobbik supporters out, but I guess that's a testament to how much the party has appropriated the left-wing populist discourse in terms of the economy.

During protests in Budapest some demonstrators have been wearing yellow vests; can we say that the movement of Yellow Vests in France has influenced Hungary's protesters?

We expected there to be yellow vests, and we got white hats, instead as the opposition MPs denounced the non-existent “violence,” took the place of unionized workers behind the main union sign, and started talking about a popular anti-Orbán coalition.

We'll see how the situation develops, but the white hats, many of them from parties who voted for the anti-NGO laws, some of them more neoliberal than anybody else on the scope, others from the previous government that let

a good portion of the country sink into debt slavery... these white hats held their speeches on a protest organized by the left, and while it was disheartening to hear them speak their empty lines and offer token resistance to the workers, they could not do or say anything about the entire crowd of some 30,000 people screaming in their faces calling for a general strike. For all they preach non-violence, they cannot fathom the idea of a strike! So the yellow vests will have to wait, for now.

Some union leaders are talking about a strike against the law; do you think it is possible? Which sectors of workers are angrier with this “slave labour law”?

A lot of unions have expressed interest in a strike, and there are some motorway blockades on the way. However, given the timing and their activity in the media, hopes are not high. Union membership is low, the strike funds are empty. The teachers and the Vasas (metalworkers) and the chemical workers seem to be the most radical (...in words and by their own measure), but they only today announced that they will start organizing a general strike if the President (János Áder) signs the law. I thought they had a bit more plans in advance. Union politics are also an issue, a lot of union leadership are known to be in cahoots with Fidesz, and their room to strike and mobilize is very low due to previous rounds of weakening labour rights. But at least for now they seem to be moving in a more political direction, whereas in the last eight years all union activity was strictly framed as “apolitical”.

Do you want to add something?

Just a friendly word of advice for the LeftEast readers: just because the liberals / centrists have visibility and media prowess, build your power up first or risk getting coopted. We might just be paying for a naive error very dearly, but it's early to say how the situation is going to develop.

[LeftEast](#)

India's urban and rural working class to embark on two day nationwide strike in January

27 December 2018, by **V. Arun Kumar**

Building a massive resistance against the neoliberal policies of the Indian government, farmers' organizations have given a call for a nationwide strike coinciding with the two-day general strike by trade unions. In September this year, 10 central trade unions and independent federations gave a call for a nationwide strike on January 8 and 9, 2018.

On Tuesday, December 18, Communist Party of India (Marxist)-affiliated farmers' union, All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) gave a call for a two-day Gramin Bharat Bandh (Rural India Shutdown) on January 8 and 9, 2019. Ashok Dhawale, president of AIKS speaking with Peoples Dispatch said, "The bandh in rural India, along with the trade union strike would unite the farmers and workers to challenge the pro-corporate and anti-people regime of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)." The call is supported by the Bhumi Adhikar Sabha, a platform of various people's organizations demanding land for poor farmers for agricultural purposes.

Farm loan waiver and land allotment to poor farmers are the two major demands put forward by the AIKS. Dhawale noted that the bandh will also be against the increasing religious polarization tactics employed by the far right-wing government headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"Corruption, communalism [religious polarization], and corporatization, which marks the policies of BJP rule will be resisted by the people of this country. We have seen how the BJP lost in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Rajasthan, as farmers and workers united for their rights," Dhawale said emphasizing that

people's movements will be strengthened in the coming days.

Agrarian crisis

India is currently witnessing an agrarian and economic crisis, marked by continuous erosion of farmers and workers' rights. More than 50 percent of the population, which includes farmers and agricultural laborers from the country's agricultural sector, has been affected but little support has been provided by the government. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), nearly 48,104 farmers and farm laborers committed suicide between 2013 and 2016. And the crisis is exacerbated by government policies supporting the corporatization of agriculture and forceful land acquisition by private companies.

Renowned journalist P Sainath, in an article noted that "India's agrarian crisis has gone beyond the agrarian. It's a crisis of society. May be even a civilizational crisis, with perhaps the largest body of small farmers and laborers on Earth fighting to save their livelihoods."

In the past one year, the country witnessed three major farmers mobilizations, in August, October and in November. In these movements, more than half a million farmers protested in the Indian capital calling for an end to the neoliberal and anti-farmer policies of the government.

"While the government is refusing to provide loan waivers to poor farmers, rich corporate loans are being waived off. This government is of the corporates and what we want is a people's government," Dhawale noted.

The recent farmers' march on November 29 and 30 demanded a special session of the Parliament to be held to discuss the agrarian crisis, and the National Commission on Farmers' 2006 report. The report had recommended crop acquisition by the state at a minimum support price (MSP) which is 50 percent above the full cost of production and redistribution of ceiling-surplus land to the landless.

Trade unions' call for total strike

Since the Hindu conservative BJP government came to power in 2014, there had been attempts to dilute the labor laws under the banner of "ease of doing business." Trade unions have warned that the continuous trampling of workers' rights will be met with severe resistance. In November 2017, more than 3,00,000 workers from various trade unions (except Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS), trade union close to the ruling government) organized a *Mahapadav* demanding the government to end the assault on working-class rights and its neoliberal policies. [4]

Announcing the nationwide general strike call, the workers' convention held on November 28, 2018, put forward a 12-point charter of demands, which included strict enforcement of all basic labor laws and stringent punitive measures for violation of labour laws, universal social security cover for all workers, minimum wage of not less than Rs. 18,000/- per month with provisions of indexation, stoppage of disinvestment in Central/State PSUs and strategic

sale, ending contractualization in permanent perennial work, equal pay for equal work, urgent measures for containing price-rise through

universalization of public distribution system and containing unemployment through concrete measures for employment generation.

December 19, 2018

PeoplesDispatch.Org

The Jasic Workers Mobilisation, a High Tide for the Chinese Labour Movement?

26 December 2018, by **Au Loong-Yu**

"The Jasic case is unusual in that it was supported openly by a group of some 50 self-proclaimed Maoists and Marxist university students, along with a small group of older citizens."

At the height of the Jasic campaign, these old and young Maoist supporters held up photos of Chairman Mao and a banner reading 'To Be Good Students of Chairman Mao Forever'. They created a website "which has now been removed from the Internet" called 'Vanguard of the Era' (shidai xianfeng) calling for more support for their cause, 'for the sake of the working class's awakening, for the sake of Chairman Mao!' (Wu 2018). As the images that accompany this article show [not reproduced here], they uploaded photographs of themselves on social media posing in Maoist-like revolutionary heroic postures, disciplined and determined to fight for their cause. One of them posted an article entitled 'Where Has Jinggangshan Gone? On the Jasic Struggle and the Future of Revolutionary Revival' (Luo 2018). Referring to the mountain where Mao first established his guerrilla base in 1927 and to Mao's revolutionary strategy of 'encircling cities from the rural areas' (nongcun baowei chengshi), it proclaimed 'Jinggangshan is here right now at Jasic and in all industrial areas.'

Although Jasic supporters might not really be advocating for an armed uprising, they do believe that the time is ripe for leftists in China to escalate worker struggle from economic to political. The very moment the Maoists got involved, the incident quickly

escalated from a workplace trade union organising drive to a political struggle against local officials. The heroic campaign was quickly and violently suppressed. Four workers were arrested, charged with disturbing the peace, and are now awaiting trial. At the time of writing, 28 supporters remain either under house arrest or have been forcibly disappeared (HRIC 2018). As for the students, after they went back to their universities, they were interrogated, disciplined, investigated, threatened, and in some cases expelled. In the past three months, more than 20 students have been fiercely manhandled "some were beaten up, some were attacked and kidnapped by thugs right on campus, and some have simply disappeared. How are we to assess this unprecedented incident in which students and workers struggle together across institutions, across provinces, across generations, and across class boundaries?

Professor Pun Ngai at the University of Hong Kong has argued that the Jasic mobilisation is a movement of 'unity between workers and students' and is of 'historical significance' (Pun 2018). Indeed, the case is significant because it was the first time in the past few decades that students have emerged in such a high profile and organised manner to support a worker protest. This stands in sharp contrast to what happened in Tiananmen Square in 1989, when intellectuals and students cordoned themselves off from the workers at the very beginning of the protests. After the democratic movement of the late 1980s failed, intellectuals soon split

into two main groups: Liberals (ziyoupai) and the New Left (xinzuopai). Both of these groups subscribed to the false dichotomy of 'state versus market', while remaining indifferent to the plight of the working masses. At best, only a handful of the New Left intellectuals adopted a rhetoric of 'fairness' in their writings by counterposing the liberal slogan of 'prioritising efficiency' for future reform with 'prioritising justice' instead. As for the students, they simply retreated to their study. It was not until the 2009 Guangzhou sanitation workers strike that workers began to receive some support from students, who mostly participated as individuals, rather than as a coordinated group. Thus, the fact that in the Jasic incident, more than 50 students put themselves at risk by acting in solidarity with the workers was indeed a new development.

Nevertheless, Professor Pun goes on to make two other points that I have reservations about. Firstly, she commends the incident as having a second historical significance in that for 'the first time the workers consciously organised a trade union.'

The reality is that there have been numerous cases of workers going on strike to demand the re-electing or establishment of workplace unions. For example, as early as 2004-05, workers at the Shenzhen Japanese company Uniden went on strike five times in one year. They finally succeeded in setting up a union but it was quickly suppressed. Other examples were the Ole Wolff case in

Yantai in 2006, the Yantian Container strike of 2007, and last but not least, the Nanhai Honda strike of 2010.

"The factory has just over a thousand workers. So the fact that 89 workers signed on to request a labour union be established" with 20 remaining in the struggle after the crackdown" is significant, particularly considering the difficulty of labour organising in this type of context."

Secondly, she remarks that "the actions of the Jasic workers also show that Chinese workers have already transformed from purely economic subjects into political subjects with class consciousness." True, the protest was initially quite promising. The factory has just over a thousand workers. So the fact that 89 workers signed on to request that a labour union be established" with 20 remaining in the struggle after the crackdown" is significant, particularly considering the difficulty of labour organising in this type of context (Zhang 2018). However, is it possible to conclude that the average Chinese worker has become a "political subject with class consciousness" based on the actions of a less than 100 people in a single workplace?

Now that the suppression of students has captured the attention of the international media, it is worth looking at the origins of these Maoist student groups in a bit more detail. The re-emergence of Maoist ideology among the younger generation can be traced to the turn of the century. At that time, some older Maoists in North China began to resist the privatisation of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) from behind the scenes. They also invited rural migrant activists and students to their classes and trainings. In 2005, they founded the "China Labour Research Web" (zhongguo gongren yanjiu wang), later renamed "Red China" (hongse zhongguo), which was closed down by the authorities in 2010. At that time, these Maoists prioritised SOE workers over rural migrant workers as they regarded the former as more "revolutionary" and the latter as lacking class consciousness. They mostly focussed their activities around the SOE workers in the North, and if

there were Maoist NGOs working in the South they maintained a very low profile. The current rise of a new generation of young Maoist students engaging so deeply in the Jasic struggle indicates the Maoists are turning their attention to rural migrant workers in the South. That in the Jasic case they have decided to adopt a tactic of high-profile confrontational resistance, was evidence of their determination and commitment given the highly repressive situation.

"Maoists accumulated lot of experience in the North in supporting the rights of SOE workers, their experiences cannot be applied to the workers in the private enterprises of the South without being substantially adapted."

Earlier this decade, "Red China" along with "Utopia" (wuyouzhixiang), a Maoist website founded in 2003 by the well known Maoist/Nationalists Fan Jinggang and Han Deqiang" had placed their hopes in Bo Xilai to lead a left turn in the Party. For instance, Minqi Li, an academic based in the United States and a theoretician of "Red China", placed great expectations in Bo as "the last significant faction that was in opposition to neoliberal capitalism", and argued that "by purging Bo Xilai from the Party, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leadership may have foregone their last and best opportunity to resolve China's rapidly escalating economic and social contradictions in a relatively peaceful manner" (Li 2016, 183 and 38).

"Although the Maoists have accumulated a lot of experience in the North in supporting the rights of SOE workers, their experiences cannot be applied to the workers in the private enterprises of the South without being substantially adapted."

The fall of Bo in 2012 shattered these hopes, and since then the two labels "Left Maoists" (maozuo) and "Right Maoists" (maoyou) have become common currency in online debates. This means that the Maoists have definitely split into at least two camps: Right Maoists continue to advocate for the support of the Party, as summed up in the slogan,

"Defend the Party and Save the State" (baodang jiuguo), while Left Maoists, such as "Red China", have become more radical in criticising the Party, having finally come to recognise that a qualitative transformation to capitalism has taken place in China. Since the rise of Xi Jinping onwards, they have become more explicit in advocating resistance from below while continuing to try to win over leading Party cadres through the invocation of the "socialist" principles enshrined in the Constitution or in Mao's work.

Although the Maoists have accumulated a lot of experience in the North in supporting the rights of SOE workers, their experiences cannot be applied to the workers in the private enterprises of the South without being substantially adapted. When the SOEs underwent privatisation in the late 1990s to early 2000s, the workers sometimes directly confronted corrupt local officials who were responsible for the theft of public property. They deployed the revolutionary ethos of the CCP to legitimise their political resistance. This was natural and was even sometimes useful. But in the private companies of the South it is different. The conflict is chiefly one between employees and employers. Moreover, the revolutionary ethos of the CCP is less likely to resonate with migrant workers, and so if actions escalate into political resistance the workers are less likely to be motivated. Therefore, in the Jasic case, as in many other cases, when the local government cracked down on workers the struggle turned political. But when looking at the possibility to escalate this type of struggle one must also ask the question: are workers fully prepared for a political confrontation? Experience already tells us that in this specific case they were not.

The Chinese authorities in reality do not have any interest in "socialist" principles, nor in Mao or Maoism. While Xi Jinping continues to demand that the people learn from Marxism, Leninism, and Mao's Thought; paradoxically, the Party-state continues to crack down on any independent and collective efforts to seriously study the classic texts of the left, and ramps up its attacks even

more when these efforts carry an aspiration to sympathise with the working people. Repressing the resurgence of Maoism among the people is not new. Back in 2004 the Zhengzhou police arrested and charged local Maoists who tried to assemble to pay tribute to Mao. The Party-state's crackdown on the Jasic workers and students today is just another incident reminding us that the CCP has long since betrayed its own

founding doctrine and is hostile to anyone who wants to interpret Maoism differently from the officially sanctioned line.

There is much for us to learn from the Jasic case. It should be the catalyst for us to begin a long overdue public debate on the situation and strategy of China's labour movement in the midst of a crisis-ridden society. Whereas previously labour constituted a silent

majority which remained basically absent from the debate between Liberals and the New Left, the Jasic case reminds us that the situation is changing, that more workers now want their voices to be heard, and that a debate on all these issues is increasingly urgent.

Monday 1 October 2018

[Made in China](#)

Trump's "Withdrawal" – What Next?

25 December 2018, by David Finkel

The main point to understand is that imperialism creates problems that it cannot solve. The horrific so-called Islamic State (ISIS), which arose out of the catastrophic U.S. invasion of Iraq, has not been wiped out as Trump boasted. After being defeated in the Iraqi city of Mosul that ISIS had seized and occupied, captured ISIS fighters – real or alleged – and often their family members have been brutalized, tortured and executed, leaving behind relatives and clans bent on revenge. The next round in that cycle of violence and vengeance is all but inevitable.

In Syria, it's entirely true that a couple thousand U.S. troops can't resolve the civil war and destruction of that country, and that U.S imperialism has no legitimate business intervening there or anywhere else. This doesn't mean that Trump's plan to withdraw this force has any progressive significance, or anything to do with peace. It is not a step back from intervention, but a rather small move on a regional chess board – with no regard for human consequences.

If Trump's announcement has any coherent significance, it appears to be a gesture to Turkey's presidentialist-

dictator Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and a cynical betrayal of the Syrian Kurdish forces who have been the most effective anti-ISIS fighters. In fact, it was those Kurdish fighters who saved the Yazidi population from ISIS genocide on Sinjar mountain, liberated hundreds of Yazidi women from sexual enslavement, and defended the town of Kobane against the ISIS siege. But Erdogan's number one priority is crushing Kurdish national aspirations, along with all democratic opposition to his rule. The presence of U.S. troops in northeastern Syria restrains Turkey from launching a murderous assault on the Kurds there.

We're learning how Michael Flynn on Trump's transition team was conniving to arrange the extradition of Fethullah Gulen, a former Erdogan ally now living in Pennsylvania, whose return to Turkey is one of Erdogan's demands. To Trump's regret extradition can't be done by presidential decree without legal procedures in U.S. courts, but removing U.S. troops and leaving the Kurdish fighters exposed is within his "commander in chief" prerogatives. That's a move "toward restoring Washington's frayed relations with our

strategic ally Turkey," as the suited diplomatic thugs would put it.

The imperial knife in the back of the Kurds and their desire for autonomy or independence is a recurring story. Some things never change. At the same time, the regional Middle East crisis deteriorates. Saudi Arabia's murderous U.S.-coddled royal house is driving Yemen to genocidal famine. Israeli and U.S. threats against Iran are provoking Tehran's buildup of its asymmetric deterrent, the supply of sophisticated guidance missiles to Hezbollah near the Lebanon-Israel border – posing the real threat of war breaking out that neither side actually wants.

The United States has had a great deal to do with creating the disasters afflicting people from Afghanistan to Palestine. The political uproar over whether a suddenly announced troop withdrawal from a corner of Syria is or is not "in our fundamental strategic interests" doesn't even touch the reality that it's precisely those "interests" that are the problem.

December 21, 2018

[Solidarity](#)

Dockworkers struggle in Setúbal: Portugal is the “wild west” when it comes to labour relations

24 December 2018, by **Raquel Varela**

Note from the LeftEast editors: this article was first published in Jornal Público, 18 November 2018. It was reprinted by LeftEast with kind permission of the author.

Carla Ribeiro is a dockworker at the Port of Setúbal. “I am a dockworker”, she says. “I have a 5-year-old daughter. I have been working for 9 years with daily contracts. I’ve worked while pregnant until 8 1/2 months. Sometimes I had to call my husband after working from 8:00 a.m. till 5:00 p.m. telling him that I had to stay until 1:00 am – and later call him again to say that I was going to work the night shift until 7:00 am. Now it’s enough! We are involved in this war. We won’t step back”.

Carla is part of a pool of 309 casual workers at the Port of Setúbal. 146 of these have been working regularly for some 20 years for the companies Operestiva and Setulset. The remaining work for subcontractors.

Setúbal began in Leixões [important port in northern Portugal]. And it started in August. When this year the Madeira and Leixões dockworkers decided to move from the old corporate unionism and its promiscuity with the stevedore companies and started joining the SEAL – the former Lisbon dockworkers union known for its pugnacity, which became a nationwide union – as retaliation they were put on the shelf by companies, some sweeping the floors. And they saw their wages reduced. In response, since August 13, all regular and casual dockworkers in the country went on a strike refusing to work overtime, causing heavy delays in cargo handling.

The bosses of Setúbal didn’t appreciate this solidarity strike and decided to break it by offering contracts (now, after 20 years!) to a few of them – just a couple of days after they had tried to “fire” them. All but two refused to sign these contracts and went into total standstill on November 5, under the motto “Either we all sign or nobody will.” Some VW/Autoeuropa workers (the automotive company most affected by this struggle) publicly supported them – as did the call-centre’s, Lisbon Underground, SOS Handling / Groundforce and several other unions affiliated with CGTP union federation.

For years, the casual workers of Setúbal have had “regular” jobs. So “regular” that they were forced to pass a power of attorney to administrative employees of the companies who sign contracts of employment for them when needed. When they fall sick, they cannot have medical assistance or their absence due to sickness paid by the NHS (because they are not officially hired by the companies). So they call the company, the company signs a contract as if they were working, the coordinator confirms, and they may have medical assistance...

This and other pearls typical of the “wild west” labour relations in Portugal have been repeatedly communicated to the Minister of the Sea and ACT [5]. They were never answered. In the Parliamentary Committees for Labour and Social Security and Agriculture and the Sea, these issues have been dragging on, while BE and PCP [6] raise the issues, but one never knows whether they are acting as part of the “Geringonça” [7] or as opposition.

This is all in vain – unless the law of the ports is changed and a collective bargaining agreement for the dockworkers is negotiated, the conflict will last. With serious impact for the dockworkers, but also for thousands of companies in the country, who lose millions, while profits go the few concessionaires of the Ports.

At last the country seemed to get an interest in this issue. Not for Carla and her family, or for these men with their lives depending on daily contracts, but for the VW / Autoeuropa cars that pile up waiting to be exported. The anxiety of the Minister of the Sea is not due to the destroyed lives of these dockworkers, but to the calls of the Autoeuropa shareholders.

I have a particular scientific interest in this stoppage (in fact, it is not a formal strike, because casual dockworkers are recruited on a daily basis and do not have their right to work protected – but neither do they have an obligation to work) because I have maintained in many books that it is now much easier for workers to organize themselves than it was 30 years ago. This statement is always surprising to some, since traditional unions insist on the myth that if they do not fight, it is because unionized workers are few and fragile.

The paralysis of the Port of Setúbal confirms my thesis. The just in time model forces companies to have reduced stocks. Relocation of companies is a permanent threat, but at the same time today a small sector can stop an entire production chain. Globalization means dumping, but also dependence. The stoppage of the Setúbal dockworkers can stop the biggest factory in Portugal and the dockworkers from Sweden or Santos

in Brazil can also stop and this will have immediate effects in Lisbon or Barcelona.

The weakest link of globalization may be the workers. And they have been. But it can also be the companies, whose profits are based on low wages guaranteed by the fear of losing job. In this field it is important to remember that strikes are tugs-of-war that demand accountability to society. Thus, trade unionism must be de facto democratic, independent of any government and internationalist - otherwise it will always face its own limits and fail to represent the interests of large sections of the population.

Portugal's "competitive edge" since the 1980s has depended on increasing labour intensification and low wages. According to researcher Eugénio Rosa, the cost per hour of labour decreased in the first quarter of 2018 (-1.5%) when compared to the cost per hour of the first quarter of 2017, the average income of the Portuguese being lower than it was in 2008. Investment fell. Productivity rests on the back of workers, manual and intellectual, required to do more and more with less and less. Doctors, teachers, nurses, dockworkers, call centre operators, airport workers, Underground workers, civil servants,

what they say the most is: "I'm tired", "I'm afraid."

Companies pay the minimum wage or little more, but the taxes of the qualified sectors pay for the social assistance to which the poor today, even when they work, are forced to resort: social unemployment subsidy, reduced electricity rate ... Every day the poor have to prove their poverty and accept reaching out to the state. Thus, we would have 47% of poor people without social transfers and with them we have 18%. While the welfare state is universal, transfers are focused - they help to perpetuate poverty, even if in the short term they alleviate it.

The other problem of Portugal, and of the world, is the pyramidal model of companies that concentrates profits in a parent company where they have few workers while concentrating workers in subsidiary companies where there are no profits. This model has created orgies of profits and social inequality, leaving SMEs asphyxiated and workers exhausted. In the case of the Ports, we should have asked ourselves a long time ago: why are they not public, being strategic, and we put an end to this Calvary of brutal work in benefit of a few intermediaries?

On 17 November, the SEAL met in a national assembly to respond to the conflict in the Port of Setúbal and there was a unanimous vote for the possibility of affiliation of casual workers of this Port, in order to contribute to the dignity of their subsistence. Solidarity is not letters that the wind carries, but tangible actions.

Societies have to produce well. It is important to work well. But you have to ask yourself how, who, for whom and what is produced. A dockworker, Duarte Vitorino, from the Azores islands, with a regular contract, is in solidarity with Carla. He earns 850 euros, of which he deducts 4% for the union. Working extra hours he reaches 1200 or 1300 euros monthly.

He told me in an interview: "I live with 500 euros less since we are on strike to extra work, we make an effort, my wife is anxious, but I don't care, it's for the benefit of all ... Besides, now I can see my son every day (he smiles). I can survive without extra hours for a year!" In this struggle he and his own have developed a sense of cooperation, justice, and courage. A feeling that dehumanized work, where a VW car seems to be more important than them, cannot give him.

Source: [LeftEast](#).

Economic crisis and global disorder

23 December 2018, by **Michel Husson**

Capitalism has run out of steam

The dynamism of capitalism ultimately rests on its ability to generate productivity gains, in other words to increase the volume of goods produced in one hour of work. Since the generalized recessions of 1974-75 and 1980-82, productivity gains have been slowing down. We went from what some have called as a "golden age" (to emphasize the exceptional

nature of this period) to neo-liberal capitalism, today threatened by a "secular stagnation". During this period, capitalism has achieved this feat: to restore profitability despite the slowdown in productivity gains illustrated in Chart 1 [8].

Chart 1. Labour productivity growth



Source : Total Economy Database

Summary Tables, The Conference Board, March 2018

This has been possible only by an almost universal slowdown in wages, the share of which in revenue is declining tendentially. And this result has itself been obtained thanks to a set of processes reacting on one another (globalization, financialization, technological innovations, indebtedness) which it would be useless to seek to break down into their relative contributions. Inequality is an integral part of this

coherent model, but its coherence could not be sustainable [9]. It is the contradictions of this model that led to the 2007-2008 crisis. Globalization is indeed one of the essential elements of this model, but the crisis has had the effect of modifying its characteristics.

The great transformation of the world

The decade before the crisis was marked by the rise of the so-called emerging countries, especially China. This "emergence" is driven by a new organization of production, with different segments spread over several countries, from the design stage to production and delivery to the end consumer. These "global value chains" are established under the aegis of multinational firms that weave a web surrounding the global economy. A smartphone is now designed, produced and marketed by workers at the four corners of the earth.

This new form of globalization served as a way to escape from the crisis of the early 1980s, opening up a reservoir of low-wage labour, further increased after the collapse of "real socialism". But it has led to a real shift in the global economy, as shown by the distribution of world manufacturing output (excluding energy): it has increased by 62 per cent between 2000 and 2018, but almost all of this growth was achieved by the so-called emerging countries, where it has more than doubled (+152 per cent), while it has increased only slightly in advanced countries (+16 per cent). Emerging countries represent today 42 per cent of world manufacturing output, compared with 27 per cent in 2000 (Chart 2) [10]. In some countries, such as China and South Korea, this industrialization is less and less confined to mass production industries (textiles, electronics) and represents an upward movement to high-tech products and even production goods.



Graph 2. Global Industrial Production: Volumes
(Billions of 2010 dollars)

However, the opposition between "advanced" and "emerging" countries is a misleading way to analyse what is happening. At the beginning of the century, Rosa Luxemburg could define imperialism as "the political expression of the process of capitalist accumulation manifested by the competition between national capitalisms" [11] Nikolai Bukharin described a "process of nationalization of capital, that is to say the creation of homogeneous economic bodies, locked in national borders and refractory to each other" [12]. Each imperialist country then set out to conquer the world, hence the First World War, characterised as inter-imperialist.

But today the map of states and that of capitals no longer coincide. We must therefore abandon the representation of an asymmetrical face-to-face between imperialist countries and dependent countries and replace it with a concept of global economy structured according to a logic of unequal and combined development carried by transnational corporations.

States and capitals

From the moment when the map of states and that of capital are more and more disjointed: we must think differently about the relations they have with each other. Certainly, the privileged links between this or that multinational and its state have obviously not disappeared and the state will seek to defend the interests of its national industries. The taking of distance comes rather from the fact that large companies have the world market as a horizon and that one of the sources of their profitability lies in the possibility of organizing production on a global scale in order to minimize their costs and locate their profits in tax havens. They have no constraints forcing them to resort to domestic employment, and their outlets are largely disconnected from the domestic situation of their home port. This means that the weak growth of a country's domestic market is bearable for companies in that country, as long as they have

alternative outlets in the global market. The task of the states, and this is particularly true in Europe, is no longer so much to defend their "national champions" but to do everything to attract foreign investment onto their territory.

This organization of world production has been made possible and constructed by political decisions aimed at overturning all obstacles to the free flow of capital throughout the world. They have been implemented through international institutions and treaties, and often imposed on dependent countries in the form of structural adjustment plans.

Globalization thus leads to an intertwining of power relations, which are organized according to what might be called a dual contradictory regulation. On the one hand, states seek to defend their rank in the scale of national powers, while guaranteeing the conditions of functioning of globalized capitalism. On the other hand, these same states must reconcile the divergent interests of capitals turned towards the world market with those which are part of the fabric of companies producing for the internal market, and to manage the internal social conflictuality.

Economic power relations are today structured along two axes: a classic "vertical" axis based on the opposition between national states, and "horizontal" axis corresponding to competition between capitals. International institutions then function as a kind of trustee of capitalist states, but there exist today neither "ultra-imperialism" nor "world government". On the contrary, contemporary capitalism escapes any real regulation and operates in a chaotic manner, buffeted between an exacerbated competition and the need to reproduce a common operating framework. The prerogatives of the nation-state have not been abolished, contrary to certain unilateral arguments. With regard to the world economy, there is one that remains: the control of raw materials.

Control of raw

materials

The permanent struggle for access to raw materials has never stopped and generates imbalances and conflicts. We obviously think of energy: oil, uranium, etc. To this must be added land that has been plundered [13] for productivist agriculture, hydroelectricity and mining. Access to water also engenders a number of regional conflicts.

Globalization has the effect of destabilizing peasant agriculture, either by flooding the country with food imports or by land grabbing. At the same time, international investments often have the motive of relocating the most polluting products to countries with less demanding legislation. All these mechanisms are further aggravated by climate change, so that we can finally advance the idea that transfers in the broad sense (waste, pollution, warming, droughts, torrential rains, subsidized agricultural products, patented seeds, fertilizers and pesticides) are "the causes of forced exile" [14].

However, this tableau entails the risk of a determinism that is a little too simplistic and that would lead to forgetting the articulation with other social and political factors. To argue, for example, that the civil war in Syria was fomented in an underhand fashion in order to preserve the interests of the major oil groups would obviously be very reductive. But this determination - to which arms sales are added - exists, as a disturbing analysis of two economists shows [15]. They demonstrate that periods when the rate of profit of the four largest oil groups (BP, Chevron, ExxonMobil, Shell) falls below the average of the big firms are followed by a conflict, from the Six Day War in 1967 to the third Gulf war in 2014. Even though the authors concede that their "history of the Middle East is in large part a fable" and that "the dramas of the region (...) have their own specific logic", their article recalls the need to correctly combine the desire for control over resources with other determining factors.

The exhaustion of globalization

The first decade of this century was dominated by a China/United States axis (people spoke of "Chinamerica") which operated on a logic of complementarity. The United States was living on credit, with an external deficit financed by recycling surpluses, notably that of China. Investments in China in the form of joint ventures contributed to the dynamism of the Chinese economy. Other countries were integrated into this international division of labour: the famous "emerging countries" or again the CEECs (Central and Eastern European Countries: eleven countries, certainly very heterogeneous). And the transatlantic economic axis between Europe and the United States was developing. This globalization was effective from the point of view of capital and all the efforts of the dominant ideology were devoted to boasting of its benefits, convincing people of the necessary adaptation to global competition and brandishing the threat of relocations.

It is as if the last decade, inaugurated by the crisis of 2008, had gradually revealed the limits of this organization. If we cannot speak of the end of globalization, we must emphasize the obvious signs of an exhaustion that seems to be durable. The development of global value chains was motivated not only by the quest for low wage costs, but also by the potential of emerging countries in terms of productivity gains. Their slowdown in the centre could be offset by their dynamism on the periphery. One of the most striking phenomena of the last decade is that productivity growth in the South has slowed down considerably. In emerging countries, "the average annual growth in total factor productivity has been divided by more than three, from +3.5 per cent (2000-2007) to just over one per cent (2011-2016)" [16]. This is undoubtedly the factor that helps to explain the dramatic slowdown in world trade. Until then, it was growing twice as fast as world production; today it is increasing at the same rate.

One reason is that China is

disengaging from value chains: "imports of inputs for re-export now represent less than 20 per cent of total merchandise exports, as against 40 per cent during the 1990s. Several factors explain this withdrawal: higher wages, reorientation towards activities with higher technological content, desire for a better distribution of the fruits of growth, appreciation of the exchange rate" [17].

If we leave China aside, we could even talk about the end of emergence. The other BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, South Africa) have not managed to outperform, as China or South Korea did, an initial specialization based on the supply of raw materials. Pierre Salama speaks about "reprimarisation" [18] in the case of Brazil, and other economists evoke a precocious deindustrialization [19]. In addition, emerging countries are subject to erratic capital movements that induce a chronic instability of their external balances and their currency. The recent cases of Turkey and Argentina are a striking example, but one could also mention the countries of Southern Europe, deserted by capital inflows.

Social dislocation

The crisis has served to reveal another phenomenon - which austerity policies have also contributed to exacerbating - namely that of the social dislocation engendered by globalization, which is in reality neither "happy" nor "inclusive". Many studies, including from international institutions such as the IMF and the OECD, have pointed to its corrosive effects, the most striking of which is the polarization of jobs.

In all advanced countries, the same phenomenon is observed: employment increases "at both ends". Highly skilled jobs are progressing at one end of the scale, precarious jobs at the other end; between the two, the "middle class" stagnates and its prospects for social advancement vanish. At the same time, income inequalities are widening. Globalization is not the only factor responsible, and it is very difficult, if not impossible, to extract it from an overall model where financialization and the implementation of new

technologies also have their share, as does the relationship of forces between capital and labour.

This is an opportunity to recall that whole countries are neither "advanced" nor emerging and that a significant portion of the world's population lives in segments of countries that are kept out of the dynamics of capitalist globalization. Fracture lines thus traverse social formations and contribute to the destructuring of societies.

Not surprisingly, there has been a recent proliferation of studies on income inequality. Branko Milanovic, one of the world's specialists in this field [20], sums up a now widely shared observation: "Income inequality is increasing within countries, but decreasing globally with the rise of China" [21]. And this widening inequality within countries "weighs on the political stability of nation-states".

Faced with this challenge, international institutions are doing their mea culpa on the theme: it would have been better to redistribute the benefits of globalization to make it more "inclusive". But this wishful thinking is in contradiction with one of the driving forces of globalization, which is exacerbated tax competition. The average rate of income tax in advanced countries thus went from 44 per cent in the early 1990s to 33 per cent in 2017, and even 27 per cent, taking into account the measures taken by Donald Trump [1] [id="nh48">48](#)]

But the contours of the conflict are complicated. It seemed to reach a new stage recently with the shocking arrest of a Chinese tech executive in Canada at the behest of the U.S. That followed increasingly belligerent statements from the Trump administration, like Vice President Mike Pence's saber-rattling speech at the Hudson Institute, which basically announced a new cold war on China.

Yet at the same time, with the administration poised to escalate the U.S. trade war with China in the run-up to the G20 summit in Argentina at the end of November, brinkmanship turned into "blinkmanship" — both sides backed away, agreeing to three

months of trade negotiations that started on December 1. [49]

To understand the various episodes in this continuing imperial battle, it is important to start with looking at its economic and political sources and how these factors have played out over the last several decades.

The U.S.-China conflict is not an even fight. The U.S., of course, remains the predominant imperialist power with the largest economy, most advanced military and therefore the greatest geopolitical power.

Following the collapse of its former chief competitor, the Soviet Union, the U.S. imposed a neoliberal world order of free trade globalization, which it ruled over in part through multilateral institutions like the World Trade Organization, International Monetary Fund and World Bank.

Even economically powerful nations were incorporated and subordinated into this order. The U.S. enforced obedience with a combination of carrots and sticks — and when it deemed fit, it destroyed so-called rogue states like Saddam Hussein's Iraq that bucked its dictates.

As part of this effort, the U.S. engaged its former Cold War foe, China, encouraging it to open its economy to international capital and privatize its state capitalist industry.

Initially, the dynamic between the two countries was symbiotic. U.S., Japanese and European capital transferred large portions of their production to China to exploit a cheap and plentiful labor force drawn from a vast peasantry.

The most obvious example of this is Apple's iPhone. [50] The corporation does most of its research and development in the U.S. but subcontracts the assembly of its devices to Foxconn's factories in China for export to the world market.

But China didn't obey American dictates. The ruling Communist Party

preserved its state capitalist industry, and it exerts indirect control over the private sector. It also compelled international capital to accept joint ventures — often requiring transfers of technology — so that China could build up its own capacities.

China aimed re-establish itself as a world power, and in the process, it turned itself into the world's second-largest economy. As a consequence, China's relationship with the U.S. had become increasingly antagonistic long before Trump, as China begins to challenge the U.S. in high tech, international investment, political influence and regional military power in the Asia Pacific.

China's dramatic expansion has posed three interrelated problems for global capitalism and its American overlord.

First, after helping to spur the neoliberal boom, China's rapid development exacerbated systemic overproduction, which helped to trigger the Great Recession. [51] Second, its increasing competitiveness has undermined other economies — in particular the U.S., which lost portions of its manufacturing sector to China. Third, U.S. capital's relationship with China has become a national security issue because sections of defense industry are dependent on Chinese supply chains.

As a result, the U.S. capitalist class increasingly sees China as both a state and an economic rival.

Former China optimist Henry Paulson, who was an executive with Goldman Sachs and George W. Bush's Treasury Secretary, notes that China has alienated U.S. corporations most invested in the country: "How can it be that those who know China best, work there, do business there, make money there and have advocated for productive relations in the past are among those arguing for more confrontation?" [52]

Paulson argues that these corporations now regret their "Faustian bargain" of making profits

in the present at the expense of bolstering their own competition in the future.

Successive U.S. administrations attempted to balance between engagement with Beijing in the hopes of incorporating it into the neoliberal world order and containing its potential as a rival to U.S. domination.

With Donald Trump's rise to power in the U.S. and Xi Jinping's ascension in China, however, the dynamic has shifted decisively toward open rivalry.

Trump's promises to "Make America Great Again" by putting "America First," even if that upsets the norms of the neoliberal world order, are very much a response to the failure of the "containment-engagement" strategy.

Xi for his part trumpets the "Chinese Dream" of restoring its lost position as a world power. Under his direction, the government launched a \$1 trillion program called "One Belt One Road" to establish infrastructure paths stretching from Africa and Europe to the Asia Pacific. [53]

The newly inaugurated "Made in China 2025" is designed to create self-sufficient national development and production in high-tech industries like artificial intelligence, robotics, aerospace and computer chips that can rival Western corporations. [54]

To back up this assertion of economic power, Xi's government developed the state's military, especially its naval presence in the South China Sea, and it has increasingly asserted geopolitical influence, especially in Asia. The Washington Post reports that "a recent Rand Study found the Chinese navy during the past two decades caught up to the United States by modernizing ~extraordinarily quickly by any reasonable historical standard."

This is the backdrop to some of the most recent tensions between China and the U.S.

One factor is economic: With China's

economy noticeably slowing while the U.S.'s is at the peak of its expansion, the Trump administration's trade hawks calculate that the U.S. has the upper hand. [55]

In September, the administration imposed 10 percent tariffs ~ down from a planned 25 percent, though Trump threatens to impose the higher penalty in the new year ~ on \$250 billion worth of Chinese imports into the U.S., and it planned to add another \$267 billion in December.

In another escalation, the White House banned U.S. high-tech corporations from supplying the Chinese telecom corporation ZTE, on the grounds that ZTE had violated sanctions on North Korea and Iran. This nearly bankrupted the corporation until the U.S. cut a deal with China.

In October, Trump's lapdog Vice President Mike Pence made his hawkish speech at the Hudson Institute, declaring: "[O]ur message to China's rulers is this: This president will not back down. The American people will not be swayed. And we will continue to stand strong for our security and our economy." [56]

With new sanctions set to go into effect weeks later, it seemed like the trade conflict would reach a new level of intensity. But both sides pulled back from the brink, agreeing to more negotiations.

Three "M's" explain the Trump administration's retreat: The midterm elections were a defeat for the Republicans; the Robert Mueller investigation into political and business corruption is tightening the noose around Trump and Co.; and the world's financial markets went into a nosedive over the threat of a full-scale trade war. [57]

Indeed, Trump's trade war was threatening to tip the world economy into recession, something he certainly didn't want to be blamed for, so the administration was prepared to cut a deal. [58]

China had reasons of its own for agreeing to negotiations. Its economic growth has slowed to just 5.9 percent

this year, around half of what it has averaged over the last couple decades. [59] Trump's tariffs were exacerbating the slowdown, and the near-death sentence imposed on ZTE exposed China's continuing dependence on U.S. high-tech corporations.

As The Economist notes, China "remains reliant on the outside world for supplies of high-end chips. It spends more on semiconductor imports than it does on oil." So the last thing it wanted right now was an open confrontation with the U.S. [60]

But no one should be under any illusions that new negotiations will bring an end to the disputes over trade, intellectual property rights, and competition in high tech and artificial intelligence.

As The Economist concludes: "Neither country's interests are about to change. America has legitimate concerns about the national-security implications of being dependent on Chinese chips and vulnerable to Chinese hacking. China's pretensions to being a superpower will look hollow as long as America can throttle its firms at will. China is destined to try to catch up; America is determined to stay ahead."

If anything, the negotiations will ratchet up tensions as the U.S. hopes to force China to agree to American terms. Far from backing off his protectionist threats, Trump blustered in a recent tweet that he was a "Tariff Man." [61]

This is where the recent U.S. moves against another Chinese company, the telecommunications giant Huawei, come into it.

The Trump administration invoked national security concerns to pressure its allies in the "Five Eyes" intelligence alliance ~ Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Britain and the U.S. ~ to bar Huawei from building 5G communications infrastructure in their countries. The claim is that China will use this network to spy on

Five-Eyes states and steal high-tech secrets.

Even more shocking, the U.S. bullied Canada into arresting Huawei's Chief Financial Officer Meng Wanzhou, recycling the same charge it brought against ZTE: violating trade sanctions on Iran. For now, Meng is under house arrest in Canada awaiting possible extradition to the U.S.

Looming behind this headline-grabbing news are other ominous developments. Earlier this month, the administration announced that China has abandoned an agreement struck with the Obama White House in 2015 and is intensifying its cyberwarfare against the U.S. [62] The FBI's Bill Priestap called Chinese cyberwarfare "the most severe counterintelligence threat facing our country today."

Plus, Trump has announced that he intends to nix the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty on the excuse that Russia has violated it. The real motive, however, is that China, which is not a signatory to the treaty, has accumulated a vast stockpile of these weapons, giving Beijing an advantage. Trump wants to rip up the treaty so the U.S. is free to engage in a new arms race with China. [63]

China has responded to U.S. pressure in a contradictory fashion.

On the one hand, it retaliated against Canada's arrest of Meng by detaining two Canadian officials, Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor, on charges of engaging in activities that harm China's state security "in a clear effort to pressure Canada into releasing the Huawei executive." [64]

China's ambassador to Canada, Lu Shaye, penned an angry article against the U.S. for Toronto's Globe and Mail, declaring: "The detention of Ms. Meng is not a mere judicial case, but a premeditated political action in which the United States wields its regime power to witch-hunt a Chinese high-tech company." [65]

On the other hand, China has begun to make at least verbal concessions in the trade negotiations.

It agreed to end its boycott of U.S. soybeans, which has hammered

agribusiness in the Midwest since it was declared after Trump's first round of tariffs. China will also suspend 40 percent tariffs imposed on auto imports, reducing them back to 15 percent, and enter negotiations on intellectual property rights. [66] Beijing has even agreed to reword its China 2025 program so that it appears less of a challenge to U.S. supremacy in high tech. [67]

Even if China and the U.S. manage to cut a deal by the end of the three-month period for talks on March 1 "and that will be a tall order" it is unlikely to last, and it will certainly not stop the developing rivalry between the two powers.

For all its erratic outbursts, the Trump presidency has focused the American ruling class on the need to confront China in order to preserve U.S. domination over the world system. [68] Even Lawrence Summers, Obama's former Treasury Secretary, had to admit that "Trump, for all his failings, has China's attention on economic issues in a way that eluded his predecessors." [69]

U.S. capital, despite its dependence on China as an export processing platform and a market for its commodities, has grown frustrated over high tariffs in China, theft of intellectual property rights, and the country's state support for national champions, especially in high tech.

Both Republicans and Democrats also agree that China poses a challenge to the hegemony of the U.S. state over the world order. But neither has come up with an effective strategy to chart a way forward.

Barack Obama's Pivot to Asia was the most coherent so far: It included the projection of regional free trade under U.S. auspices through the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) agreement; redeployment of the U.S. military out of the Middle East and into the Asia Pacific; and political pressure on historic allies to remain in the U.S. camp and resist the pull into economic dependency on China. [70]

But the Pivot to Asia failed. The TPP never came up for a vote in Congress because of domestic opposition; the U.S. remained bogged down in Afghanistan and the Middle East; and its relative weakness in Asia made it hard for the U.S. to keep its allies on side. As a result, countries like the Philippines are currently hedging their bets by maintaining relations with both China and the U.S.

Trump defeated Hillary Clinton, who offered a more muscular version of Obama's "containment-engagement" strategy. Since in office, and especially this year, he has pushed for his economic nationalist alternative that treats all relations between states, whether allies or adversaries, in a transactional fashion, aiming to get the best deal for what he defines as U.S. capitalist interests, regardless of the impact on the world system. [71]

This America First policy represents only a minority of U.S. capital, which remains heavily invested in an international system of production, investment and sale. But Trump's more aggressive nationalism is on the ascendency.

To shore up its geopolitical position, the administration is trying to group its regional allies "the so-called Quad, including the U.S., India, Australia and Japan" into a bloc to counter China's influence in what it calls the Indo-Pacific. And, of course, it has increased the defense budget, with more funds for an unshackled Cyber Command to counter China's state and industrial spy system, plus stepped-up patrols of contested shipping lanes in the Pacific Ocean and South China Sea. [72]

These policies will only stoke the conflict with China, whose rulers will counter U.S. attempts to contain its rise as a world power. Trump's "America First" policy will force them to put "China First" at all costs.

Whatever China says and whatever it agrees to at the bargaining table, the government's priorities will be to build up its independent economy and strengthen its military capacity to stand up to the U.S. And when the world economy goes into the next

recession” which is likely in the next few years, these antagonisms will only intensify.

Thus, as former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd wrote:

The U.S.-China trade war is but one manifestation of a deeper phenomenon, covering the whole political, security and economic relationship. And we would be foolish not to recognize that this systemic shift in U.S. sentiment toward China is likely to continue well after President Donald Trump has gone. Congress, both Republican and Democrats, the major agencies of state as well as most of the U.S. business community by and large support this new robust approach to China. [73]

Rudd is right. The Democratic Party offers no alternative to Trump’s confrontational approach to China. Its leaders, especially those funded by high tech, can be just as jingoistic as Republicans.

As Democratic Rep. Ro Khanna, who represents Silicon Valley in California, told the New York Times, [74] Democrats need to talk more about “America winning in the 21st century, about American outdoing China, that China is this authoritarian government and system of values that we don’t want the world to share.”

Even democratic socialist Sen. Bernie Sanders joined the China-bashing

chorus in a statement earlier this year that opposed trade sanctions against Canada and the European Union, but “strongly support[ed] imposing stiff penalties on countries like China, Russia, South Korea and Vietnam to prevent them from illegally dumping steel and aluminum into the U.S. and throughout the world.” [75]

More recently, in his second major foreign policy address recently, Sanders called for “a global democratic movement” to counter inequality and authoritarianism. [76]

The speech was a stark contrast to Trump’s xenophobia and ultra-nationalism, and it set itself against reactionaries like Brazil’s Jair Bolsonaro, a neofascist who will take over the presidency in January. Sanders’ championing of human rights and democracy is a welcome alternative in this dismal status quo.

But socialists who celebrate Sanders taking these stands can’t ignore the more difficult issues. Sanders’ speech didn’t mention the intensifying inter-imperial rivalry between the U.S. and China, which is a problematic omission in and of itself.

And we know from history that the liberal wing of the ruling establishment in the U.S. has claimed to use the U.S. empire for “humanitarian” purposes, while defending and extending American imperial interests at the expense of the world’s oppressed. [77] Unless Sanders takes an internationalist stand of opposing China-bashing, his proposal could give a left cover to the aggressive anti-China stance of

establishment Democrats and Trump’s Republicans alike.

The left must reject as bald-faced hypocrisy the U.S. case against China that singles out its repression and militarism.

Remember that the U.S. runs its own repressive state at home that jails people of color in world-record numbers, detains and deports immigrants in camps and prisons, and polices America’s brutal class inequalities.

Abroad, it oversees the biggest spy operation in the world, uses international institutions to pry open other countries’ economies for the benefit of its capitalist class, guards the system with the biggest military in world history and regularly proves its willingness to wreck whole societies like Iraq to enforce its rule.

We should also reject any illusions that China is some kind of alternative. It is a rising power with predatory ambitions, just like the U.S.

Instead of lining up with either camp, we must oppose both rival imperialisms and instead build international solidarity between workers of all countries under the slogan: “Neither Washington nor Beijing, but international socialism.”

December 18 2018

<https://socialistworker.org/2018/12...>

The yellow vests mean revolt

20 December 2018, by Josu Egireun, Olivier Besancenot

This interview was conducted by Josu Egireun for Viento Sur where it was published on 12 December with an introduction by Egireun.

AROUND A month since its first mobilization, and after several weekends in a row of national protests, the yellow vests

movement, arrogantly dismissed by the elite and facing unprecedented repression, has twice forced the government to

retreat.

The first instance came on December 4 when the prime minister froze gas tax increases for six months. The second came when President Emmanuel Macron announced a string of concessions on December 10. Yet both failed to calm the yellow vests' anger, nor were they convincing to the majority of the population who supports the movement.

From the beginning, left-wing political and social forces have harbored doubts about this movement: Is it supported by the extreme right? Because it opposes fuel tax hikes, is it anti-environment?

These doubts that have been dissipating as social movements and unions have joined the yellow vests at the local level, especially since the national day of mobilization against climate change on December 8.

And they have all but evaporated since a poll released by France 2 TV that asked yellow-vest protesters their political preferences and their main concerns: 33 percent say they are neither left nor right, 15 percent describe themselves as extreme left and 5.4 percent say far right.

The two most important demands among the protesters are for the government to increase household purchasing power and reduce taxes, while concern about immigration ranks near the bottom. And remarkably, for the first time in France, the movement is made up equally of women and men.

This is a movement that is developing its own language — one that we must learn in order to dialogue with it. It is a movement that, over the last weeks, has seen labor unions beginning to mobilize in a halting manner.

France's biggest union coalition, the General Confederation of Workers, called for a day of general mobilization on December 14, and in some regions, like Ile-de-France, this garnered support from other unions and federations, such as Workers Force, public employees in the United Workers Federation, the left-wing Solidaires union coalition, and the

Union of French Students.

There were also militant and harshly repressed mobilizations in schools, including the occupation of Nanterre University that began December 11 with an assembly of 3,000 students.

HOW DO you evaluate the proposals made by Macron in his message to the nation?

THIS IS the second time the government has stepped back since the December 4 announcement of the cancelation of the gas tax. Now they are retreating on a proposed increase from 6.6 percent to 8.3 percent in Social Security taxes that were imposed in January 2018.

These retreats increased everyone's confidence. People began to be conscious of the fact that struggle pays off. Of course, the measures that have been announced so far are very modest and very late in the game, and most of all, there's a lot of smoke and mirrors.

For example, the 100 euro (\$114) increase in the minimum wage (SMIC) isn't what it seems because it's not a net increase in the SMIC, but only an increase in a limited government subsidy for low-income workers. And this will be paid by taxpayers, not the employers.

Thus, it's not an increase in the minimum wage, but only a subsidy. In fact, this really pisses off even more people and therefore will only spur further mobilizations.

A YELLOW vest from the city of Rennes defines the movement as "the drop of gasoline that overflows the tank." How would you describe the yellow vests?

I THINK it is a real uprising. It is not yet a massive uprising of the majority, but it is a real uprising.

It isn't a traditional social mobilization. From the outset, it's gone on the offensive. Until now in France, we haven't seen a generalized

movement go on the offensive since 1968.

This movement has demanded, in one way or another, an increase in wages and a reduction in the cost of living — that is, it calls for a redistribution of wealth. This isn't a defensive movement against this or that government counter-reform, but an offensive struggle.

On the other hand, it is a totally heterogeneous movement — the product of an uprising that originates from deep within society. It does not spring from traditional organizations. Far from it, this is a movement that has crystallized all the rage and indignation accumulated in society — a movement in which all the previous mobilizations coalesce and all the anger that until now has not been translated into action finds an outlet. In effect, it is the drop of water that overflows the glass.

THROUGHOUT THESE last three weeks of mobilization, the movement's determination, its radical nature, but at the same time its democratic, horizontal functioning and its ability organize four days of national mobilization, have been striking. So is the apparent politicization of those who act as spokespersons, taking into account that they are people without any previous political experience.

WE SHOULD note from the outset the way that the conflict has been covered in the press and the response it has received from the political class. The mobilizations and the movement's activists have produced a class arrogance from the elite, similar to the contempt we saw in France during the referendum on the European Constitutional Treaty in 2005.

Now, in the face of this, we are witnessing a real politicization of the people. In France right now, there are tens of thousands, and maybe hundreds of thousands, of people in the process of becoming politicized in record time.

The challenge for us, on behalf of the organized social and political movements in France, is to stand with

this movement so that it has the most anti-capitalist expression possible. However, we cannot deny the reality of our times, including the maneuvers and the attempts by the extreme right to capture it.

This is a real problem, and there is no use denying that this is part of the scenario. Therefore, the coming together of the yellow vests and social movements “which is being organized from below, at the local level” is a very important element in response to the manipulative attempts of the extreme right.

The determination, radicalism, combativeness and vigilance of hundreds of people, the barricades in the Champs Élysées “all this recalls memories of an underground history of revolution and of general strikes in France.

It also reminds us of the defeats of the traditional workers movement of the last 15 or 20 years. Over those years, the level of confrontation didn't go beyond a certain point, and many believed our more radical history had disappeared from collective consciousness.

But the reality was different. Even people who have not participated in these mobilizations are aware of the impasse facing traditional forms of struggle.

We may also be witnessing an attempt to resolve the underlying problems, to create a relationship of forces that can win, by looking for a shortcut that relies on radical actions. That is, hoping that certain forms of action might, in and of themselves, solve the deeper problems.

But there are no shortcuts. If we want to push back Macron, we must organize greater numbers “we must surpass the size of the current mobilizations. We will have to break the glass ceiling that has so far limited the scope of participation, even for the yellow vests.

Today, we are facing a problem that we are very familiar with in France during these last years. We have seen hundreds of thousands of people participate in mobilizations, but they

fail to go further.

The novelty of the yellow vests is that 70 percent of the population supports them. We are witnessing a scenario similar to the one we experienced in France in 1995, a dynamic we defined as a “strike by delegation” “meaning that 10 percent of a union mobilized to take action, while another 70 percent was willing to support them.

What we need is to transform the minority taking action into collective action. This is the only way to really push back Macron.

HOW IS it possible that this movement pushed back the government in three weeks, while, for example, in 2010, millions of people mobilized on the streets against the pension reform, but lost that fight?

BECAUSE WE are seeing a potential unity that has scared the government.

A lot of attention has been paid to violent confrontations in Paris, but the most important thing is that broad sectors of the population are acting together everywhere, including retired people, workers, the unemployed and students “mobilizations in post-secondary institutes started a week ago.

In particular, it is the youth who scare the government. We have to point out the almost semi-insurrectional character of the slogans that the movement has adopted.

I have never known mobilizations like these “thousands of people who want to go to the center of Paris, the Champs-Élysées, just like I imagine peasants did in their time to rebel against the lord, by going to his castle to demand accountability. All this weighs heavily on the situation.

JUDGING BY the first reactions to the Macron's statements, all signs point to the mobilizations continuing, which raises the possibility of a large social and political crisis. But this is a social and political crisis that comes at a time when left-wing alternatives on a national scale are absent.

THE PROBLEM we face is that from now on, we must rebuild everything. We are witnessing a political crisis of the Fifth Republic and of political representation, and it is Macron who is paying for it. Keep in mind that Macron, in a sense, was the last option for the ruling class, even if he was not their first choice.

Macron positioned himself outside the traditional parties. Some sections of the elite joined him before the elections and others later. And from the beginning, he launched a powerful offensive against two emblematic social forces: the students and youth and the railway workers. He raised university selection standards for student and youth and forced through the dismantling of public rail service on the transport workers.

Macron's problem is that the current political crisis will not allow him to continue on this path. One section of the elite believes Macron has been weakened and may no longer represent a good option for them. After all, as long as Macronism works, it works, but when it fails, it threatens to create vacuum of power. For 10 days up until the December 10 speech, Macron was missing in action, and the speech itself does nothing but add fuel to the fire.

Therefore, the only possible, credible political perspectives for the social movement and the left is for this movement to win, to be politicized and to develop a form of political representation for itself.

In any case, we do not believe a clear answer can be presented for the next elections “especially the European Union elections, where the left is totally fragmented. We must think beyond these.

This movement must create a political foundation for a new social and political constellation of forces. With all due humility, this is what I believe we must hope for in the first instance. And I think we must thoroughly examine everything that has not worked in the different attempts to reconstruct the left.

*First published in Castilian at **Viento Sur**. Translated into English by Todd*

COP24: During the disaster, the comedy continues

19 December 2018, by **Daniel Tanuro**

The COP21 in Paris set a course: “stay well below 2° C warming compared to the pre-industrial era while continuing efforts not to exceed 1.5° C.” In the wake of this decision, the IPCC was tasked with drafting a special report on 1.5° C. Last October, this alarming report concluded that humanity has a mere dozen years (as a maximum) to avoid a massive cataclysm, and that significant changes at all levels of society are essential to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 50% by 2030 and end them completely by 2050.

In Katowice, the United States, supported by Russia, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, fought to prevent the alarm raised by the scientists being heard by the world’s governments. They achieved their goals, inasmuch as COP24 finally confined itself to thanking the IPCC for submitting its report on time. The eight-page statement adopted by the conference does not once allude to the absolute urgency highlighted by the IPCC. While national government climate plans (“Nationally Determined Contributions” - NDCs - in jargon) put into perspective a catastrophic warming of 2.7 to 3.7° C, no state has taken steps to strengthen its commitments. We will see later how to bridge the gap between the words of Paris and the action of governments ... if it is bridged.

Goodbye, differentiated

responsibilities

The blind eye turned to the IPCC diagnosis is not the only cause of outrage at this COP. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (Rio, 1992) states that global warming is a “common but differentiated responsibility”. It is therefore a question of distributing the efforts because the so-called “developed” countries bear the main historical responsibility for the warming. This clause, fundamental for the countries of the South, has, since the beginning of the negotiations, been in the sights of the rich countries, particularly the United States. However, under the guise of standardized emission accounting procedures, the COP 24 marks a new stage in its progressive re-traction.

COP24 has effectively decided that the CO2 emissions of a rich country - which could perfectly well immediately stop burning coal to produce electricity - are put on par with those of a poor country - which does not have the financial and technological means to develop green alternatives. This equivalence would certainly be justified if the assistance of the developed countries to the energy transition of the southern countries was real, substantial, unconditional and proportional to the historical responsibilities. But this is not the case. The one hundred billion a year of the “green fund for the climate” promised from 2020 (a sum which is anyway completely insufficient to finance the transition and adaptation) remain mostly a promise on paper, and the rich countries turn a deaf ear when the poorest claim compensation for loss

and damage caused to their countries by more violent typhoons and other extreme weather events.

Cynically, those who, like Trump, deny the reality of “anthropogenic” climate change - while they are primarily responsible for it - do not hesitate to use the “ecological emergency” to stifle issues of social justice. Justice in the North-South relations, obviously, but also in the relations between rich and poor, in the North as in the South. The movement of yellow jackets clearly shows that there is no way out of the climate crisis through a neoliberal policy that makes gifts to the rich in the name of competitiveness, on the one hand, and taxes the poor in the name of the environment, on the other hand. Yet it is this hypocritical and unjust policy that governments want to intensify, in the name of saving the climate. In particular through the introduction (remitted to a subsequent COP) of a global carbon price and a new “market mechanism” to generalize the commodification of ecosystems, with tradable emission rights thrown in.

Growth or climate? Jesus or Barabbas?

At the end of this COP, the comments of most observers oscillate between the image of the glass half full and the glass half empty. They deplore the slowness in the implementation of the “good agreement” of Paris. But this slowness does not stem solely from the Polish Presidency’s poor presidency of the COP, its submission to coal interests (COP24 was sponsored by the biggest European coal mining company), or the crisis the

nasty Trump has opened up in the "multilateral" model of management of international relations. More fundamentally, it stems from the impossibility of solving the climate equation without breaking with the productivist logic of capitalism. So COP21 should be re-examined, to see the dark side of the "good agreement" of Paris.

Saving the climate means stopping growth. To put it simply, it is necessary to produce less and to share more, which capitalism is fundamentally incapable of. In other words, there is a profound antagonism between the solution of the climate crisis, on the one hand, and the capitalist logic of accumulation, on the other. For a quarter of a century, COPs have done nothing but turn around this dilemma: growth or climate? Jesus or Barabbas? The Paris agreement gave the impression that a solution was found, but it was only a statement of intentions, a sleight of hand. Because, behind the scenes, the "good agreement" was underpinned by a crazy and criminal capitalist project: the "temporary exceeding" of the threshold of danger of warming. Barabbas is free, Christ is sacrificed, Pilate is washing his hands.

A scenario of sorcerer's apprentices

The idea is as follows: the 1.5°C bar will be crossed in 2030-2040 - growth for profit requires it! - but "negative emission technologies" and geoengineering will help cool the climate in the second half of the century. Sleep in peace, good people, everything is under control ... Implicit in the Paris agreement, this scenario is now quite explicit in the scientific publications that serve as a basis for climate negotiators - including in the work of the IPCC.

This project of "temporary exceeding" is worthy of sorcerer's apprentices, for at least two reasons: 1) the technologies in question are hypothetical, even dangerous (ecologically and socially), and 2) irreversible disasters - for example, a dislocation of ice caps causing a rise of several metres of the level of the oceans! - could occur during the interval. But the sorcerer's apprentices have the ears of "elites" because their "solution" seems to allow postponing the dilemma of growth to later. Suddenly, it leaves fossil fuel multinationals and the banks that finance them the necessary time to make their huge investments in coal, oil, gas profitable. De facto, the alliance of fossil fuels and finance dictates the pace and forms of the energy transition.

Totally dedicated to the imperatives of profit, competitiveness (between companies, but also between states protecting "their" companies) the negotiators affect to believe that the God of Technology will come to the rescue of their market economy and its corollary: infinite growth. Hence their indifference to the current catastrophe and their enthusiasm, even their sincerity, to (try to make us believe) they have reached a "historic agreement" - once again. During the disaster, the comedy continues.

Social justice, climate justice: the same struggle

After this COP24, one thing should be crystal clear: there is nothing, absolutely nothing to expect from the governments, from the United Nations, from the Talanoa Dialogue, from the "High Ambition Coalition" and so on. We must abandon radically any illusion about the possibility of

convincing all those responsible for the chaos, whoever they are, of the benefits they would incur by "taking leadership" to "raise ambitions" by piloting a "just transition" towards "sustainable development" and so on. They want nothing to do with it, period. All this blah-blah, all this stage management, has one purpose: to put people to sleep, neutralize their thinking, paralyze their organizations. This is the spider's strategy. To collaborate is to throw oneself into the web.

In Belgium, the stalemate of the collaborative strategy of the major environmental associations (and the trade union leaderships that support them) has come to light. Indeed, in the aftermath of the huge climate demonstration in early December (75,000 people in Brussels), the "Climate Coalition" and the "Climate Express" urged that the right-wing government should not fall from power, while Greenpeace begged the king to convince the political class of the climate emergency. Without success, of course. Is it not obvious that this way is a dead end? When all earthly remedies have been exhausted, it will only be left to implore a divine intervention.

This stalemate is in all respects like that into which the trade union leaderships sank at the end of 2014, halting their action plan "to give a chance for consultation". We know what has become of it: the right-wing government has regained confidence and dismantled, one after the other, many social conquests.

Whether in social or environmental matters, the conclusion is clear: the only message these leaders understand is that of force. It is therefore necessary to build a relationship of forces and, for that, there is only one way: to unite the struggles for climate justice and social justice in an anti-capitalist perspective.

Gilets jaunes (yellow jackets): learning from history and acting now

18 December 2018, by **Éric Toussaint**

The starting point of the French Revolution was the rejection by the people of the unfair tax policy imposed by the monarchy. Most of the population was subjected to a huge tax burden while the aristocracy and clergy did not pay any taxes. Why had the monarchy increased taxes? To repay the public debt owed to the bourgeoisie, a debt that served the rulers' interests with no regard for the people's needs.

Triggering, in part, the 1789 Liège Revolution (Belgium) was a tax on beer, which was the last straw, as it were. People could no longer bear the fact that the clergy and the aristocracy should not pay any taxes and protested against the fact that 25% of the Principality's budget went to repay illegitimate public debts.

One of the causes of the first Russian revolution in 1905 was unfair taxation intended to finance the repaying of a public debt that had increased as a consequence of wars waged by the tsarist regime. Before they were arrested by the Tsar's police, the leaders of the revolutionary movement at the head of workers', peasants' and soldiers' councils in Saint Petersburg had announced that repayment of debts contracted by the establishment had to be stopped.

The poll-tax imposed by Margaret Thatcher in 1989 set off a huge resistance movement in the UK since this tax on housing unfairly hit the poorer section of the population. It resulted in uprisings throughout the kingdom and eventually led to the demise of the Iron Lady.

The movement of the gilets jaunes is the expression of overwhelming exasperation at the flagrant injustice of policies implemented

by our rulers

In 2018, the movement of the gilets jaunes (yellow vests) which has developed in places such as France, its colony, the island of Réunion and Belgium (mainly Wallonia and Brussels) is the expression of overwhelming exasperation at the flagrant injustice of policies implemented by our rulers: a large part of the population has seen its income decrease, suffers from restrictions in public services and finds it more and more difficult to keep up with the cost of living. A majority of those who are part of this movement are not organized in either trade unions or political parties. The yellow vests are protesting against unfair taxes, shoe-string wages and miserable pensions. They demand an increase in minimum wages and purchasing power. Another frequent demand is the introduction of a tax on the very wealthy (which was recently cancelled in France).

Our leaders explain that the increase in the cost of fuel is part of our contribution to fighting climate change and a way of repaying our debt. [78] This kind of discourse does not convince anyone. Why? Because most citizens are fully aware that their government has not taken any efficient measures against climate change: there are no taxes on jet fuel or on the profits of multinational oil companies, it provides no alternatives to using private cars but is cutting the number of trains, closing country stations and increasing fares, etc. Moreover, while continuing to reduce the purchasing power of those who already have to manage on very little, generous tax cuts are given to the wealthy and to big companies.

More and more citizens realize that

leaders are enforcing an unfair and therefore illegitimate policy. They have taken to the streets to convey their demands.

As in the case of the 1789 revolutionary process, what emerges is a dynamic of collective and spontaneous drafting of registers of grievances, which include demands and proposals formulated on the social networks that are debated among people who didn't know each other yet now picket together to block or filter traffic on the roads, or access to harbours, industrial storage, buildings of the Finance Ministry. They want to be heard and they hold debates. In many cases this is the very first time they are confronted with politics on the terrain, they are learning how to self-organize, face repression, and they are becoming aware that the mainstream media along with governments are adept at disinformation.

Some demonstrations turn violent, just as has always happened in the context of the major social uprisings in the history of humankind.

Not a single robber baron has been sentenced to prison

In France, the judiciary, which is aiding and abetting the executive, decided on a police crack-down against protesters. Prison sentences have multiplied at a dramatic rate. The violence inflicted by the powers that be and the judiciary through the heavy sentences issued to protesters is unprecedented over the past sixty years. They literally want to intimidate people to prevent them expressing their anger against an authoritarian, unfair and repressive power. This

policy clearly recalls the stigmatisation and repression of lower classes in the 19th century. The judiciary is displaying its class allegiance. On one hand unconditional four- or six-month prison sentences are handed down to yellow vests for having joined citizens' protests in which public or private property was damaged. On the other, no sentence has been issued to bank owners or corporate CEOs, and yet they systematically plunder public goods through large-scale tax evasion. Not a single robber baron has been sentenced to prison although the damage resulting from the 2007-8 crisis they caused amounts to dozens of billion euros for society.

However, wielding both stick and carrot, the Macron government is attempting to defuse the movement by announcing a cancellation of the rise in the price of fuel and a moratorium on a stricter approach to technical control of cars. But it still refuses to grant any real increase in minimal wages. On 10th December, Macron only announced a prime of 80 euros and an indexation of the legal minimum wage of 1,9%. The government still refuses to increase the pensions. And it refuses to reinstate the tax on wealth. Fiscal austerity will be continued and will thus prevent any real increase in income for those who desperately need it. There will be no massive investments in public collective transport nor a lowering of fares, though this would be an effective measure against climate change. There will be no increase of corporate taxes for such polluting companies as Total. We could draw a long list of measures the Macron government should take (but will not) to implement a solution to the social and climate crises.

Unfair taxes are used to repay an unfair public debt

In debates within the movement it has to be highlighted that unfair taxes are used to repay an unfair public debt. The public debt, which has sharply increased over the past years, has

been accumulated in order to serve the particular interests of a privileged minority: major shareholders and bank owners who have profited from bank bailouts since 2007-2008; the very wealthy who have kept receiving tax deductions; corporations, which pay very limited taxes. Moreover, as a consequence of the Maastricht treaty, successive governments for the last 40 years have not been allowed to finance their debts from their own resources or by borrowing directly from their central banks; they have sold debt securities to private banks and investment funds, which now have a monopoly on loans to governments. This results in extra costs for the governments, paid for by ever more taxes on the population, while the wealthier sector is practically exempted, as it was under the Ancien régime.

A large part of new public loans is used to repay former debts and this means secure revenue for private banks and the wealthy who have bought debt securities. For these various reasons a large part of the debt is illegitimate and we must fight to get it cancelled.

A large part of new public loans is used to repay former debts

The other side of this unfair coin consists of the fact that a significant proportion of those who join the yellow vest movement are indebted to banks since their limited income is not enough to face their basic needs such as food, medicine and health care, housing, heating, clothes, transport, schooling... This is clearly illustrated in the predicament of those who have been fined over the last days: many are over-indebted because their income is not enough to cover their basic needs. Measures must be taken to cancel part of the households' debts since they have had to bear the brunt of a sharp decrease in their actual income.

After four decades of neoliberal offensive, capitalist exploitation

has narrowed the gap with the conditions of 19th century

Finally, the government demonstrates the validity of the Communist Manifesto which claims that proletarians only have their own chains to lose. After four decades of neoliberal offensive, capitalist exploitation has narrowed the gap with the conditions of 19th century wage-earners: precarious working conditions, low wages, employers that are all-powerful in contractual relationships with employees, no security for the elderly or those with serious health problems, deterioration of living conditions, stigmatisation of certain categories, arbitrary and disproportionate repression of social protest...

Let us remember that at the beginning of the neoliberal offensive some claimed that it would bring about a kind of popular capitalism, as wage-earners would also become shareholders hoarding wealth. Nowadays we can all see that a very large part of the population is surviving on shoestring budgets. The myth of "capitalism for the people" bites the dust.

It is high time to turn to radical solutions.

Alternative policies in the people's interest must deal at once with austerity, public debt, private banks, the Eurozone, oppose authoritarian tendencies and launch the process of creating a new constitution. Experiences in the Eurozone over the 2010-2018 period have clearly shown that it is impossible to break with austerity unless all the above problems are dealt with, at the very least. 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, the radical movements that gathered around the Bernie Sanders candidacy 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.

Public debt could be used to finance ambitious programmes of ecological transition instead of to enforce anti-social, extractivist, productivist policies

Public debt could be used to finance ambitious programmes of ecological transition instead of to enforce anti-social, extractivist, productivist policies that foster competition between nations. Public indebtedness is not in itself a bad thing. Public authorities can use loans to:

- finance the complete closure of thermal and nuclear power plants;
- replace fossil energies with renewable sources of energy that respect the environment;
- finance a conversion from current farming methods, which contribute to climate change and use a lot of chemical inputs which are responsible for the decrease in biodiversity, favouring local production of organic food to make farming compatible with our fight against climate change;
- radically reduce air and road transport and develop collective transport and the use of railways;
- finance an ambitious programme of low energy social housing.

Public borrowing is quite legitimate if it serves legitimate projects and if those who contribute to the loan do so legitimately.

A popular government will not hesitate to force corporations (whether national, foreign or multinational) as well as richer households to contribute to the loan without drawing any profit from it, i.e. with zero interest and without compensation in the case of inflation.

At the same time, a large portion of households in the popular classes will easily be persuaded to entrust their savings to the public authorities to fund the legitimate projects mentioned above. This voluntary funding by the popular classes would be remunerated at a positive actual rate, for instance 4%. This means that if annual inflation reached 3%, the public authorities would pay a nominal interest rate of 7%, to guarantee an actual rate of 4%.

Such a mechanism would be perfectly legitimate since it would finance projects that are really useful to society and because it would help reduce the wealth of the rich while increasing the income of the popular classes.

We must also put forward other concrete proposals that should be implemented by a government as devoted to the people as the current governments are devoted to the 1%.

The first step is to begin disobeying in a clear and determined way

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 which claims to govern should refuse to obey the austerity measures from the outset, and pledge to refuse measures whose sole purpose is balancing the budget. They should announce: "We will not submit to the European treaties' diktat of a balanced budget because we want to devote more public expenditure to

social development, end 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 capitulation of Greece in 2015 has shown us why we must shed the illusion that the EC and other European governments respect the will of the people. This illusion can only lead to disaster. We must disobey.

Second proposal: Call for popular mobilization both at the national and the European levels.

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 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 any self-defence strategy. In Spain, Portugal, Cyprus, and Ireland, it all 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.

What if a leftist government in Spain or France should say to the ECB: "we will suspend repayment of the bonds you hold herewith"

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 Eurozone countries that it bought up from private banks in the context of Quantitative Easing (see box). On 30 November 2018, it held sovereign Spanish debt bonds to the value of € 259 billion, € 363

billion in Italian bonds, € 418 billion in French bonds and € 36 billion in Portuguese bonds. [79] In all, in December 2018 the ECB held 2170 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.

The policy of Quantitative Easing (QE) has been implemented by the ECB since 2015 in the wake of what the Fed had done in the US from 2008 to 2014. It consists of massively purchasing private and public debt securities from banks in the Eurozone and from corporations. It thus pours liquidities into banks and corporations, which then use the money to speculate, thus making further crises more likely. Economic recovery is awaited in vain. The ECB was to put an end to this purchasing programme at the end of 2018 but decided to maintain the level of the stock of about € 2200 billion of sovereign securities it purchased from private banks between 2015 and the end of 2018. This means that when sovereign securities come to maturity the ECB can buy more for an equivalent amount and thus pour further liquidities into private banks, who then buy more sovereign securities from France and other countries. Moreover the ECB uses this device to blackmail governments that do not comply with austerity measures and neo-liberal reforms. Indeed if a government should decide to break away from austerity, the ECB could decide not to buy its debt securities when the old ones have matured. It could harm the said government if it decides to buy instead debt securities from a hard-line neo-liberal government. This would result in increasing the cost at which the country finances its debt. It is one of the reasons for which a legitimate government that wants to break away from neo-liberal policies must immediately suspend repayment of securities held by the ECB and simultaneously launch a policy of public loans combined with an audit of former debts inherited by the Ancien Régime, an audit with citizens' participation, so as to repudiate the part of the debt that is illegitimate, odious, illegal and/or unsustainable.

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.

Placing the finance sector under citizen control and creating a public banking service

Fifth proposal: Socialize the 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. banks and insurance companies. In other words, turning the financial sector into a public service. [80] Socialization consists of placing the finance sector under citizen control and creating a public banking service. Socializing the banking sector means:

- expropriating major shareholders without compensation (or merely with a symbolic euro); small shareholders will be compensated;
- entrusting the monopoly of banking activity to the public sector, 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 a 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 for 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. [81]

Of course, socializing the energy sector will also remain a priority during the ecological transition. An ecological transition cannot take place without a public monopoly of 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 a country chooses to exit the Eurozone or to remain 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 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, [82] or else the levying of a special progressive tax on incomes above €200,000 per annum, 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), [83] and

other basic necessities. On the other hand, increase VAT on luxury goods and services, etc. We also need to increase 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 of the same for the wealthiest 10% and for major corporations. Also, strict new measures will be taken against fraud and tax evasion.

Eighth proposal: de-privatization – “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 social 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 and so put an end to such cases. A vast programme of public expenditure would be implemented in order to stimulate employment and socially useful activity by encouraging the local economy.

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. Among such struggles, we can mention the current yellow vest movement; 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 challenging 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.

Breaking away from austerity policies cannot be achieved if radical measures against big capital are not taken

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. To believe there is any other choice is to hide behind a smokescreen and can never achieve real progress. Such is the architecture of Europe, and so great is the capitalist crisis, 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 wage the struggle against austerity and embark on the path of an eco-socialist transition. It is of absolute and immediate necessity.

It is of the utmost importance to provide people with an explanation of

what should and can be done to bring about real change. Indeed in public debates the feasibility of breaking with the neoliberal model is constantly questioned, in the wake of 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 with the capitulation of the Tsipras government. There is one obvious lesson to be learned: faced with a popular government, the negative response of the governing bodies of the EU will be swift. The European Commission, the Eurogroup and the managers of the ECB would not remain passive if a popular government decided to take the route of change. There will be no waiting-period of several months. The popular government itself will 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. [84] 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 left-wing 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.

To modify power relations, mobilization of the people will be the decisive element

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.

Having said that, the way out of the crisis must not be 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, insurance companies and the energy sector, 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 intra-European domination chains are to be found in countries on the periphery such as Greece, Portugal, Spain, but also in France, Belgium, the UK and Italy.

The yellow vest movement that started in France and in the island of Réunion has begun spreading towards other countries, notably French-speaking Belgium. Solidarity actions with the yellow vests are emerging everywhere. It is high time to embrace an internationalist empowering strategy.

Translated by Snake Arbusto, Mike Krolikowski, Vicki Briault and Christine Pagnoulle

Time to Rebuild, Time to Rethink

17 December 2018, by **Amandla!**

These initiatives represented a huge opportunity for renewing radical politics in South Africa, especially as they were emerging within a context of intensifying social struggles and deepening class antagonisms. Each in their own way raised important questions of perspective, strategy and even tactics or methods of struggle. Most importantly, taken together, they represented something very significantly greater than the sum of their parts. They represented the emergence of an anti-capitalist moment with a real possibility of building a social-political movement that could fill the vacuum to the left of the ANC and the exhausted tradition of national liberation politics.

This moment seemed to be the maturing of an earlier period, marked also by heightened mass struggles over HIV/AIDS, privatisation, retrenchments, access to basic services, etc. and the development of new social movements progressively aligned with the global anti-capitalist / social justice movement.

The possibility of an alliance of social movements with the labour movement, sections of the SACP and other left formations, to give organisational expression to these struggles was sacrificed when this social anger was channelled into the Zuma project. The 2007 ANC Congress, which saw Zuma put in power by an alliance of the ANC Youth League, the SACP and Cosatu, represented a false dawn for new left politics. It came to represent the toxic rise of crony capitalism, embedded in a neoliberal state-centred framework. The triumph of a lumpen bourgeoisie over the state and the ANC. State resources were liberated to aid the emergence of a predatory elite competing for the spoils of a stagnating economy with white monopoly capital.

A flash of illumination

It took an event of great significance to recreate the opportunities of the late 1990s and early 2000s. The mass strike of almost 200,000 mineworkers and the cold-blooded massacre of Lonmin workers in Marikana gave South Africans the lens to see the callous and toxic dynamic of the predatory elite's accumulation path. The political-social impact of the Marikana massacre is so evocatively and accurately described by Ruth First, when she wrote about a similar event in our labour history. "It was one of those great historic moments," she wrote after 60,000 black mineworkers struck for a wage increase of 10 shillings in 1946, "that in a flash of illumination educates a nation, reveals what has been hidden, destroys lies and illusions."

Marikana, "in a flash of illumination", didn't just educate a nation into the nature of the Zuma regime. It also provided the food to nurture a new political moment - one of popular struggle and anti-capitalist recomposition.

The moment has gone

Six years later, most of this energy has been dissipated and the left is more marginal than ever. The EFF's credibility amongst progressive forces is collapsing under financial scandals and intolerance and racialised discourse, especially towards so-called Indians. The Numsa project of building a movement for socialism has morphed into a narrow vanguard party initiative and neither Amcu's narrow syndicalism nor other parts of the labour movement that split from Cosatu have been able to construct a

dynamic social union oriented labour movement able to organise the millions of precarious workers.

The anti-capitalist moment has gone. Can it be regenerated? This is not so easy to answer, especially in a context in which globally there is a shift to the right. This is a consequence of progressive forces, when in power, entrenching neoliberalism and extractivism, regardless of the social and environmental consequences. This is certainly the experience of Latin America, and in particular Brazil. Does this experience have lessons for South Africa?

In the immediate term, it is likely that the underwhelming Cyril Ramaphosa will lead the ANC to electoral victory in the 2019 elections. It will be an electoral victory won more by default than by belief. The two main opposition parties have shot themselves in the foot. Scandals and internal divisions will cost the EFF and DA respectively. The ANC will win back some voters now that Zuma is gone. The working class will vote defensively to keep the DA at bay, but not with much illusion in what the Ramaphosa - Gordhan - Mboweni axis represents. The increase in VAT to 15%, the miserly minimum wage and shallowness of Ramaphosa's social dialogue agenda are not lost on the majority of workers and the poor.

Towards the fire next time

At best, Ramaphosa's ANC is a case of back to Mbekism but under less favourable economic circumstances. Conservative economic policies such as austerity, privatisation and even the weakening of labour regulations will be widely applied. They will be presented as the only alternative to attract foreign investment and get the economy working again. Yet, the

combativity of the working class and popular movement will resist and give rise to new social explosions that will pose the need for anti-capitalist alternatives.

On this, there is much to be learnt from the Amadiba Crisis Committee's struggle against mining in Xolobeni. After 15 years of struggle, the Pretoria High Court confirmed that communities have the right to say no to mining and other projects that affect their enjoyment and control of their land. For this local community and hundreds of others, mining does not represent a livelihood strategy. They see mining as entailing the loss of land, cultural alienation, environmental destruction and a fulltime source of cheap casual labour. The jobs will be only for a few.

The need for a left alternative is illustrated so dramatically when we see Chairman Mantashe advance the interests of the corrupt mining lobby and the Australian corporation, MRC, at the expense of poor people. For him and his government, mining and extractivism (digging up our natural resources and exporting them) represent development. This flies in the face of all the evidence of its social and environmental impact.

Unfortunately, none of the components that constituted our anti-capitalist moment are prepared to contemplate an alternative. Amcu's president, Joseph Mathunjwa came

closest when, in an oped for Daily Maverick, he wrote:

"AMCU is a trade union representing mine workers and construction workers. These workers are embedded in the very industrial processes that are at the centre of contributing to global warming and other environmental problems. It is inescapable that, if we are going to move decisively to a low carbon, less polluting economy, it is going to be at the cost of coal mining, coal-fired energy plants, coal to liquid gas, etc. Unless jobs are offered to our members in clean industries, they would never voluntarily agree to the shutting down of mining and energy industries. It would be like asking them to commit suicide."

An alternative to extractivism and the Minerals Energy Complex is of course not just an economic and social imperative. It is an ecological necessity in the face of all the evidence on climate change, including the most recent special report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Global warming of 1.5°C. There simply is no more time left to continue spewing out carbon into the atmosphere without dramatic and quite probably irreversible consequences. There are three articles in this issue which dig deeper into that.

The left, and not just environmentalists, needs to acknowledge that an extractivist

strategy is simply incompatible with both our development needs and the imperative to repair the ecological damage of the legacy of racial patriarchal capitalism. The economic, social and political crisis that we experience in South Africa, almost 25 years after Apartheid, is that successive governments have tried to reproduce the MEC rather than implement a just transition to a wage led low carbon alternative.

This alternative rests on three pillars: a state-driven mass housing programme, agrarian reform and low carbon development. Convincing research shows that millions of jobs lie in socially owned renewable energy, massive expansion of electrified public transport, protecting and enhancing our water resources amongst other critical programmes.

We will need to put together a new political block drawn from organised labour and small and medium-sized enterprises with strong roots in the local economy, with community-based social movements, representing landless and mining affected communities, unemployed sectors of our society, enlightened and radical environmentalists and the potentially new organic intellectuals of the radicalising student movement. This will constitute a new anti-capitalist moment, hopefully drawing lessons from the previous cycle of struggle.

[Amandla!](#)

The Yellow Vests Struggle and the French Crisis

15 December 2018, by **Au Loong-Yu, Pierre Rousset**

Au Loog Yu - The French president Macron's wanting to raise the gasoline tax is supposed to be part of the policies of phasing out fossil fuels, right? Should one support an environmental position such as this one?

Pierre Rousset - No. In fact, the increase in the automobile fuel tax in the name of the fight against climate change has brought to light all the hypocrisy of Macron's ecology policy. More and more railway lines are being closed in the logic of private sector profitability. Other public services are

cut in many localities (schools, post offices, health centres, administrative offices, etc.). Outside the cities, people are therefore more and more dependent on the car and must make longer journeys.

In general, Macron does the opposite

in France of what his speeches at the UN suggest. He pursues policies of privatisation (including in transport) and deregulation. Like Trump, he "liberates" the big companies from environmental regulations. It deprives the public authorities of the means necessary for the implementation of public policy and relies on the market. Its concrete record in the fight against global warming, the defence of biodiversity or regional development planning is pitiful - in France and in the world as well (French transnationals are free to exploit humans and nature). French banks continue to prioritise financing the most polluting energy.

Eco-taxes are rarely effective and often socially unfair [85]. They cannot be the basis of an ecological transition program. In fact, the crisis of yellow vests illustrates how it is not enough "to accompany" taxation through some compensation measures. The policy itself has to be changed in order to take a set of major social and ecological measures.

Saturday, December 8, the yellow vests once again came to Paris and gathered in many other localities. On the same day, "Climate" events were organised throughout France under the motto "Let's change the system, not the climate". The yellow vests uprising has been taken into account, with frequent contact points between "yellows" and "greens". The motto was "Making ends meet and saving the planet, one common fight" - one cannot ignore social misery in the name of climate change (and vice versa); all the more because the poor are the first victims of the global ecological crisis.

Why is there so much anger from a large section of the population? News reports here say that it is because of the growing urban population and the marginalization of the rural one. How far is this true? Are there any other dimensions of this anger as well? Is it connected to anger against what Macron represents? What is the deeper factor behind this protest?

The rise in fuel prices does not have a significant impact on the rich, but it

weighs heavily on the monthly budget of modest households. France is one of the countries in the world where the price of fuel is the highest and where the share of taxes (60%) is the largest. The latest rise was the spark that unleashed the movement of yellow vests against the high cost of living, poverty, fiscal and social injustice.

If this spark sets the plain on fire, it is because the social situation is very serious. Let's say that Macron launched the final offensive against the collective rights obtained by labour struggles, especially after the Second World War. The previous governments already restricted and partially dismantled them (the Labor Code, for example, was written to guarantee minimum rights of wage earners, and now must guarantee above all the "competitiveness" of companies). The goal is to break down collective resistance, but also to allow private capital to take over what has been in the public sector since 1945 - it represents a huge source of profit!

People realise that we are moving into a world where finance and big business decide everything, with devastating consequences. We had one of the best health systems in the world, a public service. It is being destroyed. Inequalities in health are exploding.

Macron personally embodies this shift. He worked in an international bank, he belongs to the social elite directly attached to the world of business. He has some government experience, but no political experience: he has never been elected until he became president. He is, moreover, unable to hide his class contempt for working people. He declared publicly that there are winners and "those who are nothing". "Illiterates". That it is enough to "cross the street" to find a job, that the unemployed are therefore "loafers". That those who testify on their situation and present demands are always "complaining": "in France, we do not complain". On the other hand, he is full of attention for the powerful and his own relatives and friends. His arrogance is such that he is now hated - while, for example, the previous president, François Hollande, was mocked. The most common motto is "Macron resign".

The uprising of the yellow vests, a socially very composite movement, received immense popular support (70 to 80%) and opened the crisis of Macronism. Macron got only 24% of the votes in the first round of the presidential election. He was elected by a wide margin only because in the second round, his opponent was Marine Le Pen of the National Front (far right). His majority was not "for" him, but "against" the FN and the number of abstentions was very big. He should have taken it into account, but he is incapable of thinking as a head of state. He therefore very brutally implemented his program of social destruction.

How widespread is the protest? What are the main components of the protest? News reports said that it was at first a spontaneous protest? Is this true? Could you elaborate on this?

Initiated by calls on Facebook, the dynamics of the yellow vests quickly became national. They are present throughout France (except, as such, in urban centres). According to the Ministry of the Interior (Home Office), up to 300,000 yellow vests were once mobilised at the same time (there is obviously rotation on the action points). This is a figure comparable to that of recent major social movements if we stick to the same source, the Ministry of the Interior.

At the same time, these are local mobilisations, carried out in permanence - a month of daily initiatives: total barricades or filtering of road traffic, blockage of shopping centres and gas depots, operation "free highways" ... The "ordinary people," who have never campaigned before, and women are strongly represented on the ground. And then, they came to Paris and other big cities, clashing with the police.

I would like to address here three issues.

1. Yellow Vests is to a large extent a local, grassroots movement. Territorial mobilisation is becoming more decisive today. This is where action is organised over time and the bonds of solidarity with the population are woven. More generally, given the

precarious wage situation, the capitalist reorganisation of work, deindustrialisation and the accumulated defeats in companies, territorial action (including the territorial strike) has an increasing strategic importance (in fact, even in 1968, there was a "general stoppage of work" dimension in France, in addition to the massive general strike in industries). Unfortunately, the French trade union movement has not for long incorporated this dimension into the heart of its action - and the union leadership is concerned about a movement they cannot control. At last, most of the unions are now calling for actions, including strikes, beginning Friday 14 and continuing on Saturday, the yellow vests global action day.

2. There is a great mistrust toward the parties and unions and the yellow vests want to be independent. There are often very democratic local practices (daily assemblies to decide on the next actions or discuss demands). But it is impossible for them to elect a national representation (and many do not want it). More or less self-proclaimed "figures" declare themselves "representative" (sometimes with some obvious political ambitions), which provokes exasperated reactions on the ground. The government took the opportunity to invite who it wants and claims it cannot answer the yellow vests for lack of interlocutors. There are, however, a number of well-known "flagship" demands (and many more) that it could have quickly responded to if it wanted to.

3. The action of the yellow vests have been nonviolent ... and sometimes violent. One of the achievements of their uprising was to impose a broad public debate on the issue of violence: the terrible but invisible (in the eyes of the elite) social violence suffered by the poor who basically legitimise violence in action (visible) of people who are victims. After the clashes that took place in Paris on December 1, the government launched a very tough ideological counter-offensive to divide the yellow vests or to reduce their support from the population. All the means of the new security laws were implemented in Paris on December 8, after the introduction in these laws of measures which previously fell under

the state of emergency: searches and preventive arrests, use of armoured vehicles, massive arrests (more than 1700 on the national scale); numerous and harsh jail condemnations by the courts ...

There are modalities of violence that many yellow vests reject. However, even the most pacifist note that if there had not been violence, the government would have had the opportunity to turn a deaf ear while waiting for the mobilisation to run out of steam...

What is the attitude of the bourgeoisie parties and the left parties, from SP, Mélanchon (France Insoumise), to the NPA?

Given the popularity of the movement, the right-wing opposition seized the opportunity to isolate Macron. Given the current degree of crisis and the call to return to order, it is now much more discreet. The far right holds the pressure. The PS (Socialist Party) remains in ambiguity. France Insoumise (Insubordinate France, LFI) has supported the movement from the beginning and continues. After some initial hesitation (the time to understand what was happening), the PCF (French Communist Party), the NPA (New Anticapitalist Party) and some of the other leftist forces do the same. The bulk of the labour movement has remained at least "distant" ... but it must retake their claims, evoke the "convergences" of struggles and recognise that some unions have joined the yellow vests.

Now that Macron had conceded to certain demands, is the protest receding? We heard from news that high school students are also protesting. What are they protesting against? How big is the mobilisation?

Macron did not concede anything substantial. He remained silent (incredible!) until Monday 10 of December. It is the Minister of the Interior and the Prime Minister who spoke on behalf of the regime. They hoped to calm the game by cancelling for 2019 the increase in the fuel tax, and announcing some other minor measures. Too little, too late. The demands of the yellow vests have

grown enormously, sometimes including new elections and constitutional reform (the 6th Republic). Indeed, there is a strong call for democratic reforms, as the introduction of a citizens initiative referendum right (it does exist yet in France). Or against inequalities, i.e. for the legal ceiling on high salaries. There are two major areas: a real rise in purchasing power (including a sharp rise in minimum wages, and the cancellation of the rise of a social contribution levied on pensions) and more social justice (make the rich pay) by reinstating the tax on large fortunes and by taxing the GAFA (Google, Amazon, Facebook, Apple).

The fact that Macron had to speak last Monday is politically significant. He recognised that his words hurt many. He declared a "state of social and economic emergency". He made many vague promises. For now, he announced only four concrete decisions, responding apparently to some of the yellow vests' demands. But all of them concern only segments of the population - and not the poorest (i. e. for pensioners). It is untrue that the minimum legal wage will be raised by 100 €, ~. This amount will be given only to part of the population receiving the minimum wage, through an existing mechanism of bonuses, taken from the state budget. Companies are not concerned by this "rise". Other measures were already planned, but were to be implemented progressively during the coming years.

Macron's class line of march is not changing. Nothing is asked from the rich, the bosses, the shareholders. The measures will be financed by public spending (meaning us). More cuts will probably be done on public services, etc. The public debt will also increase, probably beyond the European Union's legal ceiling (the "social and economic state of emergency" formula also aims at justifying the increase of the French debt before the European Commission).

Are university students supporting the high school students?

The high school movement started before the university students began to move. It is a little early to know how

much it will expand. It has immediately been met with very violent repression. High school students are sometimes dragged into court for wanting to hold a general meeting in their high school! One scene was particularly shocking, on video: dozens of high school students on their knees, on the ground, their hands tied behind their backs or placed on their heads, laughed at by policemen. It was, it is true, in a poor neighbourhood high school ... Social stigma, as always.

Injuries caused by the use of tear gas weapons and grenades have become numerous and sometimes grave (to the hands, eyes, feet, chest, head). After the others, the high school students undergo it too. And old women died after been hit by such police dangerous weapons.

What will happen next, for the government, for the protesters, and for the parties. How can this protest affect the 2022 general election?

How will the movement of yellow vests continue? While we have reached a pivotal point (very high level of confrontation on December 1st, unprecedented use by the state of "emergency like" measures on the 8th), the political pressures are

becoming very brutal and as Christmas comes... difficult to be sure. But this movement is not a fire of straw. It expresses a very deep social distress. It will continue and rebound, but it may divide. Demonstrations will be organised coming Saturday, but we don't know yet the impact of Macron's intervention.

The political crisis is becoming more intense. We are now hearing about the "twilight of Macronism".

Macron won because both the classical governmental parties were marginalised. The Socialist Party by its antipopular policies under the previous government. The right by the multiplication of financial scandals that affected its candidate. The République en marche (LRM) (Republic on the move; Macronist) is an inorganic movement with little social implantation (its MPs often come from the world of entrepreneurs). French institutions are among the least democratic in Western countries. Macron enjoys exceptional presidential powers and a massive majority in Parliament, even if it is a minority in the country. He can "hold", but not regain his authority.

The next elections (European and local, before the presidential and

legislative elections) are a bad omen for the République en marche. The results will depend in particular on the rate of abstention, currently very high. Will one of the next elections be the occasion for a sanction vote, or will abstention increase further? It is likely to be particularly high next year, when the European Parliament is elected.

The problem is deep. It is hard to see how the République en marche, this inorganic movement, could be consolidated in the present circumstances. France Insoumise (LFI) is also a "movement" (a "gaseous" movement, Mélenchon said) driven from above, but without a skeleton (there is no formal membership, for example). All this cannot remain in the present state. Depending on the circumstances and events, there may be decomposition, structuring, divisions ...

We are going through a social, political and institutional crisis, the outcome of which is very "open", in a profoundly new situation. It is hard to make predictions. It will depend on struggles that take unforeseen paths, indeed.

Julia Salazar, DSA Member, Wins Democratic Primary Election for NY Senate What Does the Election Mean for DSA and the Left?

14 December 2018, by Dan La Botz

Julia Salazar, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America and candidate in the Democratic Party primary election for the New York State Senate, won her race by a decisive vote of 58.5 to 41.5 percent. Since there is no Republican opponent

in the general election, she is virtually assured of taking a seat in the Senate. Her victory represents another demonstration that DSA's electoral strategy of running or endorsing candidates in the Democratic Party can be successful in winning primary

and some general elections. And that's no small accomplishment.

While Salazar won, two other DSA-endorsed Democratic Party statewide candidates, actress and public school advocate Cynthia Nixon for governor

and NYC city council member Jumaane D. Williams for lieutenant governor, both lost. And Zephyr Teachout also lost. Teachout, the progressive candidate for attorney general, was endorsed by Salazar and by Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. The latter, another DSA member, had won a stunning victory in the Democratic primary for the U.S. Congress in January. Turnout for this election was extraordinarily high, with 1.5 million casting votes this time, more than double the 600,000 voters four years ago.

The question now â€” after the victories of DSA member Ocasio-Cortez in a congressional primary and Salazar in the state senate primary as well as DSA victories in other races around the country â€” is what does DSA’s electoral strategy mean for DSA, for the left, and for the movement generally. Should the left plunge into Democratic Party races to push that party to the left and change the direction of the country? Should it run Democratic candidates to build the socialist movement, and to win more recruits to DSA and other organizations? Must we run such candidates as socialists, or simply as progressives, or as regular Democrats? Or should we draw the conclusion that while these two races and some others where DSA members were candidates were successful, the strategy has limited effectiveness outside of very particular circumstances? Or, as some in DSA and other parts of the left argue, is DSA being drawn into coalitions with progressive organizations and into the party, where it will have little weight or impact, while being gradually compromised by the corrupt political system? Before we turn to those questions, let’s look at the experience of this election.

Julia Salazar’s Campaign

Thanks to the phone-banking and door-knocking of many DSA members and other supporters â€” activists knocked on 10,000 doors and spoke to 100,000 potential voters â€” Salazar defeated incumbent Martin Dilan by 59 to 42 percent. She conducted her

campaign in a changing neighborhood, once largely Puerto Rican, but now more Central American, increasingly gentrified, and simply more diverse, a neighborhood no longer to be counted on by its longtime Puerto Rican senator who, Salazar argued, was out of touch with his constituents. [86] Salazar, who grew up in Florida before she came to study at Columbia University, was relatively new to the neighborhood, as Dilan was quick to point out. But then too, many other residents were also newcomers.

Salazar’s campaign website described her as, “a proud staff organizer for Jews for Racial and Economic Justice, a key partner in the Communities United for Police Reform coalition, and a leader in the Democratic Socialists of America. As a member of the Bushwick community, she has been a tireless advocate for her neighbors and fellow tenants.” Her description goes on:

Julia’s decade of experience as a local community organizer has brought her from the streets of Bushwick to the halls of Albany. She has protested, picketed, lobbied, and organized to achieve a more just New York. From working with her neighbors to fight for their legal right to safe housing to demanding criminal justice reforms at the city and state levels, Julia has been at the forefront of campaigns for social justice in New York. [87]

Salazar ran on a broad progressive platform but she emphasized the fight against gentrification, calling for “The expansion of the rent stabilization system to cover all New York apartments, so that no tenant is faced with the prospect of suddenly being evicted from their homes.” [88] Her opponent Martin Dilan had over the years accepted \$200,000 from real estate interests, belonging to anti-tenant organizations â€” including one headed by landlord Donald Trump â€” and he had a very poor record in terms of defending tenants’ rights. [89]

While NYC DSA had endorsed Nixon and Williams, the organization concentrated its efforts on the Salazar campaign, for which it provided staff, 2,000 campaign workers, including social and graphic media talent, and a

powerful canvassing operation, as well as other resources. Salazar presented herself and the media also saw her as part of a constellation of progressives, among them many young women of color, who are challenging Democratic Party moderates not only in New York State but around the country. [90] These candidates constitute the bluest part of what Democrats hope will be the blue wave inundating the midterm elections. In addition to DSA, Salazar was also endorsed by a slew of progressive organizations that included the Working Families Party, Our Revolution, the Brooklyn and New York Progressive Action Networks, Citizen Action, New York Communities for Change, the immigrant group Make the Road, Women of Color for Progress, and two labor unions, the United Auto Workers and the Communications Workers of America. [91]

Salazar overcame a barrage of publicity locally, nationally, and even internationally about her most complicated and unclear personal history: Was she a Colombian immigrant or a native-born American? Was she Christian or Jewish? Was she raised “hard scrabble” as she claimed or comfortably well-off as her \$600,000 trust fund would suggest? Had she graduated from Columbia University as she stated, or had she attended but never graduated as records indicated? How had she gone from conservative Christian anti-abortion activist to democratic socialist? Was she guilty of stealing the identity of the wife of NY Mets first baseman Keith Hernandez, for which Salazar was arrested though not convicted? And did she have an affair with the athlete as suggested in court documents, though denied by her and Hernandez? And then on the day before the election came her accusation that David Keyes, an aide to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, had sexually assaulted her, a charge he denies. While these articles raised questions about her judgment, her honesty, and her character, Salazar and DSA dismissed them all as a smear campaign. But her constituents apparently didn’t pay attention, didn’t care, or weren’t convinced that any of that mattered. Voters were evidently more moved by her as a candidate, by her progressive

platform, and convinced by the DSA door-knockers.

A DSA member who worked on her campaign observed, “Julia is not a natural politician. I think her victory was a testament to running an ideas- and policy-based campaign, plus having a really dedicated pool of organizers who consistently got the ideas out into the community. She won despite not being a natural politician, and despite every doubt-inducing scandal that was released about her.”

Who were the 26,000 people who voted for Salazar? Her district, like many in New York, has been undergoing gentrification, which means an influx of some downwardly mobile young white people as well as new groups of people of color even as some older residents are being forced by rising rents to move. [92] While we do not yet have the data, probably much as in the case of Ocasio Cortez, Salazar won votes from both of these groups: older residents facing rising rents or notices of eviction and newer residents moving into small, high rent apartments. [93] These populations in flux provided a de facto coalition that took its grievances to the polls and voted for Salazar.

The Nixon, Williams, and Teachout Campaigns

The other DSA-endorsed candidates, Nixon for governor and Williams for lieutenant governor, were both soundly defeated. Nixon was crushed. Governor Andrew Cuomo, usually described as a “moderate Democrat” but perhaps best understood as a representative of banking and real estate interests, defeated Nixon, well known for her role as Miranda in *Sex and the City*, by a vote of 65.6 to 34.4. Williams made a respectable showing being defeated by Cuomo’s running mate, incumbent Kathy Hochul, by a vote of 53.3 to 46.7. Both Nixon and Williams failed to convince more conservative upstate voters, many in small cities, towns, and rural areas that they could represent their

interests.

Nixon, until recently a neoliberal Democrat who had endorsed Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, attempted under the influence of the Bernie Sanders victory to transform herself into one of the new, progressive women like Ocasio-Cortez. [94] She described herself as being akin to a democratic socialist, writing; “Some more establishment, corporate Democrats get very scared by this term but if being a democratic socialist means that you believe health care, housing, education and the things we need to thrive should be a basic right not a privilege then count me in.” [95] This was democratic socialism a la Sanders, without mention of taking over the banks and corporations and organizing a democratically planned and operated economy. But it was good enough for her purposes. She elaborated a very progressive political platform, and worked with DSA to develop the planks on labor, overcoming an anti-labor remark made early in her campaign. [96] [97]

In the televised, but perhaps not much viewed, debates between Cuomo and Nixon, the political novice held her own and even gave a wonderfully radical answer to a question about the labor planks in her platform, pointing to the importance of the recent West Virginia teachers’ wildcat strikes in fighting to defend and improve public education. [98] DSA’s labor advisors no doubt helped prep her for that one. Yet Nixon couldn’t overcome the doubts of many voters that a woman with no political or administrative experience should run the state government. And one campaign worker told me when Nixon’s name was mentioned more than one voter said they weren’t interested in that “rich white woman.” Above all, it was the Cuomo juggernaut that defeated Nixon.

Jumaane Williams, DSA-endorsed candidate for lieutenant governor, represented something altogether different: a militant, Black, working-class tenant activist-politician. Williams, whose parents are from the island of Grenada, grew up in the Afro-Caribbean neighborhoods of Brooklyn, graduated from Brooklyn

Technical High School and from Brooklyn College. First elected to the New York City Council in 2009, he has served three terms and has been an outspoken critic of police violence, an advocate for affordable housing, and a fighter for immigrant rights. Calling himself both a democratic socialist and an activist public official, he has been arrested several times in protests over a variety of issues, most recently in a demonstration protesting plans to deport immigration activist Ravi Ragbir. [99] Williams lost his election, but his vote was ten percent higher than that of Nixon, likely due to a combination of his strong base in the NYC Black community as well as the incumbent candidate he faced being a less well-known candidate.

While Zephyr Teachout was not endorsed by DSA, the endorsements extended by DSA candidates Ocasio-Cortez and Salazar (without consultation with the NYC DSA membership) draw her into this assessment. The attorney general’s (AG) race resulted from the resignation of the liberal Democrat AG Eric Schneiderman after four women charged him with sexual and physical abuse, leading to his resignation. The progressive Teachout, a law professor at Fordham University, has been striving for several years now to become a politician. She ran in the Democratic primary for governor against Andrew Cuomo in 2014 and lost by a vote of 34 to 66 percent. She then ran for Congress in 2016 in the 19th Congressional District, winning in the Democratic Party primary but losing to the Republican in the general election. And then this year she ran for attorney general.

A strident critic of Hillary Clinton, Teachout had worked for Bernie Sanders and won his endorsement of her campaign. And she featured DSA member Ocasio-Cortez’s endorsement prominently on the front page of her website. Teachout’s progressive platform should have recommended her to many New York State voters, but failed to do so, perhaps mostly because of her apparent lack of practical experience as a lawyer. [100] And Teachout’s opponent, Letitia James, New York City Public Advocate and ally of Cuomo, was formidable. [101] She had a long

history of political activism and name recognition and if elected would become the first Black women to ever hold statewide office in New York. In the end James defeated Teachout, winning 40.6 percent of the vote, while Teachout won only 31 percent, the rest being divided by two other candidates. So in statewide races, DSA-endorsed candidates, Nixon and Williams “ and Teachout who was endorsed by DSA members Ocasio and Salazar “ were all defeated.

We should also note that progressive forces such as Indivisible and the Working Families Party convinced voters to defeat six incumbent members of the Independent Democratic Conference, a group of Democrats, protected by Cuomo, who often aligned themselves with the Republicans and defeated much progressive legislation. [102] While this is very good, it is not what The Nation so giddily calls “a revolution in New York politics.” [103] Forcing Democrats to be Democrats can hardly even be called a reform. But if it gives some more momentum to progressive developments, that will be good.

What Have We Learned?

So let’s return to some of the questions we raised earlier about what this all means from the perspective of the left, progressives, and the Democratic Party.

The first general observation might be that if we on the left thought that there would be shift at this time in the Democratic Party from its politically moderate “ and many would say inveterately corrupt “ leadership to the left, we were mistaken. Cuomo, who ran as the anti-Trump, had the backing of virtually the entire Democratic Party and all of the major unions, as well as the National Organization for Women (NOW) and all of the major LGBT groups. The governor has for years used the old tools of professional politics “ favors and fear “ to build and maintain his machine and to ruthlessly punish those who fail to follow instructions. [104] And many

Democrats have become convinced that in these times, in order to fight and to defeat President Donald Trump, it is necessary to resist the left, hold the middle ground and pull more conservative voters toward the Democratic Party. At least in New York State, the moderates have been able to keep the progressives at bay.

Second, we should note that both Ocasio-Cortez and Salazar won in relatively small compact districts in New York City, even though those small districts have hundreds of thousands of residents. In these districts, however, one can win a primary election “ elections in which generally few participate “ with a relatively small number of votes. In Ocasio-Cortez’s race for U.S. House district 14, only about 30,000 votes were cast, of which she won about 16,000 while incumbent Joseph Crowley got 12,000. [105] Similarly, Salazar won her race with 20,600 votes to Dilan’s 14,600. Since DSA has about 5,000 members in New York City and because it is capable of mobilizing hundreds to work in local campaigns, it is possible for the organization to have a very significant impact on the election outcome. [106] And it has been able to do this in districts where there is very little participation in the campaigns from local residents. In upstate New York, DSA has several chapters, but they are much smaller and it is more difficult for them to have an impact on the geographically larger and demographically less compact districts. [107] So DSA could not do much to move voters upstate. And in the statewide elections, media plays a larger role than it does in local elections and Cuomo’s campaign with its multi-million dollar war chest dominated TV and other media advertising, dwarfing Nixon’s modest campaign resources and lower media profile.

Third, NYC DSA members have by and large supported what has become, through both formal decisions and actual practice, the organization’s political approach, which can be described as preferring to endorse DSA members, being willing to endorse other progressives in the Democratic Party, and being willing to consider and to sometimes back a

Green Party or other left candidate. NYC DSA’s political strategy is also based on building its own independent political campaign organization “ doing its own research, maintaining its own organization, keeping its own data bases, developing its own materials “ even when it works on or cooperates with non-DSA Democratic Party or other candidates. [108] NYC DSA has also eschewed becoming involved in the snares of the Democratic Party clubs and committees. All of this is good though it is no guarantee against being influenced by or in the long run even absorbed into the Democratic Party.

The emphasis has been on building an organizationally independent operation, but DSA’s political identity has become blurred in the recent election. Consider Ocasio-Cortez who as soon as she was elected ran away with Bernie Sanders to support Democratic Party candidates in Kansas. Since he lost the presidential election, Sanders has spent an enormous amount of time and energy trying to rebuild the Democratic Party in his image with quite mixed success, and now he has taken the DSA’s leading figure in hand and drawn her into the same project. [109] And it was not hard for him to do so. Then too both Ocasio-Cortez and Salazar felt that once they had been endorsed by DSA they were free to endorse others, no matter what their comrades might have thought, and they both endorsed Zephyr Teachout. So, finally, once the New York State election campaigns were in process, DSA’s candidates became part of the blur of progressive candidates for change and good things generally. Some DSA members think this is a good thing, identifying DSA with a developing mass movement for change, a movement that DSA can even influence. Others like myself see the danger of being drawn into a powerful undertow, the force of which, though not always immediately visible, is derived from the Democratic Party’s institutional and financial power, the NGOs and unions aligned with it, and the media it influences.

Ben Beckett, an NYC DSA member, has written an article for Jacobin titled “We’re on a Winning Streak” that recognizes the problem of maintaining

socialists' independence from the Democratic Party. [110] He writes:

...the Left must follow Salazar's lead and work to cohere a distinct and consistent collective political identity based on a material analysis of society, the centrality of working-class solidarity and struggle against the capitalist class, and simple-to-understand, class-wide reforms that bring concrete benefits to voters at the expense of capitalists.

While Salazar and her supporters argued against gentrification and called for single-payer health care for all, there was not much that approximated Beckett's ringing socialist prose. I think few of Salazar's supporters voted for a struggle against the capitalist class and many may not even have known she is a socialist or what a socialist is. And I should say, unlike Beckett, I don't think winning single payer would represent a step toward socialism, though the reform would be good and the fight most important. While Salazar won a real victory, it is not clear at this point what it means for the voters or for DSA. The real test of DSA's strategy will come not with elections, but with candidates actually serving in political office and seeing if

they can operate not as politicians but as leaders of a left movement that is not fundamentally electoral. We have in the United States almost no models of this sort of leadership, and the creation of such a leadership will be difficult, since the Democratic Party will do everything possible to crush it. For example, Salazar's district is 50 percent Latinx, though most of her campaign workers came from the young, mostly white, largely professional DSA members. [111] Can DSA build a movement and an organization in that district made up largely of the Latinx working class? Can DSA through this and other such election campaigns transform itself into a more diverse working-class organization?

Finally, DSA's electoral successes come at a time when the labor and social movements remain flat. We have hoped and continue to hope that the West Virginia teachers strikes, in which some DSA members played an important role, and which encouraged other such strikes in Oklahoma, Kentucky, Arizona, Colorado, and North Carolina, would be the beginning of a labor upsurge. And we hope that such an upheaval would take on the rank-and-file character of the West Virginia strike. But in fact, contrary to some recent reports in

Jacobin, working-class struggle remains rare; there is no strike wave. [112] [113]

Socialists have always understood, that it is working-class struggle, the unions, workers centers, left organizations and the social movements based on oppressed groups that drive political change. DSA's electoral victories will in the long run only become meaningful if we have a working-class upsurge in the United States on the scale of the 1930s or the 1960s and 70s. Many of DSA's members in the unions are working to build a socialist organization that can play a role in such movement when it comes. At the same time, they recognize that a rank-and-file movement must have an independent political party to express its demands. A socialist movement in the United States depends on such a working-class uprising in order to finally break the hold of the Democratic Party over the working class and to create the possibility for today's election victories to become tomorrow's revolutionary socialist movement.

September 16 2018

[Solidarity](#)

The yellow jackets' movement destabilizes Macron

13 December 2018, by [Léon Crémieux](#)

The clashes on the Champs Elysées in Paris were the symbol of the day, but in all cities the level of mobilization, on average equal to that of the previous week, saw a higher level of confrontation. Toulouse, Marseille, Le Puy en Velay where the prefecture was attacked by yellow jackets...

Everywhere this radicalization was accompanied by the generalization of the slogan "Macron must resign". The images of the police chased from the

Arc de Triomphe, tagged and occupied by yellow jackets, have spread across the world, crystallizing the political crisis and Macron's personal destabilization.

At the same time, before 1 December, support for the yellow jacket movement led to an even greater class polarization, clearly bringing the working classes together, and opposing the more urban and wealthier classes.

In the preceding days, a convergence with sectors of the trade union movement began to take shape in a series of cities. This took the form of, at least partly, joint rallies with the long-planned CGT demonstrations for rights for the unemployed on 1 December, and also direct calls from local trade union branches in the private sector, the SNCF and the Post Office to join the yellow jackets' demonstrations.

Thus, despite the initial caricature that spread through the ranks of the trade union movement and the social and radical left stigmatizing it as a "yellow-brown" movement, gradually the character and social content of the movement's demands became clear. Although it is socially mixed, there is a great preponderance of working class forces involved. So dikes broke, opening the way to convergence and therefore to a change in the balance of forces.

The question of "purchasing power" has gradually shifted from the simple question of the rise in fuel tax to the general question of taxes, to indirect taxation affecting the working classes, focusing on the abolition of the wealth tax and tax gifts for the wealthy. The question of the distribution of wealth has explicitly appeared in many statements and slogans of the yellow jackets. The issues of pensions, attacks on pensions, wages and the minimum wage have come to the fore, allowing an explicit link to workers' demands.

So even before 1 December, the dynamic was a class dynamic, marginalizing the far right, not in its audience among some of the yellow jackets but in the distance from its favourite themes: immigration as the cause of all evils, "tax bludgeoning", putting in the same bag taxes and all taxes paid by the working classes or employers, and a demagogic attack against state employees. [114]

After 1 December, France entered a deep political crisis. With their backs to the wall, Macron and the deputies of En Marche saw what little popular support they had left melt away, reducing it to the hard core of the ruling class.

Macron began to crack, seeing that his image as popular president had been destroyed internationally, and that even the violence of the 1 December clashes had not lessened popular support for the yellow jackets' movements.

In a panic the next day Prime Minister Edouard Philippe announced the suspension of the fuel tax for 6 months, and then its cancellation for 2019.

But as the press says, it was "too little and too late"!

Not only were the yellow jackets not satisfied with these first concessions over tax increases, but we were encouraged to continue the struggle. All those who have been under attack for at least two years and been defeated one after another began to see an opportunity to make their voices heard: farmers, truck drivers, port and dock workers...

The government, by starting to back down, wanted to dramatize the situation, stirring up the threat of chaos, of the putsch, evoking the spectre of the extreme right, thus trying to break the popular support of the movement and avoid a junction with the workers' movement on 8 December.

Macron himself remained silent until 8 December, fearing to crystallize discontent once again, but called on all the "intermediate bodies" he had himself tried to put aside: deputies and senators, mayors, trade union leaders, so that they could do the job of calling for calm through major statements highlighting "social dialogue".

The trade union leaders, except Solidaires, published a lamentable inter-union statement, a "call to order", a statement disavowed in the CGT by a large number of federations and departmental unions. At the same time, the CGT, under pressure from its base, called for a day of mobilization...on Friday, 14 December.

This tactic was a complete failure up to 8 December. Not only were the government's retreats seen as an encouragement, but the junction began to take place in different cities and regions with sections of the trade union movement. These convergences appeared in the street on 8 December. There were as many demonstrators as on 1 December, and in many cities and towns there were mixed marches of yellow jackets incorporating social movement activists and often linking up with climate.

All these elements have contributed to the radicalization of the yellow jacket movement on social questions, limiting

the impact of the extreme right-wing elements still present in the movement.

At the same time, between 100 and 200 high schools went on strike or blocked on the eve of 8 December. This movement has been the re-emphasis of demands against the reform of access to the University, through the Parcoursup process, and against a reform of the baccalaureate along the same lines.

On 8 December, there were numerous clashes in different cities, particularly around the prefectures - symbols of the state. [115] Police violence and repression increased tenfold: more than 1000 arrests, meaning a large number of "preventive" arrests, a tenfold increase in the use of attacks the marches and high school demonstrations, with systematic use of tear gas grenades and flash balls, injuring hundreds of demonstrators. Eighty-five thousand police officers were deployed against demonstrators with police and gendarme armoured vehicles.

We are witnessing a completely new style of general fight against austerity policy and the government, against all anti-social measures, for social justice measures and wage increases, and directly against Macron.

For the first time since Macron's election, and even for the first time since 1995, the balance of forces has really begun to shift, and all the sections of the working classes that have been attacked, and often fought and been defeated separately, in recent years can see an opportunity to get back into action. But the paradox is still that the organized workers' movement and even the workers, as collectives in workplaces, have not - up to now - taken the responsibility for extending through strike action what is very largely a popular movement in which many workers participate individually.

On 10 December Macron broke his silence to try to give a more "humble" image to a president who has cultivated his class arrogance for 18 months, and to try to extinguish the fire of mobilization.

He wanted to highlight three spectacular measures on purchasing power: a supposed increase of 100 euros in the minimum wage, cancelling the CSG (social security contribution) increase for pensioners with an income below 2000 euros, and the abolition of all taxation and submission to social security contributions on overtime.

In fact, there is not even an increase in the minimum wage, but an advance on an additional bonus paid by the budget subject to resources.

What is spectacular is that there is no questioning of this government's class policy, no questioning of the 40 billion paid by the state budget to companies through the CICE (tax credit for employers), nor of all the tax policies for the benefit of the richest. No questioning of the distribution of wealth against which yellow jackets, the working classes most affected by austerity policies, are rebelling.

Many issues will be on the table in the coming days. The government hopes it has put out the fire and is counting on the yellow jackets crumbling and

being isolated. Everything will depend on maintaining the mobilization, with democratic structure at the grassroots level; on the junction with and mobilization of other layers, in neighbourhoods, workplaces, through the social movements: to make sure that the mobilization is maintained, to avoid division despite the media barrage calling for the movement to back down, despite the silence of the confederal union leaders who have been overtaken by a major social movement, in order to achieve a generalized fightback against Macron and his policy.

The Rebel Project of the Caravan: Solidarities and Setbacks

12 December 2018, by **Martha Pskowski**

Despite the real violence migrants have had to confront, this caravan and its predecessors constitute stirring examples of cross-border resistance which redraw boundaries of political action. [116] Unfortunately, few media accounts have bothered to understand or record the multiple organizational processes and dynamics that underwrite it as a powerful social movement. The diverse, entwined histories behind the caravan-form – assemblies and related tactics and strategies for cultivating solidarity – seem beyond the frame of most discussions. But if we are to treat the caravan as a movement and as a political force worth taking seriously, then we should talk about it in precisely this language, and attempt to articulate its features, convey its capacities. [117] I traveled to meet the caravan in Oaxaca, Mexico City, and Tijuana, and also talked to some organizers in the United States, in order to inquire more closely into the collective relationships, political coalitions, and modes of sociality that have been engendered by the caravan's spectacular existence.¹

Assemblies and Encounters: Politics in Movement

"We're a rebel project just like you all are," shouted out the representative of Radio Totopo, a community radio station in Juchitan, Oaxaca. He was on a makeshift stage in front of hundreds of members of the migrant caravan on a humid October night. "*Hermanos*, what you are doing is historic, because you have been capable of facing down the world's borders and proving that no one is illegal."

At the grounds of a bus station on the edge of town, thousands of members of the migrant caravan had set up camp. Pueblos Sin Fronteras organizers opened the nightly assembly of the caravan and passed the mic on to local organizations, like Radio Totopo, that had come in solidarity.

The municipal secretary of Juchitan, Oscar Cruz, then took the stage. "We understand that you're here not

because you want to be," he said to the crowd. "But because your countries have denied your right to live. Because of the transnational companies and powerful interests who are getting rich off the poverty of the people. Because of the violence that doesn't let you live in peace. That's why Juchitan is in solidarity with you."

After two weeks walking through small towns in Chiapas and Oaxaca, the caravan had arrived in the Zapotec city of 90,000 people, a bastion of indigenous organizing in Southern Mexico. Like many moments in the caravan, no single organization was running the show. Juchitan city officials provided food and water, churches handed out donations, and the transnational collective Pueblos Sin Fronteras strategized to get buses to move north. At the heart of it all were the thousands of people who have banded together to move through Mexico.

For 90 minutes, the members of the caravan paid close attention to the decisions facing them in the coming days and to the words of local and national organizations that had come to support them. Members of the

caravan took the stage to explain why they nominated themselves to represent the group in negotiations with Mexican authorities. Trans women in the caravan took the mic to demand respect from the rest of the group.

Radio Totopo is part of the resistance movement to Spanish-owned wind farms in the Juchitan area. Other speakers included the militant teachers' union of Oaxaca, called the 22nd Section, and a group of Catholic nuns. The assembly created a space for the interests of working class, indigenous and migrant organizations to come together.

The following morning, the self-designated security team met under a tent and assigned tasks for the day. While Juchitan municipal police were on hand, members of the caravan took a key role in making sure everyone was safe and respected the borrowed space. A Honduran man named Walter headed up the security team and designated tasks like monitoring the water stations and keeping order in the food lines.

Juchitan was the rare exception where the caravan had a stage to use for the nightly assembly. Usually people crowd around in a circle and shout over the chatter to make their voices heard. That was the case a week later in Mexico City, when the group had to decide how to continue north.

The exodus of Central American migrants and asylum seekers began arriving on Sunday, November 4 to a sports stadium in Mexico City's eastern sprawl. Doctors provided check-ins, US-based organizations offered legal advice, and a kitchen churned out thousands of meals three times a day.

On Tuesday, November 6, the day of midterm voting in the US, the caravan members had much more urgent concerns than the electoral results. For three weeks they had been walking and hitching rides from San Pedro Sula to the Mexican capital. As thousands of people milled about, Bartolo Fuentes arrived to give a press conference.

Fuentes is a Honduran organizer and

journalist who has worked with Honduran migrants for decades. In his radio show "Sin Fronteras," on the community station Radio Progreso, he shares Honduran migrants' stories. He has also organized groups of Central American mothers searching for their disappeared children in Mexico, a tradition now in its 14th year.

While the migrant caravan organized spontaneously this October, it now relies on the groundwork laid by organizers in Mexico, Central America, and the US who have agitated for migrant justice for years. When Fuentes heard that Hondurans was organizing over Whatsapp and social media to leave in a larger group towards Mexico, he decided to help them based on his years of experience. By the time the group left San Pedro Sula on October 13, it numbered in the thousands.

In Mexico City, Fuentes tried to set the story straight, explaining that the caravan is making visible a long-term phenomenon. "Caravans happen every day in Honduras," he shouted into the mic, exasperated. "250 to 300 people leave Honduras every day." In other words, the current exodus of Hondurans is part of a longer trend ongoing out-migration from Honduras: what is new are the forms in which such migration happens, like the more politically visible, mass character of the caravan itself. "This caravan is changing the way that people flee Honduras. That's what's relevant, not who organized it," he continued. Fuentes has been accused by his own government of illegally organizing the migrant caravan. He is now waiting to return to Honduras, where he fears he could be detained.

As the caravan arrived at the Mexico City stadium, another distinct thread of migrant activism, the World Social Forum on Migrations, was taking place nearby. The Forum included the first ever World Meeting of Mothers of Disappeared Migrants. Mothers and family members of disappeared migrants came together from countries including Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Senegal, Morocco, Mauritania, and Tunisia. While presidential tweeting and international media coverage has brought newfound attention to the

plight of Central American migrants, the movement in Mexico and beyond to support undocumented people in transit has been growing for years, through slow, steady organizing work in impacted communities.

La Bestia and Policy Effects

This work has only become more urgent in recent years, and both the US and Mexico have implemented harsher anti-immigrant policies that predominantly impact Central Americans. Hondurans, Guatemalans and Salvadorans have passed through Mexican territory to reach the US border for decades. Migration from Mexico to the US peaked before the Great Recession, and now more Mexicans return to their home country every year than enter the US. [118] Meanwhile, the flow from the Northern Triangle of Central America has grown consistently since the 1990s. The number of immigrants from the Northern Triangle living in the US rose 25% from 2007 to 2015. [119]

As increasing numbers of Central Americans attempted to enter the US, the Bush and Obama administrations outsourced immigration enforcement to Mexico. Strict visa requirements that the vast majority of Central Americans cannot fulfill force them to enter Mexico undocumented. They must either navigate the route alone or pay a guide (coyote) thousands of dollars to secure shelter, transportation and, frequently, bribe government officials to pass through checkpoints.

The freight train known as La Bestia for years defined the migrant route through Mexico. Áscar Martínez has written a vivid account of the dangers, uncertainties, even mutilations encountered on the migrant trail, but also the remarkable stories of refusal that underlie its existence. [120] As a volunteer at a migrant shelter in Ixtepec, Oaxaca in 2013 and 2014, I observed how hundreds of people would board the train to move from town to town. Sometimes the train would come to an abrupt stop and people would fall, sustaining horrible

injuries. However dangerous it was, the train provided a reliable option for Central Americans to move north.

However, during 2014 the number of unaccompanied minors arriving on the US border shot up. Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto responded to the increase by creating the Southern Border Plan. Three days later, the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee under the Obama administration committed \$86 million to the Plan, which was followed by additional funding from the Merida Initiative. [121]

Wantonly putting migrants' lives at risk, Mexican authorities began stationing more immigration agents along the train tracks and increasing the train's speed to deter riders. Unable to reliably ride La Bestia, migrants were forced onto remote backroads and trails.

In my subsequent visits to Ixtepec, few people were riding the train. Those who made it to the shelter had often walked for days, following remote trails to avoid immigration checkpoints. Many had been attacked by gang members and petty criminals wielding machete or guns. The migrants and asylum seekers had to surrender what little possessions and money they carried. Many arrived barefoot at the shelter; not even their shoes had been spared by the thieves.

By design, the continuous flow of Central Americans through Mexican territory is largely invisible to most Mexicans. Small towns in states like Tabasco, Chiapas and Oaxaca witness the daily exodus, but there has been little pushback from Mexican citizens towards the state's policies toward migrants.

Outgoing president Peña Nieto has ceded to US pressure. Deportations from Mexico now exceed deportations from the US. In 2017, Mexico deported 94,500 people to Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador. [122] Meanwhile, incoming president Andrés Manuel López Obrador will be inaugurated on December 1. He has stated his support for migrants (historically, for Mexican immigrants in the US but more recently for Central Americans in Mexico) and is a

strong critic of the Trump administration. Though Peña Nieto has been reticent to crack down on the caravan in past weeks, demonstrated by the rejected offer for temporary work visas and social benefits for migrants, his interior ministry has taken a harsher tone and deportation measures in response to the attempts to cross the Tijuana border.

Viacrucis and Migrant Self-Activity

To evidence the grave dangers Central Americans face in Mexico, civil society organizations have staged caravans for years. Every year during Lent, religious organizations aiding migrants organize a "Viacrucis," or Stations of the Cross, to bring attention to the situation. Many Catholics in Mexico recreate the Viacrucis each year, the most famous being in the Mexico City borough of Iztapalapa, where thousands of people gather to watch the procession. These original migrant Viacrucis were contained in Southern Mexico, and the migrants who took part had no collective options to continue to the Northern border.

Since 2014, these largely symbolic processions have taken on new meaning. That year, the train conductors in Tenosique, Tabasco refused to transport members of the Viacrucis, and the group of 450 people decided to walk to their next destination in Chiapas. As the Viacrucis advanced, it earned the support of Mexican civil society and local government. I wrote in 2014, "The participants no longer had to walk along the highway, hoping for donations of food and water from passers-by. They used their political capital to secure buses, meals and medical services from state and regional governments and local organizations." [123] Their numbers swelled to 1,000 and in Mexico City, the group secured "transit visas" which allowed them to travel safely to the US border, while others chose to stay and work in Mexico.

The year 2014 also indicated a shift in the politics of migrant support networks in Mexico. Most shelters only attend to the immediate material needs of Central Americans, which are often dire, but do not afford opportunities for political education or organizing. The 2014 Viacrucis sparked conversations in shelters, collectives and non-profits around Mexico about the agency of Central Americans. Some who decided to live in Mexico began taking on organizing roles.

To be sure, the existing for undocumented people in Mexico to organize are significant. Many are in transit through the country and for their own safety must closely protect their privacy. Those who decide to live in Mexico or enter a limbo stage because they cannot cross to the US, are treated as irregular and undocumented migrants are much the world over: subject to tremendous exploitation, paid minimum wage or less, and highly exposed to the authority of their employers.

Despite these real obstacles to organizing, migrant rights organizations have built on the tradition of the Viacrucis to coordinate groups to travel to the border in recent years. It was not until 2018, and President Donald Trump tweeted about the caravan advancing through Mexican territory, that these mobilizations received widespread international media attention. The act of securing safe transit through Mexico was interpreted by the US president as an incoming "invasion."

While Mexico has a strong tradition of accepting refugees from the Southern Cone of South America and during the Guatemalan Civil War, there has been little public recognition of the violence and persecution that many Central Americans face in their home countries. Discrimination and racism towards Central Americans is the norm in many parts of the country, as evidenced by violent protests against the caravan when it arrived in Tijuana. As the caravan members arrived on the northern border in mid-November, Tijuana residents organized an anti-immigrant march and the mayor implied that members of the caravan were delinquents.

The charity paradigm has broken in recent mobilizations. Instead of simply rendering visible the migrant struggle, subsequent caravans have built political power to make the journey safer and help Central Americans apply for asylum in Mexico and the US.

Contested Solidarities

The visibility of the caravan has made many Mexicans reexamine their preconceptions about Central American migration and created opportunities to show their solidarity. There is also increasing coordination with US-based organizations that can provide legal aid to people seeking asylum.

Organizations like Al Otro Lado, based in Tijuana and Southern California, work to connect asylum seekers in Mexico to resources in the US. Pueblos Sin Fronteras, which is made up of Central Americans who live in Mexico and their Mexican and American allies, is another group that bridges the gap between humanitarian organizations in both countries. As the universal right to seek asylum is under attack from the Trump administration, these networks create collective power to hold authorities accountable for their treatment of migrants and asylum seekers.

Martha Balaguera and Alfonso Gonzales wrote in NACLA earlier this year about the members of a 2017 caravan organized by Pueblos Sin Fronteras. [124] Even when applying for asylum at official points of entry, asylum seekers are held for months at a time. Several of the caravan members who were detained after turning themselves in on the border lead a hunger strike while imprisoned at the Adelanto Detention Center in San Bernardino County, California. They protested poor conditions, denial of medical attention, and unreasonable bonds as high as \$50,000.

Balaguera and Gonzales write:

The hunger strikers' experiences of empowerment and solidarity despite

such repression defy common representations of refugees' helplessness at the hands of the state. Indeed, the ability of the Adelanto Nine to see beyond their own dire situation and to reach out to other immigrant communities struggling to defend their rights in the face of abuse suggests an emergent refugee solidarity movement.

Organizers have also raised funds to pay bonds, secured pro bono lawyers, sought out housing for people leaving detention and accompany people to the border, even when Customs and Border Patrol repeatedly denies their attempts to seek asylum. Many asylum seekers and other migrants have to face the complex US immigration system alone; transnational organizing is now creating structures so that even people who cannot afford legal representation or a costly coyote have a shot at humanitarian protection, either in the US or Mexico. Instead of an individualized legal process, these groups stress the systematic factors that push people out of the Northern Triangle.

As the caravan has made its way north, organizing efforts have sprung up in numerous US cities. Since the caravan reached Tijuana, numerous advocates and volunteers have traveled to provide legal aid and material support. Grassroots organizers in San Diego, who mobilized earlier this year to support the springtime caravan when it arrived in Tijuana, are providing medical care. In Los Angeles, organizations like the Central American Resource Center (CARECEN), the largest Central American immigrant rights group in the country, have spoken out in support, drawing the connection between refugees who fled El Salvador's Civil War in the 1980s and the caravan members today. The New Sanctuary Coalition, based out of New York, has pledged to provide 40 days and 40 nights of support in Tijuana.

Often narratives about immigration focus on personal ingenuity, strength and determination. Yet the caravan and the solidarity organizing around it show that through collective action, Central American migrants and asylum seekers can defend their

physical safety and their rights to seek international humanitarian protection. As Balaguera and Gonzales argue, "In the case of the Viacruz participants, their struggle to cross Mexico has re-appropriated itself as part of an emergent Mesoamerican refugee social movement."

Already, the progress of the caravan has inspired other groups to form in Central America. There are now at least six large groups that have entered Mexico since mid-October. Not all have avoided detention and deportations. 600 members of a caravan, mostly Salvadorans, were detained after crossing into Chiapas from Guatemala. [125] The members of another decided to turn themselves in to Mexican authorities to seek asylum. Excluding those who were part of the caravans, Mexico removed over 9,000 Central Americans from the country, just between October 19 and November 25. [126] Yet the caravans have forced Mexican authorities to negotiate and have inspired Mexicans to act in solidarity on an unprecedented scale.

I briefly visited Tijuana in the first days of the caravan's arrival. The border city is no stranger to the arrival of large groups of migrants, asylum seekers and deportees. Two years ago, thousands of Haitians arrived in the city, hoping to enter the US, until Barack Obama abruptly ended their Temporary Protected Status. As far back as 2016, Customs and Border Patrol has limited the number of people who can enter the US to seek asylum on any given day. Hundreds and sometimes thousands of people have become stranded in Tijuana awaiting their turn. Congolese, Haitians, Indians, Salvadorans, Mexicans and Ugandans can be found waiting at the El Chaparral crossing each day.

Into this mix arrived upwards of 5,000 Central Americans. While the caravan allowed them to reach the border, their next steps are unclear. The United States is within sight of the temporary shelter set up by the city government. The wait to apply for asylum will easily stretch into weeks, if not months. The temptation to cross with a coyote is real for those who have family who might pay for it.

On Sunday, November 25, a segment of the caravan approached US soil and an even smaller number crossed in defiance of the Border Patrol agents staring them down. They were greeted with tear gas.

Some members of the caravan have started paperwork to seek asylum in Mexico or apply for temporary residency. Others have decided to return to their home countries. Yet for the thousands who remain in Tijuana with the intention to enter the US,

they have defied the efforts of the US and Mexican states to detain their transit. And unlike those who must pass furtively through Mexico's dangerous territory, they are now connected to a widening network of people and organizations that believe in the right to free movement.

Organizations and collectives in Central America, Mexico and the United States that were once highly-fragmented are now creating networks to support asylum seekers as

they pass through multiple national borders. The forces driving people to leave Central America remain, and the Trump administration is gradually chipping away at the legal foundations of asylum. In the face of these structural barriers, solidarity networks in Central and North America are laying the groundwork for a safer path through hostile territory.

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[Viewpoint magazine](#)

AMLO inauguration - the old regime collapses and a new period in the class struggle opens

11 December 2018, by Adrián Alvarado

These events are unprecedented in recent history, marked by electoral fraud and vote rigging. The atmosphere in the streets during the inauguration of the previous presidents was one of dejection, opposition and a deep malaise among large sectors of workers and youth. This time was different: the masses were jubilant and out on the streets in force.

A political earthquake that shook the system

The results of the elections of 1 July shook the foundations on which the Mexican political regime is founded. Millions of rural and urban workers; young people and women went to the polls to deliver a resounding blow to the parties of the right, submerging them in a crisis from which they have not been able to recover.

This granted a resounding victory to Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), who is the most voted-for president in the history of the country,

with more than 30 million votes. He also enjoys a relative majority in the Chamber of Deputies and Senators (enough to pass laws, but not to modify the Constitution) and an undisputed electoral triumph in 30 of the 31 states of the Republic.

In contrast, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), which governed for the last six years and headed government for more than seven decades, from 1929 to 2000, was the most severely punished, obtaining the lowest vote in its history. The party lost close to 10 million votes. For its part, the National Action Party (PAN), which has governed the country for 12 years, from 2000 to 2012, lost close to 3 million votes.

The crisis of the parties of the regime has continued after the election. According to a survey published on 28 November 2018 by the conservative newspaper *El Financiero*, the combined electoral support for the PRI and the PAN, at present, does not exceed 19 percent. On the other hand, the polls, even those that favoured the parties of the right, admit that the popularity of López Obrador and support for his government have

grown. The same newspaper, in a recent poll on 3 December, revealed that 83 percent of the population feels optimistic; 80 percent believe AMLO inspires confidence from the people. Meanwhile, Mitofsky admits the new government has an approval rate of 63 percent, higher than the vote AMLO obtained on 1 July.

The rage against the regime and the deep desire for radical changes that we observed in the last election had been previously expressed in the streets through many demonstrations, which increasingly question the political regime and the economic system. This frustration with the status quo became more evident during the government of Enrique Peña Nieto. Decades of privatisation, poverty, and the collapse of the purchasing power of wages; combined with the wave of violence running through the country, and notorious corruption cases of government officials, were creating a tide of discontent and hatred against establishment institutions, the state, corrupt governments and right-wing parties.

As a result of the election of 1 July, for

the first time in the history of the country, a president identified as on the margins of the political left has assumed the presidency, which has aroused great expectations among the working class, young people and women.

The mood on the streets on 1 December was one of joy and celebration, reaffirming and strengthening the sentiments that followed the election. Zócalo square was turned into an immense festival. The tens of thousands of attendees were filled with hope at some kind of radical change, and were aware that they were witnessing a historic moment.

Hundreds of times, Zócalo square has been filled by demonstrations: against privatisations, against violence, against enforced disappearances, against electoral fraud, and for the most immediate demands of the people and the workers - wage increases, healthcare, education, housing, etc. But this time it was different, the main square of the country overflowed with the feeling that this occasion should be celebrated as a strong victory over the hateful regime and its parties.

AMLO, from the Congress of the Union, announced the end of the neoliberal model, and the birth of a new historical stage called the Fourth Transformation, preceded by the revolutionary war of independence begun in 1810, by the Reform Laws promulgated by the government of Benito Juárez, and the Mexican Revolution of 1910.

The political earthquake of 1 July continues to send shockwaves that are still shaking the political regime and the very bowels of the system, as was clear on 1 December.

AMLO's speech

Andrés Manuel López Obrador delivered a speech in the Chamber of Deputies, after receiving the presidential sash and being sworn in. He denounced the ravages of the so-called neoliberal model, the failure of the so-called structural reforms, the cuts and privatisations, the acts of corruption and electoral fraud in elections.

On the energy reform he said:

"I say this with realism and without ideological prejudices: neoliberal economic policy has been a disaster, a calamity for the public life of the country. For example, the energy reform, which we were told would come to save us, has only meant the fall in oil production and the excessive increase in the prices of gasoline, gas and electricity."

Later, he continued:

"The damage caused to the national energy sector during neoliberalism is so serious, that we are not only the oil-producing country that imports the most gasoline in the world, but that we are now buying crude oil to supply the only six refineries that barely survive. A new refinery has not been built in the country for 40 years.

"Corn originates from Mexico, that blessed plant, and yet we are the nation that imports the most corn in the world. Before neoliberalism, we produced and were self-sufficient in gasoline, diesel, gas, electric power. Now we buy more than half of what we consume."

In addition, he pointed to the collapse of the purchasing power of wages, which during the last 30 years has deteriorated by more than 60 percent.

Another fundamental aspect of his programme concerns the relationship between political and economic power:

"The other hallmark of the new government will be the separation of economic power from political power. The government will no longer be a simple facilitator for looting, as has been happening. The government is no longer going to be a committee in the service of a rapacious minority."

A central aspect of AMLO's rhetoric and programme focuses on combating corruption:

"According to the latest Transparency International measurement... we occupy the 135th place in corruption, among 176 evaluated countries, and we pass to that place after being in the place 59 in 2000, up from 70 in 2006, climbing to 106 in 2012 and

arrive in 2017 in this shameful position."

In the afternoon, in Zócalo square, he again outlined his government programme, in a symbolic temple covered with thousands of tomoxtle leaves (corn leaves) and before thousands of people from different parts of the country, who filled the square.

He promised support to indigenous groups; scholarships for young people and children who are studying; the creation of 100 public universities; support for the victims of the 2017 earthquakes; medical care and free medications; increased pensions for the elderly; support for farmers; a freeze on the price of gasoline, fuel and electric power beyond inflation; frugality and honesty at all levels of government; the implementation of several megaprojects such as the Mayan Train, that will be built in the Yucatan Peninsula; the creation of a refinery and investment to the production of more gas and oil; internet coverage throughout the country and free Wi-Fi in public places; an increased minimum wage; a thorough investigation into the disappearance of the Ayotzinapa abductees; the creation of a controversial National Guard, with the Navy and the Army to take charge of public security tasks; promoting public consultations to guide government decisions; lowering the high salaries of government officials; no new taxes; the cancellation of the so-called Educational Reform and instead, preservation of historical memory through literature and promoting culture, among other proposals.

He said that the government will be close to and will not betray the hopes of millions of people who trust and sympathise with the cause of the Fourth Transformation:

"Let's not stop meeting, but always keep in communication. There will be no divorce between people and government. I need them, because, as Juárez said, 'with the people everything, without the people, nothing'. Do not leave me alone because without you I am worthless or almost nothing; without you, the conservatives would easily overwhelm

me. I ask for your support, because I reiterate the commitment not to fail you; I will die before I betray you."

Following in the tradition of the liberals of the 19th century, of which López Obrador is a fervent follower, the Fourth Transformation focuses its programme on the fight against corruption and the implementation of an austere government, eliminating unnecessary and sumptuous expenses, and fighting for a government that serves all social classes and sectors of society, without being subject to the pressure of economic power and finance capital. It is based on a fight against the neoliberal economic model, not against the system that gives rise to it: capitalism. It aims to implement a series of reforms and concessions to the most vulnerable sectors: the unemployed youth, the elderly, etc. It also strives to maintain the economic and political independence of Mexico with respect to foreign governments.

The reform package that Andrés Manuel López Obrador proposes has certainly found a broad social support base, in contrast to the policy of austerity, privatisations and elimination of social and labour rights that have been implemented in the last 30 years or more.

AMLO's rhetoric on fighting corruption finds a wide echo given the scandalous cases of illicit enrichment by high public officials, opacity in contracts for public works between all levels of government and private companies, and the link between organised crime and heads of state. Mexican capitalism drips corruption from its every pore.

And although explained in an abstract way, without much detail, the idea of separating political from economic power implies to the masses that the government is no longer a committee in the service of the interests of bankers and big businessmen.

The desire for profound changes has gripped the minds of millions of people: workers, peasants, housewives and young people. They know very well what they do not want: corruption, violence, poverty, unemployment, low wages, structural

reforms and government submission to imperialism. The development of consciousness they have undergone is a product of political struggle and the experience that they have acquired in recent years. The masses have assimilated and support, for now, the programme of López Obrador, because he is the only one that promises not to continue with the odious state of things. We recognise that class consciousness is a contradictory process, and that millions of people have broken with traditional parties and question the existing regime, which is an important step. However, this is not the end of a long political process that awaits us.

Millions of people will have to go through the political school of AMLO's government, before beginning to draw openly revolutionary conclusions. 1 July and 1 December were key steps in this process, although they will not be the end of the story.

A government subjected to two great social forces

The government of López Obrador will be subject to two major social forces, which represent the fundamental classes of the current capitalist system.

On the one hand, the big capitalists and bankers will press to moderate his proposed package of reforms and prevent fundamental changes for the benefit of the working class and wider masses. The desire of these parasites – of what we call the "mafia in power" – is to maintain their profits, based on the exploitation of the working class, with low wages (without benefits or social rights) and the ruthless plunder of natural resources. They will try to make AMLO's changes cosmetic, while preserving the same social and economic policies. In fact, they have already begun to exert pressure. Let's take three examples.

As a result of the cancellation of the construction of a new airport in Mexico City, a group of businessmen has begun to withdraw their funds and investments, which has weakened the

Mexican peso against the dollar. This has led the new government to buy a series of bonds invested in the construction of the airport, acquire debt and open a new round of negotiations with the capitalists interested in the airport being built in Texcoco, to avoid an open conflict, which could reach the international courts.

Secondly, in recent days, an initiative was presented in the House of Representatives to regulate the high bank fees charged to users. The response was a resounding fall in the stock market, and pressure from senior managers of Spanish-owned banks. As a result, the initiative had to be withdrawn.

Finally, a proposal was presented by some deputies (identified with the left) to review the contracts of mining companies, and another initiative to return to the old pension regime and review the current "Afores": a privately-run retirement fund, which is in the hands of banks. In response, there was a rabid response from bankers and big businessmen, who have also threatened the withdrawal of investments.

Bankers and businessmen will use their economic power – based on the private property of large companies, banks and large tracts of land – to pressure and even boycott the economy. In this way, they seek to block the package of reforms proposed in the new government's programme, even those that seem to be minor initiatives. And they will prevent the so-called structural reforms (such as those to energy and labour), from being reversed at all costs.

On the other hand, there are millions of people who make up the social base of the movement around López Obrador, with a strong desire for change, who want a different direction in the economic, political and social field. They want structural reforms to be reversed, the minimum wage to be raised, benefits and social rights taken over by the state, corrupt and repressive politicians punished, political prisoners released, and they long to live in peace – no longer fearing violence on the streets or from

the state.

However, in order to advance this minimum program, we have to confront the interests of the big businessmen and bankers, who want to maintain the current state of affairs, and who were represented by the governments of the PRI and the PAN.

The strength of the millions of workers lies in their capacity to organise, which we will have to test and prepare before the great historical events to come. As we mobilise in the streets, we must not doubt that the "mafia in power" intends to derail the project of change. In any correct political programme, we will have to discuss and democratically debate moving from an anti-neoliberalism and anti-corruption stance to an openly anti-capitalist programme.

The AMLO programme should propose a tactic of reversing structural reforms (including energy and labour reforms), and the state taking over the mining, oil and electric industry; and recovering the benefits and social services privatised in the past. For these proposals to be lasting, we must go from a struggle against neoliberalism and discuss the need to struggle against capitalism: the origin of exploitation and inequality.

The Fourth Transformation is a worthy heir to the revolutionary movement for independence in 1810, the revolutionary war of reform and against foreign intervention, and the 1920 revolutionary movement in which hundreds of thousands of peasants and workers fought against the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz. Now, our task is to fight for true independence and to free ourselves

from the yoke of imperialism; to end the old regime, controlled by the new conservatives who refuse to wither away. Our task is to fight, here and now, against those who exploit and oppress us; against the new dictatorship of the oligarchs, bankers and bourgeois.

The Fourth Transformation cannot only be anti-neoliberal and anti-corruption, it will have to be anti-capitalist and revolutionary so that any real change will endure. Only with the expropriation under democratic control by workers of the major national and multinational companies can we begin to transform Mexico for the benefit of the majority of workers, peasants and the poor. The Fourth Transformation can only be carried out through the struggle for socialism.

Source *In Defence of Marxism*.

Lessons from Irish unions: The Trade Union Campaign to Repeal the 8th

10 December 2018, by Sarah Jaffe

Union members and leaders make up about a third of the workforce; like in the US, women make up more than half of membership. A key help in shifting public opinion and organizing the Repeal campaign was The Trade Union Campaign to Repeal the 8th Amendment. The Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) had a history in the pro-choice movement in Ireland, having campaigned against the 8th Amendment when it was first proposed, and the Trade Union Campaign to Repeal the 8th Amendment began several years ago, long before the referendum on repeal was called.

Abortion had always been illegal in Ireland, but the 1983 referendum was called at a time when most other Western nations had expanded women's right to abortion. Instead, Ireland doubled down. Any Irish person with an unwanted pregnancy

had to take a pricey trip to the UK for a legal abortion if they could afford it—a reality dramatized by a rally in Dublin a week before the referendum, where women in canoes paddled up the River Liffey bearing banners that read, "Don't Make Irish Women Get the Boat." For those who couldn't make the journey, recent years brought underground access to illegal abortion pills and the risk of a 14-year prison sentence, or being forced to carry a pregnancy to term, sometimes at risk of their life.

That risk was underscored by several dramatic cases in the 1990s and 2000s in which courts intervened to halt abortions, including in the case of Savita Halappanavar in 2012, who died after doctors refused to intervene as she miscarried. Courts had even ruled for doctors who pushed a woman into an unwanted Caesarean

section, citing the 8th.

And so, according to Mandy La Combte of the Trade Union Campaign to Repeal, "We see the issue of 'repeal' among the forefront of achieving equality for our female membership." La Combte pointed out that women in Ireland make up more than 50% of trade union membership in Ireland, and that 50 percent of working women in Ireland earn €20,000 or less. That means that the €800 - €2,000 that travel outside of Ireland for abortion care might cost could be up to 10% of their annual income. "This amounts to significant stress for women," she said, "That compounded with the added emotional stress of travelling abroad often in fear and distress denies women any semblance of dignity and is an affront to their basic human rights."

Longtime prochoice and trade union

activist John Meehan explained that when the Trade Union Campaign began, none of the major unions had a clear policy on repeal. It was slow work convincing them, he said, but by the 2010s, it was clear that public opinion was shifting, and when activists raised the issue at union conferences or regional meetings, it won support easily. Union leadership, Meehan said, could be hesitant to break its habits, but it was increasingly clear that repeal was in the interests of the membership.

In 2017, several unions and labor federations, including Unite the Union, UNISON, Mandate Trade Union, the Communications Workers Union (CWU) Ireland and the GMB commissioned and funded a sweeping survey, *Abortion as a Workplace Issue*, which found that many union members had experience with the need for abortion affecting them on the job—from not being able to get time off to fear of stigma in the workplace. 51 percent of respondents not only approved of repealing the 8th but of making abortion accessible “when a woman asks.” (In September, the health minister announced the service will be free.)

One respondent said, “I would like to discuss how access to abortion is a socio-economic issue. If you have money and means to travel without anybody taking note, then you can go to the UK and have an abortion and no one is any wiser—no embarrassment or public stigma. If you are in a low-paid job or unemployed, you could end up trapped in an unwanted pregnancy or have to turn to friends, family, money lenders for finance.”

Beyond proving that union members were already thinking about and being affected by the abortion ban, Meehan said, the report “shows that in this country when groups of people just sat down and just talked about the issue, it was much more of a trade union issue than they [originally] conceived.... For example, lots of people in it said it never occurred to them to go to their trade union about the issue.” The stigma around abortion would have prevented them, in a way that it would not have prevented a man from seeking care if he had an injury or illness. A woman

who needed to travel for an abortion could not tell her boss that she needed time off work for an illegal procedure (even if since the 1990s the Irish constitution has also mandated that one does have the right to travel for an abortion), and so long as the unions remained silent on the issue, she would have no support.

“Now, that, frankly, had to change,” Meehan said. “That meant a break from this kind of routine-ist approach towards trade unions. It meant both women coming forward and institutions, trade unions, dealing with this, recognizing it.”

That leadership from within the labor movement came from women-led unions like Mandate, which represents shop workers who are overwhelmingly female and working-class. It took years of working with unions, labor councils, and identifying activists within the labor movement to make the Trade Union Campaign for Repeal bigger and stronger. “The perspective of some unions is to stick to workplace issues and not concentrate on human rights issues, so this has been challenging,” La Combte said.

The campaign also backed members of the Oireachtas (the Irish legislature) who were fighting for repeal, and met with politicians from various parties ahead of the 2016 general elections to try to determine their positions on repeal. For a long time, most of Ireland’s major parties—the two largest, both center-right parties, Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil, as well as the left-nationalist Sinn Féin—had been anti-abortion, and while Irish Labour was ostensibly pro-Repeal, it only had managed to be in government in coalition with the conservative Fine Gael. Smaller socialist parties like People Before Profit took a fully pro-choice stance, and quite a few independent members of the Oireachtas did as well, campaigning hard for repeal.

The Right2Change movement, which grew out of the anti-austerity campaign for water rights after the institution of fees for water in 2014 and was heavily backed by trade unions, included repealing the 8th in its policy platform, released in the lead-up to the 2016 election, and over

100 candidates—including Sinn Féin, moving toward a pro-choice position—signed on to that platform. Fine Gael maintained its hold on government, but shifted its own position, particularly with the rise of Leo Varadkar to the position of Taoiseach (prime minister). Varadkar, openly gay and the son of an immigrant, represents a new face for conservative politics in Ireland, courting the foreign businesses that use the country as a tax haven with a newly friendly, socially-liberal face.

This meant that by the time the referendum was called, three major parties supported it and even the leadership of the socially conservative Fianna Fáil backed Repeal, though a good half of the party’s membership and elected leaders supported the No campaign.

But it was the activists at the grassroots and within the Trade Union Campaign, not the elected officials, who won the overwhelming victory on May 25. The elected officials had been pulled along toward change by campaigners, who learned from the country’s 2015 referendum on marriage equality that talking about supposedly-sensitive “cultural” issues taught them much about how those issues affected people’s daily lives. The “respectable middle ground” of the Repeal campaign might have been the voice on the television, but it was activists like Meehan and La Combte who had spent decades winning people over who did the on-the-ground work and had the hard, personal conversations that changed minds.

The support of the labor movement was key in illustrating the ways in which abortion in Ireland was already happening, but happening unequally and exacerbating the economic stress that many were still feeling after years of austerity. It brought the voices of real working people to the fore, and pushed back on the idea that unions should only care about “bread-and-butter” issues. It took a risk, and found its position reflected in 67 percent of the country.

Sarah Jaffe writes on labor for a variety of publications and is the author of *Necessary Trouble: Americans in Revolt*.

A Ruling Class Activist: A Not-Eulogy for George H. W. Bush

9 December 2018, by **David Finkel**

But George H.W. Bush was never content to simply bask in the comfort of unearned privilege. He lived his life as a truly committed ruling class activist.

He rose to the position of director of the Central Intelligence Agency in the 1970s — the years when the CIA actively collaborated with the murderous Chilean dictatorship and the Argentine generals' dirty war that tortured and disappeared tens of thousands. Some of the architects of that slaughter have ultimately gone to prison in Argentina, but their U.S. enablers Bush and Henry Kissinger of course remained safely out of the reach of justice.

In the 1980s Bush served as Ronald Reagan's vice president during the U.S.-sponsored genocidal wars in Central America, and the years when Washington allied with and aided both Iraq's dictator Saddam Hussein and Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden in the Afghanistan war. At the same time, the United States was covertly selling weapons to the Islamic Republic of Iran, both to prolong the hideous Iran-Iraq war and to finance the illegal supply of U.S. aid to the Nicaraguan contras.

In case you never heard of this recent history, that's a tribute to the mass amnesia perpetrated by our corporate media. These policies significantly laid the groundwork for today's desperate flight of refugees from the ruined countries of Central America, as well as the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and the cascading disasters that would follow in the new century. As Reagan slipped into disgrace and first signs of dementia, Bush helped

keep the ship of state afloat and the blood flowing smoothly.

But Bush didn't stop there. His own successful 1988 presidential campaign featured an important contribution to our political culture — the overt use of racial bigotry in attack ads, with the infamous "Willie Horton" commercial blaming the hapless Michael Dukakis for a Massachusetts inmate who committed murder while on parole. Bush's advisor Lee Atwater on his deathbed expressed remorse for that racist hit piece; Bush as befitted his station in life never apologized for anything.

In particular, he certainly never regretted the 1989 overthrow and U.S. capture of Manuel Noriega, the Panamanian ruler — who had been one of the CIA's most trusted assets in Latin America during the very years when Bush led the Agency — after Noriega had struck on a new course as an independent drug lord. The capture of Noriega involved U.S. bombing of the civilian population in Panama City, causing deaths somewhere in the hundreds or perhaps thousands that have never been fully revealed.

That was only the prelude to his greatest triumph in office, the first Gulf War in 1991 after Saddam Hussein's seizure of Kuwait. The climax of this brilliant campaign was the turkey shoot on the "highway of death" as Saddam's already defeated and fleeing conscript army was mowed down (his elite protection troops being safely out of the battle), and the U.S. bombing of the Ameriyya bomb shelter in Baghdad that liquefied the civilian families

sheltering there. Again, isn't that all conveniently forgotten?

In the wake of the fighting, the Shia population of southern Iraq, brutally oppressed by the Saddam regime, rose up in revolt. President Bush and the U.S. military deliberately allowed the Iraqi air force to move in to crush that uprising. Saddam's regime was resurrected, with ultimate results that we know.

In the wake of the "liberation of Kuwait," Bush's reelection in 1992 was briefly considered a foregone conclusion. Alas, it didn't work out that way. But the Bush family dynasty wasn't over by a long shot. Bush's two sons Jeb and George W. became governors of Florida and Texas — in W's case, after he had failed both as an oilman and a baseball owner — and Jeb successfully stole the 2000 election in Florida to put his brother in the White House.

The presidency of George W. Bush — 9/11, the Iraq war catastrophe, Katrina and all — was considered, until just recently, the worst in modern U.S. history. Ironically, the antics of Donald Trump have served to burnish the image of both Presidents Bush the elder and younger.

George H.W. Bush was truly an activist and president not only for, but literally of, the U.S. ruling class in whose service he lived his life. He is lovingly eulogized by the media from conservative, to liberal, to Saturday Night Live. As they all tell us, we shall not soon see his like again. At least, we hope not.

December 5, 2018

[Against the Current](#)

From Women's Strikes to a New Class Movement: The Third Feminist Wave

8 December 2018, by **Cinzia Arruzza**

A week after the strike and the pickets in Glasgow, thousands of Google workers, from Tokyo to New York, abandoned their desks and workstations and took to the streets in protest, in response to a series of revelations, published by the New York Times, concerning cases of sexual harassment perpetrated by several managers of the high-tech giant and conveniently covered up. Google, like other giants of the digital economy such as Facebook, has been wearing the mask of progressive capitalism for years: an employer who exploits, yes, but without discriminating between women and men, trans and cis, gay and straight, and one who is even happy to pay for the costs of freezing eggs and IVF. The protest, however, was not limited to cases of sexual harassment at work; it articulated a series of claims among which the demand for protection and trade union rights stood out. As Moira Donegan wrote in *The Guardian*, "The protest focused with admirable clarity on the interdependency of gender and class inequities, and hints at the possibility of unionization efforts among tech workers." [127]

These two strikes, the latest in a long series of strikes with women as protagonists, from the March 8th international strikes to those of hotel and education workers in the United States, confronts us with an apparent dilemma. What are we talking about when we talk about women's strikes? Is this class struggle or a new feminist wave?

The Third Feminist Wave

After more than two years of international mobilization - two International Women's Day

transnational strikes, and the recent expansion of the movement to Chile, where last summer a wave of occupations and strikes against harassment and sexual violence hit schools and universities throughout the country, as well as to Brazil, where the hashtag #EleNao, launched by some female celebrities in response to the electoral ascent of Jair Bolsonaro, triggered a process of feminist mobilization resulting in a series of mass demonstrations - it is clearly time to say that we are in the middle of a new feminist wave. A wave that has different political and geographical articulations within it, but that as a whole has posed issues such as gender violence, wage inequality, reproductive rights, and women's reproductive work, as well as sexual liberties, at the center of the political and cultural debate of every country hit by the mobilizations. To fully grasp the impact of this event, however, it is better to clarify the terms. The current one is not the fourth or even the fifth feminist wave. It is the third and arrives around 40 years after the end of the second. In the past few decades there has been a certain tendency to label as "feminist wave" movements of thought that took place especially within campuses and their surroundings. These currents of thought have marked important turning points within feminist theory; however, they were not rooted in processes of mass social and political mobilization comparable to the feminist movement of the Sixties and Seventies. So, if with "wave" we intend to indicate a process of social and political subjectivation that takes place through mass insurgency, the term is ill-suited to indicate currents of thought or turns within a theoretical debate. Moreover, the turns within feminist thought which have been labeled as "waves" refer mostly to the periodization of the

Anglo-American feminist debate; by applying the category of "wave" to them, we end up thus universalizing a geographical particularity, which instead should be "re-provincialized."

This, of course, does not mean that the evolution of the theoretical debate of previous years has had no influence on the movement's reflections and slogans. On the contrary, the transfeminism and the anti-essentialism of the movement are certainly indebted to queer and trans theory, and its internationalism and anti-racism are strongly influenced by work on intersectionality and on the relationship between capitalism and racialization. However, the notion of a proliferation of "waves" suggests a historical continuum of feminist mobilizations from the second wave to the present, obscuring the nature of the current feminist movement as an event - and thus its potentialities for political and social disruption.

While the second feminist wave, in the Sixties and Seventies, had a core of advanced capitalist Western countries as its centers of propulsion, the current feminist wave was born from the "periphery" - from Argentina and Poland - and it rapidly spread to a global level, assuming a mass dimension in a series of countries most affected by the crisis and by austerity and debt containment policies (Italy, Spain, Brazil, Chile...). The use of digital technologies and social media has contributed enormously to the immediate transnational character of the movement, encouraging not only coordination of struggles, but also the circulation of documents, ideas, slogans, analysis, and information, encouraging a dynamic expansion of the mobilization. But it is above all the strike that constitutes the most important novelty of the new wave.

Not only because the strike has put women's work, women's role in social reproduction, and the relationship between production of commodities and reproduction at the center of the debate, but because it has become the main engine of a process of subjectivation, through which a new anti-capitalist feminist subjectivity is emerging, one that is strongly critical of liberal feminism, which is also present within the new wave: just think of some liberal tendencies of the Women's March in the United States, turned into a progressive appendage of the Democratic Party, or the carceral declinations of #metoo.

The potential impact of the current process of feminist subjectivation emerges most clearly when one takes into account the fundamental difference between this wave and the first two. In extremely schematic terms, the first feminist wave - in the last decades of the 19th and early 20th centuries - took place within the process of birth and consolidation of the workers' movement: from the growth of the German social democracy to the formation of trade unions and social democratic and communist parties throughout Europe and the United States. Within this historical process of mass politicization and the irruption of the working class on the political scene, the first feminist wave claimed the full realization of the universalist promise proper to both democratic liberalism and socialism by agitating around the slogan of equality: equality of capabilities and rights. The second feminist wave took place within another process of class subjectivation, that of the onset of the New Left in advanced capitalist countries and of the wave of anti-colonial and national liberation struggles. Within this process, the second wave appropriated the watchword of difference, borrowed from black nationalism, to denounce sexism in society and within the movement and to give voice and visibility to a specificity too often silenced.

The context of the third feminist wave is radically different, since the new feminist movement is not the expression of a particularism within a broader process of subjectivation. The

explosion of the feminist movement was, of course, preceded by other mobilizations, the season of struggles of 2011-2013 with international visibility (in particular, Occupy, the Indignados, and Taksim Square), with which it presents some elements of continuity. Like these previous movements, the feminist movement was born outside and independent of all the parties and organizations of the traditional left (or what remains of it). And as in 2011-2013, one of the characteristics of the feminist movement is the speed with which specific and partial claims - the denunciation of femicides and the attack on the right to abortion - have transformed into an overall condemnation of the system (the capitalist mode of production and its state institutions). However, the anti-systemic nature of the 2011-2013 mobilizations was not matched either by a capacity for organizational sedimentation or by an ability to identify practices of struggle and strategies corresponding to the radicality of the analyses and aspirations. From this point of view, the feminist movement was born from the ashes of the previous season of social movements. It has inherited some of its characteristics, but at the same time it has taken a crucial step forward: the internationally coordinated adoption and reinvention of the strike as its main form of struggle and as its political identity. Far from expressing a particularism, a partial perspective, within a broader process of subjectivation, through women's strikes the feminist movement is increasingly placing itself as the international process of class formation of this phase.

The Arcane Question of Class

The Marxist tradition is haunted by a paradox. On the one hand, for Marxism the notion of class struggle is a fundamental heuristic instrument for the interpretation of the nature of capitalism and of capitalist historical processes, and it constitutes its political-programmatic horizon. On the other hand, what exactly a class is is perhaps the most controversial and ambiguous question within not only

Marxist debate, but Marx's own writings. In Marx, class sometimes designates a metaphysical entity or a moment in a philosophy of history that results in the negation of negation. At other times, it indicates and defines the industrial working class on the basis of objective sociological and economic criteria. In *The Poverty of Philosophy*, Marx famously distinguishes between "class in itself" and "class for itself," but the distinction is only hinted at and is far from clear. Finally, in a series of political writings it would seem that a social group cannot be considered as a class if it does not act politically as a class, in an antagonistic relationship with another.

These ambiguities have played a major role in the subsequent Marxist debate and have given rise to divergent theories. Schematically, it is possible to distinguish three main approaches: objectivist or sociological, metaphysical (where "class" is an abstract category indicating the subject of a progressive philosophy of history), and political. To understand why the new feminist movement should be understood as a process of class subjectivation, it is necessary to refer to the latter approach.

For E.P. Thompson, "class" is a historical category before being a theoretical one, a category that must therefore be articulated starting from the empirical observation of individual and collective concrete behaviors that - over time - express a class character and create class institutions (trade unions, parties, associations, etc.). [128] This means that the notion of class is dynamic, referring to a historical process rather than expressing the essence of a static entity. In other words, understood as a historical category, the notion of class cannot be reduced to the sociological categorization of social groups on the basis of classificatory and quantitative criteria. For example, the definitions of the working class as the set of all wage workers or of all those who, employed or not, have no other resources than the sale of their labor-power, although not in themselves false, are vague, abstract, and incomplete. In short, these definitions contain an element of truth, but if taken as complete definitions they

lead to analytical misunderstandings and political errors with relevant consequences. [129] On the contrary, for Thompson class is the point of arrival and not the starting point of a process of formation. As paradoxical as it may seem, class is the product of class struggle and not its presupposition.

Daniel Bensaïd articulates a position similar to that of Thompson, in Marx for Our Times:

Where positivist sociology claims to "treat social facts as things," Marx always treats them as relations. He does not define his object once and for all by criteria or attributes; he pursues the logic of its multiple determinations. He does not "define" a class; he apprehends relations of conflict between classes. He does not photograph a social fact labelled "class"; he has his sights set on the class relation in its conflictual dynamic. An isolated class is not a theoretical object, but a nonsense. [130]

If class is the historical and dynamic product of class struggle, what remains to be clarified is the relationship between this process of formation through struggle and the determined position occupied by social groups within capitalist relations of production. Social relations of production structure society by placing individuals in what Ellen Meiksins Wood calls "class situations," the nature of which is determined by objective factors. [131]

In the case of working class situations, we must therefore refer to the expropriation and separation from the means of production (proletarianization), the extortion of surplus-value through wage labor, as well as the historically specific labor processes, division of labor, and so on. However, being placed in a "class situation" does not automatically mean belonging to a class. In fact, class relationships never present themselves to lived experience in an immediate way. For example, Wood writes, factory work does not assemble workers into a class, it assembles them within a given productive unit: what the workers experience directly is their own

exploitation within a given workplace, not class relationships in general. Obviously, their objective collocation within the relations of production creates the conditions of possibility for the workers gathered in a productive unit to experience a higher unity, for example the one with the workers of other productive units in the same territory, or in the same country, or worldwide, but this superior unity is not a faithful image of the structuring and division of society through relations of production. It is rather the product of a contingent and variable historical process, which Wood calls "class formation." For individuals placed in "class situations" to constitute themselves as a class, they must fight as a class, that is, they must experience antagonism with other classes. To summarize, a class is not a thing, a static entity, but a social relationship and a political and social aggregate, which is constituted through contingent and specific historical processes.

The political consequences of this theoretical approach are enormous. In fact, if the class is the dynamic, variable, and contingent result of a historical process of self-constitution through the struggle, one of the worst political errors that can be committed is to impose ready-made abstract models onto history with respect to what counts as class struggle and what does not. In fact, there is the risk of continuing to bask in nostalgia for the forms and experiences of the past (or for those that are mere figments of our imagination), rather than recognizing the processes of class subjectivation that are taking place under our noses.

The New Class: Feminist, Anti- racist, Internationalist

The logic of "parallel movements," as Lise Vogel notes, has characterized the overwhelming majority of theories and political strategies of the history of the workers' movement: on the one hand, there is class struggle, on the other, the women's movement,

environmentalist movements, anti-racist movements, sexual liberation, and so on. [132] Within this framework, at best, one wondered how to unite these movements with each other; at worst, the various "partial" movements were accused of dividing the unity of the class, of expressing liberal tendencies, or of distracting attention from the truly central question: exploitation. The new feminist wave is offering the opportunity to overcome the impasse of this approach, because even more than previous waves it is blurring the boundaries (real and imaginary) between class struggle and feminist movement. To go back to the examples of Glasgow and Google, the difficulty in answering the initial question – is it class struggle or feminist struggle? – resides in the fact that the question is fundamentally wrong. These strikes, as well as the 8 March transnational strikes, and in particular the Argentinian and Spanish strikes, are feminist class struggle. The feminist movement is becoming more and more a process of formation of a class subjectivity with specific characteristics: immediately anti-liberal, internationalist, anti-racist, obviously feminist and tendentially anti-capitalist, in excess and in tension with respect to the traditional institutions of the left and its practices. Of course, this process is not the same in each country, and is definitely more advanced in some countries than others. And yet, if we consider the movement as a whole, it is this aspect that represents its greatest novelty and embodies the most interesting potentialities.

When we talk about potentialities we must also talk about the risks of failure, the necessary conditions, the work to be done, and the strategies to be adopted in order for these potentialities to be realized. The realization of the potential created by the new feminist wave requires above all a capacity on the part of the movement to reflect on itself and therefore to think strategically at the same level in which it has already positioned itself through its practice: that of an anti-systemic movement at the global level. Issues such as the consolidation of shared practices of struggle – first of all the strike – the organizational sedimentation at the

national and transnational level, and the universalization of the feminist movement through its expansion to the whole society and through its capacity to speak for the whole – or

“transversality,” to use the words of Verónica Gago – are among the central issues that the feminist movement will have to discuss and face in the next period.. [133]

Source **Viewpoint** 3 December 2018 *“From Women’s Strikes to a New Class Movement: The Third Feminist Wave”*.

The workers who won’t snitch

7 December 2018, by **Dennis Webster**

The duty of workers to tell on other workers is referred to as “derivative misconduct”, a relatively new feature in South African law. Numsa will ask the Constitutional Court at the very least to limit widespread and free application of this law by employers and courts.

Derivative misconduct was introduced to South African law in 1998 by Constitutional Court Justice Edwin Cameron during his tenure on the Bench of the Labour Appeal Court.

Workers found guilty of derivative misconduct are not themselves guilty of perpetrating misconduct. Rather, they are guilty of knowing which of their comrades *are* guilty of misconduct, then failing to inform their boss. They are workers who, according to Cameron, “through their silence make themselves guilty”.

“Duty to rat”

This “duty to rat”, as Judge Kate Savage called it in her dissent to the Labour Appeal Court’s judgment in favour of Dunlop in July, forms part of workers’ broader duty to uphold the best interests of their employer’s business in good faith (a duty that, in employment law, stretches as far back as the Master and Servant Act). It is because of this duty that nobody is allowed to bad-mouth their employer.

The suppression of unions during apartheid was achieved partly by enforcing this duty, as organising and striking violated the duty of workers to promote their boss’s best interests and were, therefore, illegal.

Since Cameron’s judgment 20 years

ago, the courts have developed derivative misconduct in a series of judgments to the point where employers and courts may assume that all workers on strike are aware of any misconduct that occurs during that strike. As a result, employers no longer need to prove that workers are guilty of misconduct; rather, employees must prove their innocence.

It is exactly this development in the interpretation and application of the law that Numsa is challenging in the Constitutional Court.

A wider struggle

The law is far-reaching, and, of course, does not only apply to the dismissed Dunlop workers who refused to snitch.

Speaking to *New Frame* in a grey suit, with light stubble covering his strong jaw, was Phikizwe Mkhwanazi, 72. He has been mixing paint powder at Luxor Paints in Boksburg, on Gauteng’s East Rand, for 15 years. Mkhwanazi was planning to retire next month but he is now one of 181 workers who were dismissed from Luxor Paints after a protected strike in March.

Many of the workers at the factory were dismissed not for committing the alleged misconduct but because they did not inform their employer that some of their co-workers had committed such misconduct. Because of the Labour Appeal Court’s application of the derivative misconduct law in its ruling on the Dunlop case, Luxor Paints did not have to prove that the workers it

sought to dismiss – the entire striking workforce – knew about the misconduct.

Mkhwanazi, whose brown eyes are glazed at the edges by the onset of *arcus senilis*, told *New Frame* he had nothing to do with the alleged acts of violence during the strike at Luxor and knew nothing about them.

Aside from being too old to do so, Mkhwanazi says he was eating “pap and vleis” for lunch the day much of the violence was meant to have happened, the same day on which private security guards hired by Luxor fired rubber bullets at the workers, resulting in one worker losing his eye. [134]

Lucas Du Preez, Luxor’s in-house legal counsel, says there was a complete breakdown in the relationship between Luxor and workers who were involved in the strike but not present at the picket line, and who failed to condemn their comrades’ actions, spending three months away from work during the strike.

“The employees didn’t come to work with guarantees and say: ‘No more nonsense – we are here to work.’ They never did that,” says Du Preez. “Then surely you can argue that they have made themselves part of the big scene [misconduct during the strike] by their conduct, by their absence.”

Igshaan Schroeder, who coordinates the Casual Workers Advice Office, which is representing the Luxor workers in challenging their dismissal, told *New Frame* that derivative misconduct in relation to strikes is “a way of smuggling collective guilt in

through the back door”.

He adds: “Collective guilt is something that even the apartheid courts rejected in 1987. It comes from

Roman slave law. That’s what the bosses are using and that’s what the courts are relying on.”

Numsa’s appeal will be heard in the Constitutional Court on 28 February

2019.

Saturday 24 November 2018

[New Frame](#)

Organizing resistance in Brazil and international solidarity against neofascist Bolsonaro’s government

5 December 2018, by Fourth International Bureau

The final result of the presidential elections in Brazil last October catapulted to power the deputy and former army captain Jair Messias Bolsonaro, considered, until just under a year ago, an outsider in the dispute, with less than 10% in the polls despite his 28 years in parliament. The president-elect in Brazil was, in fact, an almost folkloric figure, with his positions of undisguised defence of the military dictatorship (1964-1985) and of torture, his vehement defence of the “shoot to kill” bandits and massive incarceration as solution for the urban violence, his clumsy bigotry against feminists and women in general, his gross prejudice against gays, lesbians and transsexuals, and all marginalized and contempt for basic social environmental, behavioural and labour rights.

But this ultra right figure, who had the support of the cattle agro-industry, part of the financial system, most of the neo-pentecostalist evangelical churches, most of the rich urban middle class and large popular sectors, will be inaugurated on 1 January 2019 as the 38th president of the Federative Republic of Brazil. With 55% of the vote, Bolsonaro came to power after the most polarized and violent election campaign in the history of the political system inaugurated in 1985 with the end of the last military dictatorship, the so-called New Republic. It was also the Brazilian election with the most decisive manipulation of fake news

through social media, with the very probable participation of personalities and foreign companies.

These were not elections like any other. The pre-electoral environment began already under the sign first of a political assassination and then the persecution of the figure who was leading the polls. It was another terrifying chapter in the thriller of the institutional coup of 2016, which brought down the PT government. The murder, on 14 March, was that of Rio’s councilwoman and feminist, black and LGBT activist Marielle Franco of the PSOL, whose death, along with that of driver Anderson Gomes, has still not been elucidated. A macabre message from the most reactionary forces to all blacks, to all favela activists, to all feminists, to all LGBTs, in an unprecedented institutional form. The persecution, perpetrated by the High Courts of Justice, traditional parties and Congress, and also by grassroots Bolsonist groups (who even shot at a bus in former president’s caravan in the south of the country) was that of Lula, the PT leader, a coup that was reconsolidated with his arrest on 7 April, following a highly questionable process.

In early September, Bolsonaro was stabbed by a “lone wolf” while campaigning in the city of Juiz de Fora (Minas Gerais). The attack took him to the operating theatre three times, endangered his life, gave him the aura

of a surviving hero, and yet gave him the pretext he needed to avoid debates - which he had already shown were difficult for him. Polarization has, since that episode, reached levels unknown in Brazil.

The first polls for the second round pointed to an overwhelming victory of the captain-candidate, which in the end did not happen because his victory in the first round imposed both unity and mobilization on the majority of the left and democratic forces, in a unified action that included millions of activists and people who first took to the streets in the race to “change the vote.” The mobilizations for Haddad in the last two weeks of October were strengthened by Folha de S. Paulo’s revelation that Bolsonaro had used illegal business financing to pay for fake news in Whats App - a practice similar to that already used by Donald Trump in 2016 via Facebook. Many Bolsonaro voters chose not to vote or to cancel their vote. But the fascist campaign did not fade: the candidate responded, in a speech on Avenida Paulista, promising to sweep from the map “the reds” and the largest newspaper in the country. The political climate was marked by physical aggression against pro-Haddad activists, rape, and even the murder of a capoeira master in Salvador (Bahia).

Nevertheless Bolsonaro finally won with a very significant advantage, 10 million more votes than Haddad (55%

to 45%), with victories in most states - with the exception of the Northeast and Pará (Amazon). However, the PT managed to maintain the largest group in the Chamber of Deputies (56 MPs, against 52 for Bolsonaro's PSL) and, with its allies, the governments in all of the Northeast. At the same time, the far right conquered the governments of the rich and strategic Southeast-Rio, São Paulo, Minas Gerais. The hard core of Bolsonaro's backward coalition elected a group of 90 MPs, but their alliance could reach more than 200 votes of the total of 534.

How was Bolsonaro possible?

It is impossible to understand the rise of Jair Bolsonaro without going back a few years in the report and recover the main characteristics and events that marked the 13 years of PT governments, overthrown by the institutional coup of 2016.

In the federal government, PT benefited, between 2003 and 2013, from the global boom in commodity exports. Even deepening the deindustrialization of the country, its policy based on export extraction allowed both Lula's administrations (2003-2010) and the first one of Dilma (2011-2014) to guarantee extraordinary profits to financial capital, to agribusiness and to finance major capitalist groups in construction, mining, telecommunications and meat with public resources.

But PT governments nevertheless promoted limited redistributive policies - with real impact on the most vulnerable urban and rural populations. They increased the minimum wage at rates higher than inflation, maintained the Bolsa Família Programme (monthly payment to families below the poverty line, conditional on the maintenance of children in school), a lot of affirmative policies (quotas for poor, black and indigenous students in universities and technical schools) and the multiplication of new public

universities, public schools and scholarships in private universities. These measures, coupled with the widespread encouragement of domestic consumption by means of public banks' easy money, made it possible for a wide spectrum of workers to buy a home and enter the mass consumer market for the first time in their lives.

Nevertheless, already in 2005, with the scandal of the purchase of votes in the parliament by the Lula's government ("mensalão"), the PT's prestige began to fall. By this time, it was clear that the party, which had long since abandoned any class discourse, would not adopt any type of measure or policy to encourage popular and citizen participation in public life. Instead, in order to guarantee governability for the coalition regime, PT made huge concessions to maintain in its base in Congress the groups of evangelical churches such as the Universal Church of God's Kingdom and sectors of the Assembly of God (which in 2018 would be decisive for Bolsonaro's victory).

These concessions to ruralists, neopentecostals and to the "bullet group" (polices and weapons manufacturers' representatives) meant that the PT did nothing to advance in feminist guidelines such as the decriminalization and legalization of abortion, paralyzed demarcations of indigenous lands, adopted programs of major infrastructure and major events that resulted in the expulsion of indigenous and riverine people from their lands. PT advance anything in the debate for a deep reform of the judicial, police and prison system, to put an end to the drug war, the mass incarceration and the genocide of the black people (in particular the favela youth). In 2013, under Dilma, PT's political-ideological decline would jump in with the social outbursts of discontent.

Amid the gigantic demonstrations for education, health, better urban transportation, right-wing groups took to the streets to fight with the left and channel the movement against corruption, against all the political parties and against PT in particular. June 2013 was not, however, as the PT

states, an explosion of a reactionary nature - far from it. But undoubtedly it showed a part of the elite that the PT no longer had as much use to keep the masses as "passive" as before. And the right and ultra-right have counted, from then, on the decisive support of the mainstream media in the political and ideological struggle for the mass mobilizations, as we saw in 2015 and 2016 in the wide protests to dismiss Dilma.

The role of the Lava Jato scandal and economic stagnation

Political-social discontent with the government intensified greatly with the long economic stagnation, starting in 2014, that imposed a drop in income for the sectors that formed the basis of Lullism and provoked the explosion of urban and rural violence. It was a decisive contribution to Dilma's deep discredit that she made her second presidential campaign (August to October 2014) on the left and, in less than two months, started to apply an economic program that went counter to everything she promised, with a Minister from her opponents, the neoliberal Joaquim Levy. Levy, who will now be part of Bolsonaro's government.

The PT's breakout accelerated with the impact on the workers' consciousness of the biggest corruption scandal in terms of amount of money and contagion on the whole political system: the Petrobras scandal, unveiled by Operation Lava Jato, which involved a network of millionaire bribes in virtually all the Republic's parties. Sometime between the end of 2014 and early 2015 (more likely when Dilma fired Levy), with hundreds of thousands of "yellow-green" (the main colours of the Brazilian flag) on the streets mobilized by the right against "corruption", fundamental sectors of Brazilian capital broke with the support they were giving to the PT's class collaboration project and adhere to the coup conspiracy.

After Dilma's impeachment, between April and September 2016, while the PT lost voters, activists and militants (and was only able to respond by talking of persecution), the right and its most ultra version grew in society. Desperate factions of the bourgeoisie and a large middle-class sector, traditionally more reactionary (racist, misogynist, homophobic and fearful of the new generations' socially progressive mores) embraced the ultra-right.

The persecution of the PT was real: Justice and Federal Police were selective. Coup forces appealed abusively to the "plea bargain" mechanism. Lula has been accused without clear proof, and later condemned without a fair trial. Media published Lula and Dilma's audios without official authorization. Judges arrested several PT leaders without any obvious need to do so. Impeachment was politically and legally unjustifiable. However, the party never outlined any self-criticism of the "bad deeds" (to use Dilma's expression) of so many leaders. The official orientation of the leadership was to forbid Haddad from making such a self criticism in the 2018 campaign. The problem, for the PT leadership, was a lot of individuals' "mistakes" - a large part of them nowadays in prison. No word on the "PT's way to governing", so much adapted to the political system's rules that the party caught their worst habits from its oligarchic partners.

This was how a strong rejection of the PT was born and grew in a large part of Brazilian society. In more impoverished sectors, who had benefited from the Lula years, this did not consolidate. Among the more informed and active youngsters and leftist working class sectors, this questioning of the PT may have favoured Ciro Gomes, Marina Silva and PSOL. But in broad sectors of the rich urban middle class, particularly its upper strata (and especially in the Southeast and South), it has become, with the help of the media, Lava Jato and right-wing parties, a blind hatred of the PT. A blind hatred of the left, social policies, the idea of Human Rights valid for all, to the idea of solidarity with the dispossessed, to the notion of belonging to the world, to

science and to truth. A hatred that extended to the colour red, Cuba, Venezuela, feminism, gays, trans and environmentalism and anything but pure egocentric individualism, based on the theology of prosperity, belief in the God-market, in the opportunity for all and in the contempt for the different.

It was the combination of this reactionary antipetism with the justified disappointment of millions of workers with the party that had brought so much illusion to them that elected President Bolsonaro.

So, Bolsonaro was not (or should not be) exactly a surprise

Although Michel Temer will leave the government with unprecedented levels of unpopularity, unable to take the economy out of stagnation, he has done the groundwork for capital and helped in the election of Bolsonaro. The radical programme of freezing public investment and withdrawal of labour rights, applied by Dilma's former vice president, has deepened the economic crisis. The explosive combination of that crisis with the strong conservative, patriarchal and authoritarian slaver base, always latent in the country which was the last to abolish slavery on the globe, fertilized the soil for the growth of the far right. In any case, the most important sectors of the Brazilian bourgeoisie wagered not on Bolsonaro, but on Geraldo Alckmin (PSDB of São Paulo). The sectors that bet on Bolsonaro from the outset were the weapons industry, retailers and the majority of agribusiness.

We must also remember that there was a real political-ideological crusade against corruption, fuelled by the "holy alliance" between judges, prosecutors who operated the Lava Jato, the mainstream media, and - it is now well known - a large part of the Armed Forces. This four-year long campaign was decisive for reinforcing exhaustion with the political system, the old parties and figures - as well as

the illusion of the supposedly antisystemic "saviour" that Bolsonaro incarnated - in public opinion. The traditional ruling parties PSDB and MDB were seen as representing the old-style system and took a beating at the polls, getting 34 and 29 MPs. Alckmin would never been elected.

Internationalized media manipulation

The successful manipulation of WhatsApp groups by the Bolsonaro campaign indicates a dangerous internationalization of the Brazilian elections and heralds a worldwide trend. There is likely to have been international campaigning advice from marketing firms linked to Steve Bannon, Trump's strategist, who is now engaged in organizing an "international" of ultra-right "populism." This shaped foreign intervention in the Brazilian electoral process. It is important to note that the production centers of the digital data that influences the elections, in this surveillance capitalism, are globally located in the USA. Another sign of farewell to national sovereignties.

The far right candidate surfed on the high waves of discontent with the corrupt and unpopular Temer government, with recession and unemployment, with traditional politics and with the PT, thus Bolsonaro managed to give himself an "anti-systemic" image. His rise, therefore, fits perfectly into the scenario of unpredictability and global ungovernability drawn by the document "Capitalist Globalization, Imperialisms, Geopolitical Chaos and Its Implications", approved at the last Congress of the International. Sectors of capital in Brazil, even quite globalized ones, such as banks, insurance companies and agribusiness, have completely given up "mediations" in dealing with the democratic regime and the subaltern classes, opting to embrace an alternative that offers them greater facilities for deepening super-exploitation and plunder.

There is a new global capitalist restructuring whereby public funds - all of them - and all common goods, territories, forests, energy and water, should be used by the system. No such project can survive without putting an end to all transparent debate in society. It is the same context in which racist, xenophobic, nationalist groups are growing in the United States, France, Germany, India and in which they are coming to power in Hungary and the Philippines. In fact, the difficulties in returning to the rates of profit obtained up to 2007, before the financial tsunami of 2007/2008, have pushed the world bourgeoisie to:

(1) the pursuit of a global project of increasing dispossession of the rights of the working class and of the peoples of the "global South", which includes (re) taking absolute rights over what should be common property of land, such as the territory itself, water (aquifers, rivers, oceans), mineral deposits, energy sources;

(2) therefore, increasingly attacks on national sovereignties and bourgeois democratic regimes, which increasingly represent obstacles to the implementation of the neoliberal plans of adjustment, austerity, privatization, indebtedness and resumption of territories and goods imposed by the system and its international organizations;

(3) to opt, at least in part, for far-right solutions, with nationalist-protectionist overtones in industrialized countries, and more ultraliberal characteristics on the economic front in the Global South, with strong conservative discourse in customs and punitive policies, anti-human rights, bloodthirsty war on trafficking and banditry in general.

Period of turbulence in the dispute over regime change

In addition to being rather dark and difficult, the times ahead for those exploited and oppressed in Brazil will be intensely turbulent.

Although the election of a nefascist government in Brazil is a hard defeat for the social and democratic movements of Latin America and the world, this is not a historic defeat. The leap from the current reactionary situation to an openly counterrevolutionary situation has not occurred and may not occur: this depends on the outcome of the clashes and struggles that will still be fought. The radicalization of the political situation in Brazil will depend on the unfolding of the world economic crisis and its impact on the Brazilian economy, on the capacity of Bolsonaro and his government to resolve the internal contradictions of its block of support and the resistance force of the country's workers and oppressed.

The hard core of the government has a project that leads to the closure of the regime, to a political system less permeable to popular pressures. Another question is whether there is at present the correlation of forces to this change of the political system and at what pace Bolsonaro and his first echelon will be able to apply his project. The government is, in essence, authoritarian, racist, misogynist, LGBT-phobic, militarist, anti-left, unconcerned with democratic institutions and indicated to operate on the logic of creating internal and external enemies. In a word, neofascist. All this in the service of an ultraliberal, privatizing and withdrawing rights agenda, averse to the protectionist nationalism of classical fascism.

Along with the military and ultraliberal nucleus, comprise the support block of the new government, ultraliberal religious fundamentalism (in which the Universal of the Kingdom of God stands out), fractions of the Justice (just as Sergio Moro), agribusiness, economists and ultraliberal bankers of the Chicago School and physiological politicians straying from traditional parties - an important part of the bloc that made the coup of 2016. This sum of forces has contradictions between its agendas and projects. The future of government will depend on the ability of its nucleus to cohesion this bloc in engagement with its political project.

Depending on the development of

these internal and external issues, the hard core of the government will or will not move towards the radical implementation of its project, which is that of a less democratic political system. Some major tests of the resurgence are already planned for 2019.

Where the attacks come from: the "tests" of neofascism

The international conditions do not seem promising for new growth for the Brazilian economy. The prospect is of a world recession in 2019. And Bolsonaro announces a messy alignment with U.S. and Israeli interests (with the stupid proposal to move the Brazilian embassy to Jerusalem), as well as cosying up to Piñera's Chile to the detriment of Argentina and Mercosur as a whole.

These alignments unbalance relations with key economic partners for recovery. China - is the main Brazil trade partner, with the trade balance strongly positive for Brazil. Chinese companies have strong direct investments in the country, such as in electricity. Arab countries are the main buyer of the chicken and cow meat of the agribusiness.. To err in international politics, in this unfavorable global context, can make unfeasible the chances of a minimum balance of public accounts and keep the industrial sector in operation.

The "School Without a Party" project aims to control what is said in the classroom - with special concern about gender issues, sex education and criticism of the government. The president-elect calls, through social networks, parents and students to denounce teachers who politicize historical issues and address gender issues in the classroom. The oldest son of the president-elect, Eduardo Bolsonaro, a federal deputy for Sao Paulo, has already announced a bill that aims to criminalize, in addition, the "apology to communism."

Still in the field of education, the

promise is a brutal attack on public and free education, particularly in the upper sphere. Bolsonaro directly interferes with the choice of rectors. At the same time, he lavishes praise on the advantages of long-distance education, including at the elementary level (five first years!) And suggests adopting in the country the voucher model so that the population has access to private schools, as in Chile, or a way to transfer public money to the privately owned schools.

The second test will be the criminalization of land and housing occupation movements (MST and MTST) through the improvement of the Antiterrorism Act (tragically and ironically enacted by Dilma in response to 2013), already quickly provided by the new reactionary groups.

Another fundamental test, charged daily by the voices of the "God market" and the media quickly converted to bolsonarism, is the reform of the social security system. The president-elect has already negotiated with Temer to not vote this year any change in the Social Security system. The superminister of the Economy and Chicago boy Paulo Guedes promises an even more radical reform to 2019, based on the precepts of the Pinochet Social Security (on what each worker makes his individual savings for his retirement), that, as it is known in means of real news, resulted in a social disaster in Chile. The debate and the struggle promise.

In the background, in deep Brazil, there will be an intensification of the war on drugs and the poor, which means that the new government will intensify the genocide of the black people. This attack will occur through the release of the carrying of weapons, the green light to the brutal military police and municipal guards to, in doubt, shoot to kill, and to continue imprisoning massively. This set of measures could be extended to restrictions on the functioning of trade unions, associations, parties (Bolsonaro and his followers promised war on the PT and PSOL leadership) and press freedoms, expression and organization.

Bolsonaro, in addition, proves to be a

major threat to the global environment by promising, in the wake of Trump, to break with the fragile Paris Agreement on CO2 emissions. And, to top it off, he promises to end the demarcation of indigenous lands, in an obvious signage to the cattle landowners in particular (but also to the soybean and other crops producers on the Amazonian agricultural frontier) that gives green light to the devastation of the rainforest. If the great rainforest had already been threatened under the reign of PT's extractivism, much worse would be the situation of this world's lung and guarantee of some climatic equilibrium in South America under the baton of this ally of chainsaw and agribusiness.

Organize international resistance and solidarity

In Brazil, the fundamental task is to organize resistance to the attacks of the new government on the democratic freedoms and social rights of the people, through the unified fight of all those who want to defend democracy and the rights and achievements that the neo-fascist will attack. In this struggle, we will work towards the creation of a single anti-fascist front in defence of democratic and social rights- capable of articulating and unifying sectoral and regional initiatives against attacks by government and capital. The militants and sympathizers of the Fourth International will be in these fights, in defence of democracy and all social and human rights.

We will also be part of the organized movements and entities of workers, youth, blacks and blacks, women, and LGBTs, indigenous people and all sectors of the population, inserting more than ever in workplaces, poor neighbourhoods, in universities, in schools, in cultural groups of precarious and radicalized youth, in the occupations of the poor and without land, in order to resist the Brazilian people. We attach special importance to the movement of young

women, who have been coming into force since the spring of 2016 and have taught so much to everyone with the organization of # ElenÃfo.

For Latin America, where Bolsonaro's election has had such an impact, it must be very clear that every little struggle, every victory, however sectoral, against Macri, against Duque, against PiÃ±eira, against Ortega and his plans, is also a victory of the resistance against Bolsonaro. No step back! Resistance in Brazil depends on the persistence of all of Latin America and the progress of the struggle throughout the world.

That is why it is also vital that in Europe, the United States, Asia, Africa and Oceania, we be very attentive to carry out a wide campaign of denunciation against the attacks that the new Brazilian government will rehearse against democracy, legislation and international environmental treaties (the Amazon is in great danger!) and the social and political rights of workers.

The Fourth International calls on all those who struggle, all ecologists, all democrats, to unite their forces to denounce the Bolsonaro government and demand:

- Hands off the landless and homeless in Brazil! For an international campaign to repudiate the Anti-Terrorism Law and its macabre enhancements! All solidarity with the MST and the MTST and all the activists.

- Hands off the Amazon rainforest! Hands off the indigenous lands! Keep the legislation that guarantees the demarcation of the lands for the original peoples. For the continuation of Brazil in the Paris agreement!

- Hands off the social security rights of Brazilian workers! No reform of the pension system without first a radical audit and publication of Social Security debtors!

- Hands off the Brazilian public universities! Hands off academic freedom! No interference in the rectors' (deans) election.

- Down with the "No party school!" No cell phones in the classroom! Keep the education budget and face-to-face education in primary and secondary education.

- End the war on drugs and the poor! No liberalisation of gun permits. No to the reduction of the penal age, proposed by the future minister Sérgio Moro. Youth need schools, not prisons. For the legalization of marijuana. For a combined effort by the judiciary to

speed up the trials of the 200,000 prisoners who are imprisoned without a sentence.

Bolsonaro's electoral victory is in fact part of a resurgence of the authoritarian regimes that are strangling the democratic gains of recent decades, with Putin in Russia, Orban in Hungary, the PiS regime in Poland, Erdogan in Turkey, Duterte in the Philippines, Trump in the United States, Netanyahu in Israel, and far-right parties to the government in

Austria or Italy... An international anti-authoritarian and anti-oligarchical movement is necessary, because the situation requires a broad mobilization of all political forces committed to democratic rights, workers' rights, women's rights, environmental and climate preservation, human freedom of movement, in short against oppression of all kinds. Building such a global movement is a task on the agenda.

5 December 2018

Turkey: Relentless - Forty Years of struggle from "Sürekli Devrim" to "Yeniyol"

4 December 2018, by Uraz Aydin

International movement, local organization

An originality, therefore. Because unlike all the other far left currents, *Sürekli Devrim* did not come from the common base that was the Turkish Communist Party but emerged independently of Stalinism and its Maoist and Hoxhaite variants, as part of an international movement stemming from long years of struggle against the bureaucratic degeneration of the Soviet Union and the sectarian or class conciliatory policies of the CPSU, the Comintern and its national sections.

So a first challenge for *Sürekli Devrim* and then for *Ne Yapmalı* ("What is to be done" - which appeared subsequently) was to denounce the historical betrayals and erroneous policies of the Stalinist leadership and thus demonstrate the legitimacy of revolutionary Marxism through publications and articles dealing with issues like the bureaucratic Thermidor, the second Chinese revolution, the politics of the third period and the popular front and so

on. Another important effort was to provide a Marxist and internationalist analysis of Turkish history breaking with a certain Kemalist nationalism intrinsic to the Turkish left. The first issue of SD, for example, was devoted to the national question and the defence of the right to self-determination of the Kurdish people. Debates and polemics with local Stalinist or centrist currents were another category of articles, inevitable and necessary for this period. And finally, the internationalist perspective required to inform and take a position on events that marked this period such as the revolutions in Iran, Nicaragua and El Salvador, the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan or the revolutionary struggles in Peru and Bolivia.

During the two years that were to end with the military coup of September 1980, relations with the Fourth International were ensured by comrades Livio Maitan, Pierre Rousset, Jim Percy of Australia and of course François Bouée, known as "Momo" (of the French LCR), who was like a full member of the group. The publications, training materials and pamphlets that Momo carried during his numerous round trips as a travel guide between 1977 and 1980 would

be of great importance in the political orientation of the group, in a period when means of communication were drastically reduced.

The program, the fetish and the street

What connects a political current, what marks its unity is above all its program. *Sürekli Devrim* thus published in July 1978, before its first issue, its manifesto declaring its positions on the three sectors of the world revolution, the balance of power between the bourgeoisie and the working class, the Kurdish question, the anti-fascist struggle, women's liberation, the student movement and the unity of the revolutionary forces. Also included in the manifesto was the Transitional Program, the founding text of the Fourth International.

As Trotsky put it, every organization experiences an initial propagandist period in which it affirms its foundations and stands out from other political currents. What is important, however, is not to remain at this stage, not to become a sect that limits

its activity to a fetishism of the program and a defence of the holy book, which multiplies splits based on interpretations of lifeless texts. One of the main merits of the *Sürekli Devrim-Yeniyol* (SD-YY) current was probably never to fall into this trap, however comfortable it may be; not to freeze and schematize the realities of an era to create unshakeable dogmas.

This question was expressed in the following terms at the second conference (1986) held at the Amsterdam Institute, by the members of the group exiled in Europe - coming from six different countries - following the coup d'état. "We never stopped fighting in the 'mud of the street'. We participated in the class struggle not as masters of sectarian thinking but as revolutionaries anxious to translate their program into a concrete political line, trying to fuse the working class." A concrete example of this perspective was the revolutionary activity of the Union of Forest Industry Workers (ASIS) - one of the components of the DISK Confederation opposition - with the special contribution of our late comrades Alev Ates and Rifat Kendiriligil.

However, this refusal of programmatic fetishism is not a question of individual clairvoyance but of political culture, that of the Fourth International. It is true that there were times when the defence of the program against all odds - which meant a defence of Marxist analysis and revolutionary perspective against all sorts of reformism - had to be a necessity and have a certain function. But this belief of holding the truth alone in the face of a world at risk could also engender the suspicious sectarianism of the last guardians of the temple. However, the programmatic base has been renewed with the radicalization of the "1968" turn and contact with a new revolutionary generation and therefore with new questions. Because it is the struggle and the questions that emerge through this struggle that renew, that "refresh", that sharpen the program so that it does not lose any of its subversive character, its edge over time.

Thus, two texts that were debated

from the late 70s to the mid-80s, one on the importance of democracy and pluralism in socialism (and the revolutionary party!) and the other on the need for independence of the women's liberation movement have been key programmatic achievements in the political orientation of the Fourth International. The same is true of the manifesto "Socialism or Barbarism" in the context of the fall of the bureaucratic dictatorships and the two texts on eco-socialism and LGBTI struggle in the early 2000s. The SD-YY current paid particular attention to reporting these debates and translating the texts into Turkish, and of course to training its cadres and organizing its sectors of intervention according to these political lines.

In search of revolutionary unity

The turning point of the 1990s, marked by the collapse of the bureaucratic dictatorships and the social and political consequences of the neoliberal counteroffensive, was a stage of restructuring the far left at the international level. With very different modalities, the attempts to create a pluralistic and unified left that began mainly with the Brazilian PT in 1979, continued with the efforts of our Italian and German comrades, resulting in a whole series of unitary organizational experiences in the 1990s, in countries such as Portugal, Uruguay, Denmark, Spain and Italy.

In Turkey, in a context where the left was torn apart by murderous divergences, *Sürekli Devrim* in its first issues called for a "revolutionary united front": "The task of the revolutionary Marxist movement is, while waging a struggle for the propaganda of its own program, to attract various revolutionary currents to the same platform, to define commonalities beyond differences, and to lead an anti-fascist struggle with an anti-capitalist orientation through a single front of action and thus accomplish its historic mission." The style has certainly aged, but the "mission" is still relevant.

Sürekli Devrim was banned with the introduction of martial law in 1978. In

book format, easier to conceal in the pocket, *Ne Yapmalı* appeared under martial law before being banned in turn six months later. During the years of exile after the coup d'état, the political continuity of the current was assured by the magazine *Enternasyonal* (International) published in Paris - and described as a "subversive miniaturized libel" by Daniel Bensaïd in his autobiography - to be shipped to Turkey in tin cans.

It is then in conditions of a relative democratization that the newspaper *İlk Adım* ("First Step") and finally *Sosyalist Demokrasi için Yeniyol* ("New Course for a Socialist Democracy") would appear in the late 1980s and early 1990s, through the efforts, with others, of our deceased comrade, Necdet Sarac. And 1994 saw the launch of a unitary initiative, the United Socialist Alternative (BSA) which was an electoral alliance, and then the foundation of the United Socialist Party (BSP) which Ernest Mandel evoked in laudatory terms in his debate with the North American "Spartacist" sect in 1994. The rapprochement between this party, constituted by various ex-Stalinist and centrist currents and the important centrist-Guevarist current of the 70s, *Devrimci Yol* ("Revolutionary Path") led to the foundation of the İ-DP, the Freedom and Solidarity Party, which provided the conditions for a much larger unitary struggle than had previously been possible.

Yeniyol mobilized all its energy for the construction of this party --which for a time was part of the European Anti-Capitalist Left (EACL) alongside the LCR, the Italian PRC, the Portuguese Left Bloc and so on - through its successes and setbacks, while expressing its criticisms. After a last effort - from the drawing up of the program to the editing of the newspaper - to push the party towards a more anti-capitalist stance in 2006-2007, *Yeniyol* finally left the party when the dominant group affirmed its resolve to make it a monolithic party.

This was also the period of the social forums to which *Yeniyol* contributed, in particular thanks to its international relations. With the weakening of the anti-globalization dynamics, it was in

the environmental movement, solidarity with migrants, the trade union struggles of the public sector workers and in the LGBTI movement that *Yeniyol* intervened to the extent of its abilities. From 2010, *Yeniyol* also devoted part of its activity to trying to break from, on the one hand, the weight of secularist-republican positions in the radical left in the fight against the AKP and on the other hand the liberal ideological positions still held in sectors of the left (including the group related to the IST) which saw the AKP as a force able to democratize the state faced with the weight of the military and the Kemalist republicans.

We should also note, from the 1970s to the present day, with the publishing house K z and then Yazın, the publication of the writings of Trotsky and Mandel, and works by comrades such as Daniel Bensaid, Michael L wy, Catherine Samary, Gilbert Achcar, Jeanette Habel, Enzo Traverso, Michel Husson, Michel Lequenne, Claudio Katz, as well as the Notebooks for Study and Research and the programmatic texts of the Fourth International, have accompanied our militant commitment. Nearly 90

volumes have been published up until today.

However, our current has not ceased to search for unitary initiatives. This is why it took part in the June United Movement ("Birlesik Haziran Hareketi") which tried to continue the dynamics of the Gezi/Taksim revolt in 2013. But this broad initiative reduced its intervention in taking positions in cultural/religious conflicts with the AKP (like defence of secular education) rather than giving priority to intervention within the class struggle. Its real sin, however, was not to take a stand in such a critical phase as the elections of June 2015, when the AKP could have been overthrown.

The SD-YY current which, since its very first publications, has defended the democratic and revolutionary demands of the Kurdish people - including of course its right to self-determination - and displayed a critical solidarity with its struggle, has been the initiator of unitary campaigns for the HDP - which originated from the Kurdish movement - with other currents of the radical left in the three elections that took place since 2015. For a year now our current has also been one of the

founding members of the United Labour Coordination with the objective to intervening in the class struggle with a project of self-organization independent of the trade union bureaucracies, but also putting the labour struggle on the agenda of a left torn between the two reformist poles that are the CHP and the HDP (although the latter is of course more left wing and requires full solidarity because of the repression against it).

An article in *Yeniyol*, published in 1999 and titled "Relentless", said: "The renewed credibility of a socialist project is not an issue that can be resolved in the short term. Only by regularly and stubbornly taking part in struggles around issues which are urgent and burning for the broad working masses will it be possible to make this long-term project meaningful to them." In order to render desirable for workers, women and youth, the only alternative capable of giving human beings (and any other living being!) the lives they deserve, that of a self-managing socialism, environmentalist, feminist and internationalist, our current will continue its fight, as it has done for forty years - relentlessly.

A special day. Living and struggling in the occupied and self-managed RiMaflow factory.

4 December 2018, by Dario Firenze, Piero Maestri

Getting up at six in the morning and seeing this sky makes us think that it will be an important, beautiful day, maybe it is a portent. Today at this time the caf  at the self-managed Rimaflo factory is open early. Beppe is already preparing breakfast, despite going to bed just three hours earlier - "I wasn't able to sleep anyway". Not even Pippo has been able to sleep even though he had gone home, "better to be here than twisting and turning in bed". So he is keeping the brazier going at the entrance to the factory. It is improvised from some

iron structure left behind from the industrial past of these factories. The fire will keep people warm during the mass meeting to defend the factory today. It's like a black and white photo of occupied factories defended by workers in the early years of the crisis of the 1970s in Italy and elsewhere - images and memory of working class history.

Within a couple of hours the space in front of the factory gates is filling with so many people. Hundreds are coming from eight in the morning of a working

day in Trezzano sul Naviglio, a good way from the centre of Milan. Young people, not so young, older people still working, pensioners and activists from so many struggles are here. "But I am older but not elderly" says Fabio 81, with many years of political and trade union struggle behind him. People from quite a diverse social and political background - from the broad left, catholic charity volunteers, rank and file and confederation trade unions from the CISL to the USI, the Non Una di Meno feminist current (=one is too many) with their pink

scarves scattered among the crowd. And finally, as a female comrade remarked, "remember all of us too who are not represented by anyone".

Perhaps the majority of those present at the factory entrance are unattached politically or organisationally. It seems that it was an individual response rather than a defined political or social connection which impelled all these people to respond to the call made by the Rimaflow workers to come and join them at the cordon in front of the factory gates to stop the eviction scheduled for today. It's a consciousness that you have to choose which side you are on and a very good understanding of the specific, exemplary experience of these workers (although the project is not unique). They understood and shared this experience because they have seen the factory operating, they knew the people working there and perhaps also knew Massimo, (who is still under house arrest) because of his role in any of the many struggles he has been involved in or supported. Also because they are living in a country without a left (as the title of the first issue of the Italian version of the Jacobin magazine suggested) but want to defend an experience which they feel close to, which is based on the needs of everyone. They wanted for once to see if we can avoid a defeat that leaves not much more than a sour taste in the mouth..

Just to experience for once the real conviction that "struggle pays off". Because we are so used to repeating this slogan while we lose, almost like a litany that is not listened to much, a rhetorical device for maintaining a routine of closed and not very engaging initiatives. For many people in front of these gates, Rimaflow represented a protagonist which they could feel close to. It is a protagonist that is not immediately labelled, defined within a trade union or party current, linked to a specific movement or the deadening circles of aimless activism. It is an open experience that resonates with so many people, which does not abandon political struggle but engages with it at the base and on the left, in the mobilisation for and construction of a practical alternative. An alternative of a solidarity economy, concretely social and of the people

and not symbolic, that truly develops the practice of working without bosses and that is capable of resisting and opposing the logic of the market. A broad social and political alternative to build from the base the tools we need to build a new society without exploitation or oppression. You can understand - when speaking with the people who came - listening to their comments and banter but also detecting an anxiety why they all are clear that it would be an intolerable injustice to eliminate such an experiment.

A banner stretched above the heads of the people meeting at the factory with red letters on a white background spelling out "Our lives are worth more than your profits." This is a very old slogan that has been widely circulated down the years, a slogan that might seem abstract and just a principle after recent years in which the profiteers have been able to flourish without many constraints and have penetrated ever more completely into our lives. But today, in a special way, it has stopped being just a slogan but is incarnated with the living people brought together today in this self-managed workplace, who through their presence exemplifies these words. Our lives, wherever we come from, are exploited, oppressed or violated in various ways, are being put on the line to oppose those who today want to rub out the Rimaflow project in order to make profit. So this banner and the living images of this event hit us right in the guts, they fill us with emotion and are like a breath of fresh air.

The struggle pays off. What does it mean? Which struggle and in what sense has it paid off. We are not here going into the merits of the agreement wrenched from the hands of the mighty UniCredit bank by the Rimaflow workers. Naturally you have to look at the real value of any agreement, particularly important here where we are talking of the prospects for work, income and social insertion of dozens of men and women and their families. Today's agreement is like a draw won away from home in the last seconds when there is still the home leg to come - a three point score in the dying seconds to get level with the opponents - a sprint in the last

metres of a race to come up to the shoulder of the competitor who is about to break the tape. It is a great result but the match is not over yet. It still needs great commitment in order not to lose concentration or the collective strength of the team. Some people may think that it is not a great victory to get an agreement on a soft exit, that we have to resist to the last person and we should concede nothing to the bosses. We do not want to pontificate on this but an agreement implies a compromise and if it allows us to continue to pursue our objectives in better conditions then it certainly is a good agreement. This is one.

But it is interesting to reflect collectively on the meaning of "struggle pays off". Could we have reached the same agreement without mobilisation? Of course we do not have dialectical or scientific proof to support this hypothesis. But we believe that in this case it would not have been possible. Not because more than 300 people in front of the gates would have really been able to stop a violent eviction (nothing is sure but it would have been very difficult to resist over any length of time). Not because numbers on their own would have made any difference.

No, the strength of the mobilisation lies in the broad solidarity that was expressed by the most diverse people. This was seen in the many fundraising initiatives all over Italy, in the thousands of signatures collected and the financial support. The campaign reached its highest point in a day of unusual mobilisation making it difficult and awkward for Unicredit to use strong arm tactics. The relevance of this mobilisation lies above all in having brought together very different forces - who are often in conflict with one another. In this case, a confluence of people that punched above its weight and not a movement without objectives.

Truly it was down to the motivation and the achievement of this small but militant community of workers, their intelligence and to those who took on the commitment of guaranteeing continuity and openness and who on a daily basis gave time and resources to this experience.

Struggle paid off because it seemed to so many, and also among those who had opposed the RiMaflow Project, that it was unthinkable to have this experience eliminated. The struggle paid because over these weeks it was clear that there would have been a strong social and political confrontation – also on a cultural and media level – if the eviction had been attempted.

We do not want to underestimate the presence of so many trade union, political, civic and social movement supporters if we take some time to look more closely at the role of the Fuorimercato network – the self-management movement.

Never more than in this occasion have we seen the importance of each term in its name. A network in which every link knows how to defend all the others, is able to show externally the strength of its structures and which wants to demonstrate this even more to the rest of the network. Because this is what solidarity means for those who are part of the same journey. Outside the market (Fuorimercato) – these are the experiences of building an alternative economy that are still weak and often embryonic but which when working together can be effective and have a multiplier effect and spreading impact. Self-management – there are not any team orders or party line that decides on solidarity and common commitment but a taking on of collective responsibility, of working together and of reciprocal support. Movement – the strength of the network resides in being active, moving the collective forward together.

The cooperative movement of mutual support through which this network develops work and theory on so many different levels (economic, social,

cultural, trade union and political) was evident also during this event by the strong common defence of a project and a group of workers and by their reciprocal links. It showed its potential in a conflict, pushing back with own forces an attack that otherwise would have been difficult to overcome. It has given us a big boost to see on a working day at Trezzano sul Naviglio comrades from: Contadinazioni from Palermo (Campobello di Mazara), Diritti a Sud (=rights in the South) from Nardo, Solidaria and Bread and Roses from Bari, Communia from Rome, the estate without landowners in Mondeggi, Sobilla from Verona and the Casa del Popolo Twenty Stones from Bologna. It has shown us what this network could be.

Over these months in various initiatives, articles and posters we have tried to promote the slogan: “Defend cooperatives, defend them with mutual solidarity”. These words today have been a reality here and not been empty principles lost on the wind.

The “First political, artistic, sporting and cultural international meeting of women in struggle” held in Chiapas (Mexico) last year, called by the Zapatista women relaunched this slogan:

“We have decided to live and since in order to live you have to struggle then we have decided to struggle.”

The RiMaflow workers have chosen to live and to struggle, taking over their own factory into self-management, defending a workplace without bosses and their very lives. Here you can see the victory of our lives against their profits in the choice of living their struggle against those who want to

rob them of their lives. They defend their lives against those who want to destroy them. That is why yesterday had such a strong impact on everybody who was there and for those who followed it from a distance because this winning choice, of living and struggling was felt deeply by all.

Yes struggle pays off. Not only because we can get a good result, move towards our objectives and defend our own projects but above all because it strengthens our consciousness, our collective responsibility, the way we relate to each other. This has an impact even outside the network.

The question of winning a battle is not a small thing in these times. In bright sunlight we demonstrated in a contingent through Trezzano to celebrate the postponement of the eviction. We saw the abandoned carcass of the industrial fabric that a few years ago provided work. In the midst of our joy and excitement both younger comrades and people who have been active for decades commented “this is the first victory of our lives”.

Reading hundreds of posts on social networks that “Rimaflow has won”, “We have won” does not mean that there is dangerous collective illusion but rather an energy that has been renewed and which allows us to repeat a slogan that has resonated in the Spanish state and in Latin America for years – Si, se puede (Yes we can).

30 November 2018

Source **Fuorimercato, Autogestione in movimento** “Una giornata particolare. Vivere e lottare dalla fabbrica recuperata Ri-Maflow.”. Translated for International Viewpoint by Carmela Avella and Dave Kellaway.

Progressive MPs yet again target of state oppression

3 December 2018, by **Farooq Sulehria**

A brief background is offered here in order to understand the symbolic gravity of this oppressive state action.

Mohsin Dawar and Ali Wazir were elected as members of National Assembly in July 2018 from North and South Waziristan. Months before their elections both emerged as popular leaders of Pashtun Tahafuz (Defense) Movement (PTM). Although Ali Wazir has been having a mass support for more than a decade as was proved in the 2008 and 2013 elections where his election was stolen by the agencies and defeated with tiny margins.

PTM that arose in 2017 has been demanding an end to the state support for faction for Taliban, rehabilitation of tribal citizens displaced by military operations, and end of to military excesses in Pashtun belt bordering Afghanistan.

This region has been a base camp for the Taliban and Al-Qaida since the 1980s. Local inhabitants have paid a huge price for the Afghan conflict in this region. Ali Wazir symbolises the miseries and resistance of the local people against state sponsored Taliban. Thirteen of his family members, including his father and siblings, have been targeted and killed by the Taliban.

Ali Wazir and Mohsin Dawar's home districts have been internationally portrayed as a safe heaven for Taliban. Where if one goes by global and national media reports, wild tribal people have been hosting global networks of Jihad, this is a blatant depiction of the situation.

These depictions mirror generalised discriminatory attitude against the Pashtuns in Pakistan. Ali Wazir and Mohsin Dawar are

publicly known for their progressive views and defeated fundamentalist parties in these remote hinterlands of South Asia popularly elected them. Ali Wazir has proclaimed to be a socialist and has been associated with Pakistan's Marxists of "The Struggle" for almost fifteen years. This is just one indication of flawed picture painted of Waziristan in media locally and internationally.

Pashtuns constitutes the third largest ethnic community in Pakistan and largely inhabit the area bordering Afghanistan.

In fact, this region has been subjected to orientalist's depictions by British colonial forces for over a century.

The most powerful rebuttal of orientalist depiction and media coverage was offered in the form of PTM. Earlier this year, for months, the PTM mobilised hundreds of thousands of people; besides inspiring millions others, against state sponsored "war on terror". Besides holding huge mass rallies across Pashtun areas, the PTM has also exposed hypocritical state policy on the Taliban in Pakistan's metropolitan centres of Lahore and Karachi.

Consequently, Manzoor Pashteen, Mohsin Dawar and Ali Wazir have been subjected to malicious media vilification campaign. In one case, for instance, their pictures were used as a terrorists and traitors in one of the official state anti terrorism poster campaign.

Hundreds of their activists implicated in false cases and jailed. Despite the state oppression that earlier has translated into extra judicial killings, torture and destruction of entire

villages, the PTM remained peaceful in its methods. However, instead of resorting to so-called legal and constitutional actions, PTM has mobilised people on the streets against these arrests and other oppressive action. Many times, they have forced the state to relent. Yet another powerful tool in the hands of PTM activists has been social media.

November 30th arrests and release of Mohsin Dawar and Ali Wazir was brought on national agenda through a powerful social media campaign. They are now household names in Pakistan. Thanks also to vilification campaign. What should be done?

1- PTM needs a continuous international solidarity campaign in support of their just demands and peaceful methods.

2- The PTM has exposed the contradictions of "war on terror" discourses, global as well as national. This requires a reappraisal of strategies and discourses on Afghan conflict. We therefore demand that PTM should be taken on board as part of any solution of the conflict.

3- The PTM movement has established the viewpoint presented by the Pakistani Left since 9/11. Opposing the US occupation of Afghanistan, the Pakistani Left was pointing out that a military solution of fundamentalism would only galvanise the fundamentalists in the region. Earlier we only have the so-called Taliban ruling Afghanistan, now they have been ruling parts of Pakistan. On top of that, ISIS is firmly in control of at least 3 provinces in Afghanistan besides a footprint in Pakistan. Therefore, the Pakistani Left should be supported in its ideological and political fight against fundamentalism.

Two steps to stop Brexit

2 December 2018, by **Socialist Resistance**

We called for a vote to Remain in the referendum in 2016 as the Leave campaign was totally dominated by a nationalist and xenophobic reaction to globalisation. We did so in the knowledge that the EU is an undemocratic neoliberal institution, and is a necessary instrument for big business and finance in the era of globalised capitalism. Voting Remain was to defeat the far right.

In the present situation, there is no space for a Left Brexit. Any such Left Brexit would have to be in the context of mass mobilisations and a radical left government confronting the neoliberal EU. This is even more obvious today.

It was correct in the immediate aftermath of the referendum to state that it should be respected, as a re-run then would have been seen as a manoeuvre to overturn the decision.

All forms of Brexit will entail economic disruption to a greater or lesser extent depending on whether it is a hard/no deal Brexit or a soft one. The cost of this disruption will be passed on to the working class and the poor who have not yet recovered from the crash in 2008. All Brexits, even soft ones, will also entail the loss of the democratic right of freedom of movement of people throughout the EU 28.

Now, two and half years on, with the information out in the open as to the

consequences of the various Brexit deals, the call for another referendum or people's vote on any deal, including an option to Remain, is legitimate in the present circumstances. The issue of whether referendums are a good way to decide on government policy in general is a different discussion.

We welcome the Labour Party position adopted at its recent conference in so far as it opposes any Tory deal, that there should be a general election if the Tories lose the vote in Parliament, and "if we cannot get a general election Labour must support all options remaining on the table, including campaigning for a public vote". This implies a referendum with the option to vote Remain and this should be in the Labour Party manifesto.

But while Labour's "six tests" means that they will vote against any Tory Brexit, these tests also commits Labour to "a strong and collaborative future relationship with the EU" and the "the fair management of migration". In other words, a very soft Brexit without free movement of people.

We continue to oppose any Brexit, including a soft one, and call for a vote against all Brexit options in Parliament and to Remain in the EU, including in a referendum.

The Labour Party should adopt a position of opposition to all forms of Brexit and take the leadership of the anti-Brexit movement. Failure to do so risks the Labour Party losing a general election and the future of the "Corbyn movement".

Given the crisis and meltdown of the Tories, the central agitational demand today is for the Tories to step aside and for a general election, followed by a referendum on the outcome of negotiations.

While opposing the neoliberal and undemocratic EU, we support the call for "Another Europe" based on opposition to neoliberalism, popular democracy, respect for the rights of nations, freedom of movement for people, an end to fortress Europe and militarism, and for economic and political solidarity. We should sketch a new vision for the 21st century to update the "united socialist states of Europe". We do not have any illusion that the EU, just like the UK, can be reformed and democratised without mass struggles.

We will participate in mobilisations for another referendum or a "people's vote" but we do not support the "People's Vote" campaign as it is dominated politically by neoliberals and Europhiles. We support the "Another Europe is Possible" campaign and other similar European-wide campaigns.

Turkey: Elections, crisis and repression

1 December 2018, by **Uraz Aydin**

The elections of

The dual presidential and legislative elections of June 2018, once again under a state of emergency, resulted in the re-election of Recep Tayyip Erdogan as head of state and a victory of the conservative-nationalist bloc composed of the AKP and the historic party of the Turkish far-right, the MHP. While Erdogan won with 52.5% of the vote, the bloc – the “People’s Alliance” – got 53.7% and thus secured a majority in parliament, which also meant the passage from a parliamentary regime to a presidential regime – already validated by the April 2017 referendum – making Erdogan sole leader with extremely strong powers.

The surprise within this bloc was the result obtained by the MHP led by Devlet Bahçeli. Indeed, all the estimates predicted its collapse – because of its submission to Erdogan – to the benefit of the IYI Party, resulting from a secularist and oppositional split with Bahçeli’s party. However, the MHP managed to maintain its votes, getting 11.1%. If the latter lost two thirds of its vote to the IYI Party, it compensated for this with an unexpected transfer of votes from the AKP. The “disillusioned AKP” voters on which the opposition was counting to stop Erdogan’s dictatorial regime thus preferred to express their discontent by remaining within the same bloc; they validated Erdogan’s presidency while weakening the AKP and forcing it to deal with the MHP, thus becoming a decisive force in parliament.

Nationalism on the rise

Scheduled for 2019, the legislative and presidential components of the elections were called almost nine months early. There are several reasons for this. Erdogan first wanted to take advantage of the nationalist climate he had managed to create with the offensive against Afrin, a Kurdish enclave in northern Syria, led by the PYD, the PKK’s sister organization. This offensive, conducted with the massive

participation of the jihadists of the “Free Syrian Army”, was presented as a liberation of territories under terrorist occupation and applauded as a blow to the PKK in Syria by the various components of the opposition (the HDP being the only party to oppose it). Moreover, the fact that neither the Syrian regime, nor Putin, nor Trump really opposed it was perceived as a victory against these powers and as the affirmation of being back in the game as a regional power, able to challenge everyone. This resulted in a military-nationalist consensus that Erdogan did not want to let slip.

Another reason for calling this double ballot in advance, leaving only two months for the campaign, was so that the various opposition parties, in particular the IYI Party, would not have time to organize. It should be noted that at this time, both for the opposition and for the conservative-nationalist bloc, the IYI Party was judged as a real risk that could hurt the MHP. But through the dynamics I mentioned above, there are now two far-right parties totalling more than 21% of the vote, besides the AKP, which in terms of policies implemented could be judged as much more radical than many European far-right parties. Therefore, nationalism and militarism are the two main components of the ideological sensibility that characterizes this period, going beyond the government and opposition cleavages.

A structural crisis

And the last and most important reason was undoubtedly to hold these elections before the economic crisis worsens and penalizes Erdogan. Indeed, while the economic situation has been showing signs of deterioration since the beginning of the year, in August there was a collapse. Fed by the tensions with the White House and specifically Donald Trump’s tweet announcing his intention to double tariffs on steel and aluminium, the lira went into freefall to lose 16% of its value against the dollar in August and 40% over 2018.

While for the opposition this deterioration of the economic situation

has been interpreted as the consequence of the authoritarianism of the Erdogan regime and of its geopolitical choices, the ruling bloc has resorted, as is usual now, to the thesis of international conspiracy. “If they have their dollar, we have Allah,” said Erdogan. To take the lead of any mobilization that the effects of the crisis could cause, the *Reis* (leader, or “Duce”) thus accused the “interest rate lobby”, targeting more or less directly the United States. There followed ridiculous bursts of “anti-imperialism” in the media (80% under the tutelage of the *Reis*), an anti-imperialism of which of course Erdogan was the champion.

It is clear, however, that this crisis, which is still in its infancy and has now caused dozens of bankruptcies and collective redundancies, is of a structural nature. It results from the specificities of the integration of the Turkish economy into world capitalism (like the massive indebtedness of the private sector in currency) and is deeply linked to the crisis of the accumulation regime of which 2008 marked a first phase. As a result, the global crisis has reverberated in emerging capitalist countries like Turkey and Argentina, which will probably not be the last.

Diplomacy and repression

Today tensions between Washington and Ankara seem to have eased following the release of US preacher Andrew Brunson, accused of espionage and in detention for nearly two years as part of the anti-Gülenist repression, although the request for the extradition of Gülen was not accepted. [135]

Moreover, Erdogan’s position following the assassination of Saudi journalist Jamal Kashoggi in the Saudi Arabian consulate in Istanbul allowed him to adopt a position of “responsible interlocutor” in collaboration with Western powers against his main regional opponent, Riyadh. However, amid this relative lull, Ankara has not stopped bombarding Kurdish positions in Rojava in Syrian Kurdistan – allied with Washington – in order to make

clear that it will not accept the consolidation of Kurdish autonomy, at its border and led by its internal enemy, the PKK. [136]

However, inside the country, the security grip continues to tighten with permanent waves of house searches and collective arrests, even while after a few days only some of the detainees are remanded in custody and the majority are released. We could cite dozens of examples but let us mention two of the most significant. In the middle of September, some ten thousand workers revolted against their unbearable working conditions - which had already left 32 dead - on the construction site of the "largest airport in the world" in Istanbul, one of Erdogan's prestige projects. After hours of conflict between the workers and the military police, nearly 600 workers were taken into custody following violent raids in the dormitories. After a few days the vast majority were released, but a total of 34 workers and trade unionists were remanded in custody awaiting trial. Since then military discipline reigns on the site.

The latest example is the arrest of a dozen people, including academics and NGO employees, accused of being in a hierarchical relationship with Osman Kavala, the businessman presented as the "Turkish Soros" - detained for more than a year without indictment - and to have worked to extend the Gezi revolt by importing professional activists from abroad! Eventually they were all released the same night or the next day, apart from one of them who remains detained, accused of having participated in meetings concerning civil disobedience. The absurdity of the accusations has no limit, but has a very rational function, that of keeping the country in an illusion of perpetual threat, whether it is the terrorist threat, the threat of a coup d'état, the threat of "economic war" or, as in the latter case, evoked five years after the events of Gezi, the threat of a "colour coded revolution".

The opposition

On the side of the opposition forces, it must first be recognized that they

were able to outsmart the AKP-MHP bloc to catch them off guard and managed to nominate their candidates and mount their campaigns as quickly as possible. The CHP, IYI Party and Saadet Partisi also joined forces in the Alliance of the Nation - in order to avoid the risk that the latter two parties remained below the 10% threshold and would not be represented in parliament. [137]

But, undoubtedly, the surprise of this campaign period was the performance of Muharrem Ince, the candidate of the CHP whose candidacy the leadership of this party had to accept reluctantly, since he is a rival of the current party leader, Kemal Kilicdaroglu. Ince, through his capacity to argue and debate, to thwart the traps of the "organic" journalists of the AKP, to provoke and disorient Erdogan, managed to generate a real mobilization and hope for a second round for "the secular people". Yet Ince did not come from the left of the CHP and said nothing "left" either. In these speeches it was at most a question of "normalization" (rather than democratization), the question of a return to the parliamentary system remained in limbo and the question of the Syrian migrants was far from being treated in a spirit of "refugees welcome here".

Requiring the Kurdish vote in the case of a second round, Ince had taken great care to advocate the importance of teaching in the mother tongue (thus Kurdish, among others) and had visited Selahattin Demirtas - former co-chair and candidate of the HDP - in prison (which was considered courageous in a context of unparalleled criminalization of a party represented in parliament).

But it was not to be, despite the mobilization of hundreds of thousands of people and monster rallies, Ince remained at 30.6%. Gaining 1/3 of the IYI vote and $\frac{1}{4}$ of the HDP vote, Ince exceeded by 8% the results of his party but that was not enough for a second round. The CHP vote was also down because of votes going to the IYI Party and to a lesser extent the HDP. While the IYI Party definitely asserted itself as an actor on the political scene with 10%, of which a quarter came from the right of the CHP and the rest

from the MHP, the results for Saadet were far from what was expected. It only elected two deputies, who will come from the contingent opened by the CHP in its lists for Saadet and not from its own lists. Even though its alliance with the secular CHP could have penalized it, the 1.34% that it obtained shows that a political Islamism combined with the defence of social and democratic rights is not able to compete with the corrupt Islamic-nationalist populism of Erdogan.

The Kurdish movement: weakened but standing

As for the HDP, which has been terribly weakened by the various waves of arrests targeting its spokespersons, MPs, mayors and elected officials and thousands of its activists, it managed to increase its votes in relation to the November 2015 elections (10.76%) to 11.7%. Remember that the HDP was not included in the Alliance of the Nation. If the CHP and Saadet (and of course the HDP) were open to such an alliance, it was Meral Aksener of the IYI Party who refused to be on the same platform as the HDP, widely criminalized and denounced as an extension of the PKK by Erdogan.

Thus, it was crucial that the HDP could exceed the 10% threshold, which was done, especially through a campaign led by Selahattin Demirtas from his prison. Also, a candidate for the presidency, Demirtas scored only 8.4%, part of his electorate having preferred to vote for Ince in the first round. The HDP (legislative) + Ince (presidential) formula was largely followed by the "Gezi" generation and part of the left wing of the CHP.

However, the HDP's campaign this time was totally reduced to the arithmetic of the Assembly and the need for the HDP to enter parliament to limit the power of the AKP. No clear political message or demands were put forward. We were far from Demirtas' challenge to Erdogan, "We

will prevent you from being president”, which marked the elections of June 2015. It was rather the personalities who joined the ranks of the HDP as parliamentary candidates which served as a “campaign”: a journalist freshly released from prison, representatives of revolutionary currents outside the HDP, academics sacked for defending peace, a figure who has become the symbol of resistance to the state of emergency and so on.

Note also that the HDP vote increased in all the major western cities like Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, and that the HDP vote in these three cities constitutes 30% of the total HDP vote. On the other hand, the vote fell in the Kurdish cities. So, in Sirnak the HDP vote dropped from 84% to 70%, in Hakkari from 84% to 72%, in Diyarbakır from 72% to 67% and likewise for Mus, Bitlis, Siirt and so on. The state of repression and the moving of several polling stations is not enough to explain these results. But with the AKP having either stagnated or slightly increased its vote in this region, it is more a question of a shift from the AKP to the MHP, especially at the level of the Turkish and Arab populations (and the military and police personnel on the ground), and from the HDP towards the AKP for sectors of conservative Kurds.

Apart from some currents hostile to the Kurdish cause, the radical left mainly called for a vote for Demirtas and the HDP. For the third time since 2015, an independent and unitary campaign was launched to vote for

Demirtas and the HDP, of which Yeniyol, the Turkish section of the Fourth International, was one of the initiators. This initiative, called “One Step More”, along with the call to vote, included in its campaign Demirtas’ request for release for fair elections and the highlighting of the economic demands of the HDP in the context of crisis.

However, if the party came in third place in the parliament, ahead of the currents of the extreme right, which constitutes a real victory, the HDP is beset by various tensions, which little by little are being made public. The first is the conflict between Demirtas and the current leadership of the party. In Demirtas’ candidacy for the presidential election, with the latter’s call to the HDP to come out of “holiday mode” and to get active on the ground, and the video prepared to mark the 6th anniversary of the HDP, where Demirtas is almost absent, the frictions are clearly visible. [138] But these tensions are largely the result of the party’s identification with Selahattin Demirtas, whose character, attitude and sincerity mainly enabled the HDP to rise from 6% to 13% in the June 2015 legislative elections and to be represented in parliament.

The party leadership is therefore concerned about this identification – especially in the absence of Demirtas, imprisoned for 2 years – and is trying to break from it. But it seems clear that it is not by removing the latter from the picture or relativizing his contributions that the question will be

resolved. It results from a crisis of the HDP, which is unable to act in the Assembly because it has almost no function, nor in the street, because of the repression. However, the leadership of the PKK, which has never digested the HDP’s relatively greater autonomy –where Demirtas again played an important role – and has expressed this many times, is taking advantage of this situation to reconsolidate these links of subordination with the party.

The second source of tension, or criticism rather, results from the fact that the HDP is increasingly losing its character as a “Kurdish party” in the eyes of a fringe of this population and seems to them today subject to the Turkish left. Several articles published in recent weeks testify to this feeling, which is partly well-founded (the majority of the deputies are Turkish for example), but which precisely relies on the very project of the foundation of the HDP, to make it a party of all Turkey, to “Turkify” it as they say here; which was the idea of Abdullah Â-calâ, the historic leader of the PKK, imprisoned for twenty years.

It is in these circumstances that all political actors are preparing for the municipal elections and reconsidering their alliances. However, for the various tendencies of the opposition it seems more and more difficult to mobilize. These elections, where the AKP wins every time, bring about a real loss of credibility in institutional politics, which does not translate into radicalization but depoliticization.