



IV529 - February 2019

On Venezuela

28 February 2019, by **PSol**

2- After countless failed attempts at imperialist interventions in Venezuela last year, the Trump government strengthened a criminal economic boycott, which only further penalizes the Venezuelan people who have been living through an economic, political and social crisis for some years. The growth of the migratory movement, the violent street demonstrations ("guarimbas") like those that took place in 2016-2017 and the election of extreme right-wing governments in South America, have put the United States in a new offensive against the country.

3- The inauguration of Nicolás Maduro on January 10, 2019, a few days after Bolsonaro came to power in Brasilia, strengthened the U.S. plan to support Venezuelan right-wing groups, such as the Mesa de Unidad Democrática (MUD), without recognizing the president-elect. In this context, the president of the Venezuelan National Assembly, Juan Guaidó (Popular Will), proclaimed himself president of Venezuela on January 23. He was immediately recognized by the governments of Donald Trump (USA), Ivan Duque (Colombia) and Jair Bolsonaro (Brazil), as well as by the governments of Paraguay, Peru, Canada, Ecuador, Chile, Argentina and the European Union.

4- The threat of military intervention makes it clear that what is underway is neither an operation in "defense of

democracy" nor a "humanitarian" military action with the approval of the UN Security Council, as the government of the United States and the "Lima Group" would have us believe. The "defense of democracy" is contradictory to the imposition of an unelected president and the call for "military rebellion," as well as the economic sanctions imposed on Venezuela are contradictory to "humanitarian aid"⁰. As a puppet of the U.S. government, the Colombian and Brazilian troops are heading to the Venezuelan border this Saturday, February 23, to bring supposed "humanitarian aid," but with the clear objective of provoking a conflict, what is really underway is the attempt for an external military intervention combined with a coup d'état from within, with the objective of regaining control of the country.

5- The real objective of the United States, in line with the right-wing opposition, is to appropriate the wealth of Venezuela and restore neoliberalism in the country, imposing a harsh defeat, bloody if necessary, on the struggle of the Venezuelan people who insist on deciding their own destiny. One cannot forget that Venezuela has the largest oil deposits on the planet, even surpassing Saudi Arabia. While Saudi Arabia has 267,000 million barrels of oil reserves (15.7% of the world total), Venezuela has 298,300 million barrels (17.5% participation). Undoubtedly, a

victorious intervention in Venezuela will pave the way for new setbacks throughout Latin America, directly and definitively subordinating our continent to the interests of the United States. At the same time, it will mean the strengthening of reactionary and authoritarian governments that are committed to attacking the social movements and the most exploited and oppressed sectors of society.

6- Faced with this, the PSOL opposes any foreign interference in Venezuelan affairs. We are absolutely against the interference of the Bolsonaro government in Venezuelan affairs and any political or military aggression against the sovereignty of Venezuela. At the same time, we reject the economic sanctions imposed by the United States and its partners on the brother country, as well as a possible foreign military intervention or even a military coup.

7- Faced with the very serious situation in Venezuela, it is urgent that the Latin American peoples unite in solidarity with the Venezuelan people and demand that the governments of the region reject any agreement with Donald Trump, whether it be rejecting the farce of the "humanitarian aid" campaign, the rhetoric of "defense of democracy," or any assignment of military territories, bases or operations that imply war measures against Venezuela. We reject any solution or overcoming of

the crisis that poses a threat to peace or that is outside the democratic and constitutional framework of Venezuela.

8- Finally, we call upon all democratic and left-wing organizations and social movements in the region to form

committees in defense of Venezuelan sovereignty and solidarity with the people of Simón Bolívar, the "Liberator".

Defend Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib!

26 February 2019, by Solidarity Steering Committee

Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib are under attack for who they are – as Muslim Arab-American women, and as progressive critics of U.S. foreign policy not only in Palestine but throughout the Middle East and in Latin America as well. They represent exactly what white nationalists and Islamophobes don't think belongs in Congress, or for that matter in the United States. They also represent what the leadership of the Democratic Party doesn't want either – outspoken opponents of the bipartisan blank check that Congress gives to the Israeli military, and the whitewashing of Israel's brutal Occupation policies that veterans of the South African freedom struggle have called "worse than apartheid."

Because the attacks on Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib are certain to continue and escalate, it is essential that anyone who wants to be considered "progressive" come to their defense now. That includes telling the Congressional Democratic leadership that it's absolutely unacceptable to censure or threaten to strip them of committee assignments. Otherwise, the racist hyenas aiming to destroy them will come back for more.

It's "beyondchutzpah" for the Republicans to accuse these two women of anything improper. Until Rep. Stephen King's most recent white-nationalist pronouncements, he was spewing racist garbage for years without facing consequences. And during all the years of the racist "birther" and "secret Muslim" lies about Barack Obama, the only leading Republican who explicitly denounced those attacks was the late John McCain. All the rest were silent or

complicit in that smear campaign.

When it comes to the substance of Middle East policy, how much better are the Democrats? Right now, a bill is "on the desk" (i.e. pending) in the House of Representatives, enabling state legislatures to effectively outlaw support of the nonviolent BDS (Boycott/Divestment/Sanctions) campaign against Israel's discriminatory laws and brutal Occupation practices. This legislation has already passed the Senate, right after the government shutdown ended, with 22 Democrats and all Republicans except Rand Paul voting for it.

This legislation is a blatantly unconstitutional attack on free speech and political advocacy, a bipartisan move to flush the First Amendment down the drain, which is why every civil liberties organization vehemently opposes it. It's this legislation whose drafters in the Senate (Marco Rubio and Joe Manchin), Rashida Tlaib wrote, "forgot which country they represent," and which Ilhan Omar tweeted is fuelled by "it's the Benjamins, baby") and followed up by citing "AIPAC" (the American Israel Public Affairs Committee. "Benjamins" refers to hundred-dollar bills, as you might not know if you don't carry them around in your wallet).

Anyone who understands the history of antisemitism is familiar with the myth that "the Jews" control society, or the world, through control of money, banks, media and by various conspiratorial mechanisms. For centuries, popular and elite culture in Europe (although not in African countries like Somalia, where Ilhan Omar is from) was saturated with

these falsehoods.

That doesn't mean it's antisemitic to point out that AIPAC, and even more extreme "pro-Israel" types like Sheldon Adelson, terrorize politicians by deploying massive campaign funds to keep them in line. We can expect to see that play out in Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib's districts in the next election season, even though Israel and Palestine are not the major concerns of voters there. It is neither antisemitic, nor is it too early, to anticipate them being aggressively "primaried" with external funding.

In another tweet a few years earlier, Ilhan Omar referred to Israel having "hypnotized" U.S. and world political leadership. That's not antisemitic, but it isn't quite accurate either. Far from being "hypnotized," the U.S. political establishment has an eyes-wide-open bipartisan policy of support for Israel's strategic and military role as a partner of U.S. imperialism in policing and trying to dominate the Middle East. That's an entire discussion in itself, of course, but it needs to be at the forefront of the solidarity movement's understanding of the U.S.-Israel relationship.

It is not an attack on Jews to point out how Israel's array of discriminatory laws, its brutal government practices, and its recently enacted "Jewish nation-state law," are underpinned by a state ideology of ethno-religious supremacy that is racist at its core. That's why some of the murderous U.S. white-nationalist marchers in Charlottesville chanting "Jews will not replace us" (some "very fine people," Trump called them), including their leading figure Richard Spencer who calls himself a "white Zionist," see

Israel as a model for the “white Christian America” they envision.

Condemning Israel’s atrocities against the Palestinian people is no more antisemitic than calling out the kingdom of Saudi Arabia for the murder of Jamal Khashoggi and the genocide in Yemen is “anti-Muslim.” As a matter of fact, it’s not only Islamophobes and hardcore Zionists

who hate what Reps Omar and Tlaib represent. You can be sure that the Saudi rulers, who brutally suppress the rights of women and dissenters in that country, are very unhappy to see them in the U.S. Congress.

Some on the left have described Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib, as well as the openly socialist Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez, as “our class warriors dropped behind the enemy lines.” We can’t

speak for them, and we don’t know whether they see themselves that way, but we do know as advocates of social justice, democracy, and self-determination for oppressed peoples at home and everywhere, that it’s our absolute responsibility to defend them.

February 14, 2019

[Solidarity](#)

Pulwama “End the pernicious cycle”! No to war

25 February 2019, by Jammu Kashmir Awami Workers Party , Radical Socialist

The car bomb attack that has killed 40 CRPF soldiers is just such an act and deserves the strongest condemnation. As in all cases of terrorism, our sympathies and condolences are with the loved ones, families, relatives and friends of the victims. The perpetration was a lone Kashmiri youth Adil Ahmad Dar, while responsibility for preparing and training him was publicly claimed by the Jaish-e-Mohammed, a group that has been sponsored who claims to have the support of important sections of the Pakistan Establishment. Given that this is the case what should be the course of justice for the immediate as well as the longer term that we should demand?

1. The golden rule of justice is to seek punishment for those identified as guilty. Given that JeM has announced its responsibility there is little reason to doubt its culpability. Nevertheless, the Indian government should publicly disclose all evidence pointing to and confirming this if for no other reason than to fully persuade the peoples of Pakistan, India and the rest of the world of who the guilty ones are and thereby not only build pressure from all quarters for their indictment; but by doing so also counter false and motivated conspiracy theories of all

sorts. Yes, the Pakistan government must in any case be pressured to take action against the JeM given its past history. As it is, Pakistan has also suffered from terrorist attacks against its people and institutions but there are those in the wider governing Establishment who make a hypocritical and self-serving distinction between those agents who are ‘ours’ and others.

2. There is indirect state sponsorship and support for agents who have the autonomy to decide when, where and how terrorist acts are to be carried out; and there is direct state execution of such terrorist across country borders (the greatest and most pernicious of such states being the US which since 1945 has killed more civilians outside its territory than all the rest of the world’s countries put together have done). Sponsorship abets an act of international terrorism even if it is not the embodiment of such an act. But there is still between the two a very important qualitative difference politically and in respect of international law. The latter carried out as it were by the official armed forces of a country is an act of war, declared or undeclared.

A non-state actor, even when abetted

in preparations by a government, no matter how reprehensible this is, is not an act of war. Which is why, for the Modi government to declare that the attack in Pulwama is just such an act of war is not only wrong but it is politically speaking extremely dangerous since it raises the military-political stakes so much higher. That this government should nevertheless resort to such jingoistic rhetoric raises suspicions that the BJP is planning to use this encounter to generate greater communal tensions for the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections. The aim is to whip up public anger against the people and government of Pakistan on one hand and against the people of Kashmir on the other hand – yet another example of a thinly disguised politics of anti-Muslimness that has always been central to the fascistic ideology and politics of the Sangh Parivar.

3. An attack by the Indian Army across the border against Pakistani soldiers, let alone against civilians, will not be a ‘revenge’ because it will cause injuries and deaths to those who have nothing to do with what has happened in Pulwama. This will only cause widespread anger and bitterness among a Pakistan public about the injustice being done to its soldiers

and/or civilians and help rally domestic support for their own government including for those sections which are behind such cross-border assaults, when in fact everything should be done to isolate and undermine these sections within the country. Any hopes of moving towards greater democratization within Pakistan and an end to, or cumulative reduction of, military domination will be seriously undermined by Indian actions that push the Pakistani public to support that military in the name of their own form of belligerent nationalism. All progressives in Pakistan working to democratize that society understand this fully (and much more than progressives in India) realize that progress internally in this regard is directly and intimately connected to greater sobriety, balance and moderation in the ties between the two countries. Religious extremism on both sides, however, feeds on generating greater hatred and hostility between the two countries and peoples.

4. Terrorism always has a specific political context. In this case, as in so many other examples of unwarranted violence by non-state and state actors (including by the Indian government), the context is Kashmir! The fundamental diagnosis is clear. While the Pakistan government since the late 1980s has fished in the 'troubled waters' of turbulence and alienation in Kashmir those 'troubled waters' have been created by successive Indian governments with the current Central government adding a distinctive anti-Muslim attitude and practice to its involvement in Kashmir. Even in the initial decades from independence to the late 1980s when serious levels of domestic violent activism arose, there

has been betrayal after betrayal of the commitments made to respect the state's autonomy even as the province as suffered more frequently from the imposition of President's Rule than any other Indian state.

There are over 650,000 troops of all kinds primarily in the Valley making the proportion of armed personnel to civilians the worst in the world when according to New Delhi the number of militants or designated 'terrorists' in recent years is not more than a few hundred or so. This huge presence of troops is required primarily to monitor and subdue a general population whose alienation and anger against New Delhi has spreader wider and deeper than ever before. Among Kashmiri Muslims this has been further exacerbated by this government which has justified the firing on stone-pelters, excused the occasional firing on bystanders as well as condoning the generally humiliating treatment of the populace, not to forget the use of pellet guns injuring and maiming hundreds of unarmed demonstrators. Given this reality it is extraordinary that the Indian army is now saying that they will shoot on sight anyone carrying a gun who does not immediately surrender. All this has not lessened the willingness of Kashmiri youth to get training from the all too willing providers like the JeM across the border; or to carry out their own 'martyrdom' through suicide bombings to make their personal statement against the injustices felt by the injustice dealt to them.

The path to reducing and finally eliminating attacks such as in Pulwama does not lie in belligerent posturing or 'surgical strikes' across the border, let alone in

escalating military tensions and actions between the two nuclearly-armed neighbours. It lies above all in addressing the political context of Kashmir and in ensuring justice to all in the province especially in the Valley, be they resident Muslims or Hindu Pandits wanting to live there with peace and amity once again restored. It is not the Indian government's actions against Pakistan but its behavior in Kashmir that will be decisive for shaping the future. Will alienation there further deepen making it a continuing breeding ground for the cycle of on one side non-state terrorism (aided or otherwise from across the border) and on the other side the state terrorism of the Indian armed forces? Or will we work to end that pernicious cycle altogether?

The solution of Kashmir lies with the people of Kashmir, not with India and Pakistan. The people Kashmir on both sides must be the one who decided the fate of Kashmir. A consultative process from both sides must starts now. The armies of both countries from both parts of Kashmir must be withdrawn. A civilian solution to a civilian issue must be ensured by the civilians and not by any army means or through a bunch of terrorists, state sponsored or otherwise.

We welcome the ban on Jamata Dawa and Anjman Falahi Insaniyat by the state of Pakistan. The state must break all open or hidden contacts with religious fundamentalist groups. There is no military solution of Kashmir. Religious fundamentalism is playing havoc with the lives of many not only in Kashmir but also in India and Pakistan. Religion must not play any role in running the state affairs and the use of religion for political means must be discouraged at all level.

Trump Takes Another Step Toward Authoritarian Government

23 February 2019, by **Dan La Botz**

U.S. President Donald J. Trump declared a national emergency on Feb. 15, arguing that it was necessary to build a wall along the nearly 2,000 mile U.S.-Mexico border because of a criminal invasion taking place there. Trump had gone to Congress to ask for five billion dollars, but a bipartisan agreement would give him only \$1.375 billion, so to bypass Congress he declared the national emergency, which will allow him to allocate funds as he sees fit.

Trump's action creates a constitutional crisis and represents another step towards an authoritarian government. With this declaration Trump can not only spend money that Congress denied him, but the national emergency law also gives him has many powers that include shutting down electronic communications, freezing bank accounts, and deploying troops to suppress domestic unrest. [1] The declaration gives him virtually dictatorial powers.

In fact, there is no immigrant invasion. According to the U.S. government's own reports show that immigration at the southern border does not represent a national emergency. The number of unauthorized immigrants has declined significantly since 2007; and there are a million fewer undocumented immigrants in the United States today than in the past.

Finally, most immigrants have lower crime rates than the U.S. population as a whole.

By not vetoing the bipartisan \$1.375 billion bill, Trump avoided another government showdown that might have led to sick-ins or strikes by government employees and other workers. Sara Nelson, president of the Association of Flight Attendants, told the AFL-CIO leadership, "Go back to talk with your locals and international unions about all workers joining together to end this shutdown with a general strike!" And it might have happened. The last strike ended when workers at La Guardia airport started to walk out threatening cascading shutdowns at airports across the country. So Trump turned to a declaration of national emergency instead of using his veto.

Since 1976 U.S. presidents have had the power to declare national emergencies and have done so 59 times, especially since the 1990s, but usually for recognized national disasters such as floods or health issues such as swine flu, though a number have had to do with international political issues. [2] No past president used the national emergency to bypass Congress' power of the purse, that is, its control over the taxing and spending. And no

president did so for an alleged emergency that most do not see.

Before Trump declared the border wall to be a national emergency, both Republican and Democratic Party leaders expressed their opposition to him doing so. However, after Congress had passed the funding bill and Trump had announced that he would declare a national emergency, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell stated that he supported the president's action. The Democrats and some Republicans have pledged to resist the president's national emergency, proposing Congressional resolutions and threatening lawsuits against it, though they already undermined their case by voting for the bipartisan \$1.375 billion bill. Legal experts think there is little likelihood that Trump can be stopped in the courts.

While we are involved in many struggles against Trump's administration, we socialists have a responsibility to organize a national protest movement against this latest dangerous step toward authoritarian government. There is a national emergency—but it is Trump's threat to our democracy.

16 February 2019

Source [New Politics](#).

The 1946 Revolution in India – History's loss!

23 February 2019, by **Lal Khan**

The so-called independence of the South Asian subcontinent was won not through a struggle by the national bourgeois leaders but through negotiations and deals with the British Raj's wily bureaucrats. Such

–liberation' never transform the lives of the populace and ensue social prosperity but the old rotten system continues to coerce the masses only with superficially different contours and colours of the elite and the state.

India and Pakistan artificially grafted and imposed ruling elites by the British imperialists resulted in the continuance of the rule of the capitalist caricature set up by the Raj. These upstart elites continued to

practise the British ploy of 'divide and rule' to perpetuate their exploitative rulership along with the imperialist plunder even after the end of direct colonial rule. Hence the war mongering and whipping up of religious and nationalistic chauvinism we are witnessed in the last seven decades.

However the British in connivance with their toady native elites could only enforce this set up after the betrayal and defeat of one of the most glorious episodes of mass upsurge—the 1946 revolution, distorted as "Sailors' Mutiny" by official historians. These have also repeatedly falsified the true facts and events that led to independence. Internationally and regionally these narratives proclaimed that this independence was won by the Indian National Congress led by Gandhi, Patel and Nehru and Muslim League led by Jinnah. While they conveniently concealed the struggles and role played by workers, youth, peasants and the Indian army, navy, air force and the police rankers in the struggle for independence. Marx had elaborated that during and after the first Indian war of independence in 1857 the British conquered India by using the Indian troops. However by 1946 British were no longer confident of relying on Indian soldiers in the British Indian Army to sustain their coercive rule. There was a volcanic rebellion that had even shocked the wily strategists of the Raj.

This revolt led by the sailors and workers had forced the British to an early departure from the subcontinent and the movement was on the verge of abolishing the socioeconomic system that has enslaved the oppressed masses for generations. Its protraction is the root cause of the misery, deprivation, tyranny, bigotry and bloodshed that has been ravaging the subcontinent's masses with the largest concentration of poverty on the planet ever since. The atrocious counter-revolution was inflicted through the bloodied partition of 1947 the wounds of which are still festering.

Seventy-two years ago, this week of February 1946, a revolutionary spark triggered an heroic uprising that engulfed the South Asian subcontinent

where the masses were up in arms defying the might of the imperialists and the repressive colonial state. The ebbing of this revolutionary wave and its defeat though the deceit and sabotage of the local leaders led to the horrors of the holocaust of Partition. Carving up of the Indian subcontinent on religious lines resulted in massacres with killings of over one and a half million souls and enforced migration of over twenty million. However the brilliant episode of the Sailors' Revolt has enormous lessons and examples of the audacious role and courage that it instilled in the hearts and minds of the ordinary people in such revolutionary periods that are historical exceptions.

The naval revolt of February 1946 erupted due to the accumulation of resentment over a long period among the sailors. The salary of the British sailors was 10 times more than that of the Indian sailors. So also were their perks and privileges. However, the major cause of the revolt was political. The trial of the Indian National Army (INA) leaders and its struggle during the siege of Imphal, when the INA inflicted massive damage on the British army gave the sailors a profound belief that the mighty British Empire was not all that invincible.

The revolt started on February 18, 1946, when 1100 sailors on the H.M.S. Talwar stopped work and declared an official strike at dawn. The sailors unanimously elected signalman M.S. Khan as President and petty officer telegraphist Madan Singh as Vice-President. Leading signaller Bedi Basant Singh, S.C. Sen Gupta, Chief Petty Officer, School Master Nawaz, Seaman Ashraf Khan, Able Stokers Gomez and Mohammad Hussain were also elected to the Central Strike Committee. The Central Strike Committee had a resolute destiny for their struggle—complete political and socioeconomic liberation.

In the Bombay Harbour, the revolt quickly spread to 22 ships and the Castle Barracks and Fort Barracks shore bases. The strikes spread like wild fire to military establishments in Karachi, Madras, Vishakhapatnam, Calcutta, Delhi, Cochin, Jamnagar, and Andaman's Islands on to the shores of the Middle East in Bahrain and Aden.

They were able to win over almost all the 70 ships and all the 20 seashore establishments with over 30,000 sailors actively participating in the revolt. The next morning Indian sailors seized military vehicles in the dockyards, and drove around Bombay shouting slogans in support of the INA prisoners and chanting slogans like 'Hindu-Muslim eik hain' (Hindus and Muslims are One). The Central Strike Committee issued a leaflet that ended with the call, 'Long live the solidarity of workers, soldiers, students and peasants. Long live Revolution'.

A mass fervour of support swept across united India in support of the striking sailors. On the morning of February 21, 1946, British guards opened fire at the Indian sailors in the Castle Barracks and this transformed the revolt into a violent armed uprising.

Hundreds of strikers from ships, minesweepers and shore establishments in Bombay demonstrated near the Victoria Terminus of the Indian Railways. When British ordered Indian soldiers to fire at the striking sailors, the latter refused to shoot at their fellow Indian brothers.

On February 20 and 21, the striking sailors gave a call for a general strike, which evoked incredible response. Three hundred thousand workers put down their tools and walked out of textile factories, mills, railways and other industries in Bombay and many other cities and towns in the country. Barricades were set up on the streets that were pitched battles of youth and workers with the police and army. The strike was a direct challenge to the British rule. In Calcutta, over 120,000 people came out and other Indian cities and towns witnessed strikes and demonstrations on a similar scale.

The revolt spread in the other Indian armed forces of the Raj. Nearly 2000 men in the Royal Indian Army Signal Corps mutinied near Jabalpur. There were mini-revolts by Indian gunners in Madras, signallers at Allahabad, and clerical staff at army headquarters in Delhi. Indian officers of the RIAF refused to fly out British troops to attack the sailors and to pilot planes

to bomb the ships. Felled trees blocked train tracks and roads. The RAF strikes spread to airbases in Allahabad, Mauripur (Karachi), Dum - Dum (Calcutta) Kanpur, Palam (Delhi), Poona, Vizagapatam, Kallang, Chaklala (Rawalpindi), Lahore and Negombo. The strike also spread to South East Asia where 4000 airmen struck at Seletar, Singapore.

The workers from railways, docks, postal services and other sectors were radicalised and joining the strike movement. This was a scenario British never expected to be faced with and it was this movement of the proletariat that forced them to retreat. In an interview in March 1976, Clement Attlee, the post-war British prime minister of the times reminisced, "The RIN Mutiny which made the British realise that the Indian armed forces could no longer be trusted to prop up the British." When asked about the extent to which the British decision to quit India was influenced by Mahatma Gandhi's and his movement, Attlee's lips widened in a smile of disdain and he uttered, slowly, "Minimal."

Sir Stafford Cripps in the debate at the British House of Commons had said, "The Indians in the (Royal Indian) Army are not obeying the British officers... In these conditions if we have to rule India for a long time, we have to keep a permanent British army for a long time in a vast country of four hundred million. We have no such army and money...."

In Karachi, striking sailors took over the H.M.S. Hindustan and Bahadur ships anchored at Manora Island. The sailors then took out a procession through the streets of Karachi and were joined a large number of the city's residents. Karachi's British army commander sent two platoons of Baluch soldiers to suppress the revolt. The Baluch refused to fire upon their brothers. The British then called on their 'loyal' Gorkha troops to put down the revolt. The British commanders were shocked when even Gorkha soldiers refused to fire upon the striking sailors. Then the British troops were summoned that started firing and the sailors on the ships retaliated. The firing and attacks and counter-attacks continued for four hours. Six of the sailors were killed,

more than 30 were wounded. Trade unions in Karachi called a general strike, and the whole city was shut down. More than 35,000 people, Hindus and Muslims marched towards Eidgah and held a massive rally despite intimidation, harassment, arrests, baton charge and live firing injuring more than 50 protestors.

As World War II was coming to an end, India was entering a period of stormy resurgence of the working-class movement. Industrial strikes in virtually all the major cities - Bombay, Calcutta, Allahabad, Delhi, Madras, Lahore and Karachi erupted with full force. The Indian working class courageously jumped into the fray ignoring massive state oppression, arrests, beatings and even bullets as the decisive force in the struggle for liberation. Towards the end of 1945, the Bombay and Calcutta dockworkers refused to load ships going to Indonesia with supplies for troops meant to suppress the national liberation struggles there.

At the beginning of 1946, this strike wave assumed a highly political character. On January 24, 1946, 175,000 textile and industrial workers went on strike in Bombay to protest the shooting of demonstrators celebrating the birthday of Subhash Chandra Bose, leader of the "Azad (Free) Indian Government" and organiser of the Indian National Army. Railway workers' strikes, series of student demonstrations throughout India brought large swathes of the Indian proletariat in other sectors of industry and services into militant struggle. Throughout these demonstrations the inspiring and fiery slogan "Long Live the Revolution!" was echoing across united India.

The last years of colonial rule also saw a remarkably sharp increase in strikes on economic issues all over the country - the all-India strike of the Post and Telegraph Department employees being the most prominent. The pent-up economic grievances during the war, combined with the high prices, scarcity of food and other essentials and a drop in real wages, drove the working class to the limits of its tolerance. In anticipation of freedom expectations were rocketing to the skies. The people saw

Independence as an end to their miseries. The workers were now struggling for what they hoped freedom would bring them as a matter of right.

It's an historical satire that Congress and Muslim League implacable rivals both condemned the Royal Indian Navy revolt. These leaders of the native bourgeois condemned the striking sailors and workers. Mahatma Gandhi issued a statement criticising the rebels. The Muslim League too denounced the strikers, arguing that "unrest on the streets was not the best way to deal with grievances and that protest should be through constitutional methods only". Valabhbhai Patel demanded the sailors to surrender and summoned the vice-president of the sailors strike committee, Petty Officer Madan Singh in a flat in Bombay and literally shouted at him and demanding to sabotage the revolt. Nehru, who did not want to be left behind Patel, in another meeting with Madan, advised him and his comrades to surrender and bring the navy revolt to an end. Nehru even held a press conference to reprimand the revolting sailors.

The Communist Party of India was in a dilemma due to the flawed ideological concepts of the leaders. On the one hand, the CPI wanted to "be with the people", in order to restore some of its credibility lost during the war, when the party overtly supported the British Raj in the name of "People's War". Their rank-and-file, particularly the students, enthusiastically joined the uprisings in Bombay and Calcutta. Ultimately this contrast in policy led to the beginning of the split of the CPI after differences emerged between its two main leaders Bhalchandra Trimbak Ranadive and P.S. Joshi.

Ranadive was the party's main trade union leader and hence was active in strike action and deeply influenced by the uprising. He wanted the party to take up the leadership of the revolutionary movement. While Joshi, general secretary of the CPI at the time was more receptive to the instructions from Moscow under Stalin. However at the second Party Congress held in Calcutta in February 1948 the party elected Ranadive in place of P.C. Joshi as CPI's general

secretary. But in 1950 Ranadive was deposed, and denounced by the party as a "left adventurer". The split materialised in 1964 and two parties that emerged were the CPI and CPI (M). Ranadive was the founder and leader of the CPI (M) that has emerged as the largest communist party in India.

The betrayal of the political leadership ultimately led the movement into disarray and it scattered. On February 24, 1946, white flags were raised from the decks of all ships to announce surrender. In its last session, the strike committee passed a resolution that stated, "Our uprising was an important historical event in the lives of our people. For the first time, the blood of uniformed and non-uniformed workers flowed in one current for the same collective cause. We the workers in uniform shall never forget this. We also know that you, our proletarian brothers and sisters shall also never forget this. The coming generations, learning its lessons shall accomplish what we have not been able to achieve. Long live the working

masses. Long, lives Revolution".

With a revolutionary party having cadres tempered in the foundations of Marxism could have provided a direction to the sailors, soldiers and millions of workers who came out on the streets across united India. Soviets could easily have been established in Bombay, Lahore, Calcutta, Karachi, Allahabad, Peshawar, Madras, Kanpur, Delhi and many other major metropolitan cities. Unfortunately due to the criminal role played by the Comintern and the leadership of the CPI with the disastrous policy of forming a "people's front" with the "progressive bourgeois" of Congress and the Muslim League missed a historic opportunity. Despite their overtures to the British by supporting the imperialist war, when the time came for the transfer of power the preferred option for British imperialism were the bourgeois parties, the Congress and the Muslim League, as they wanted to ensure continuity of capitalist plunder.

The victory of the 1946 revolution

could have changed the course of history. The rising mass movement would have neither paused at the stage of national independence nor it would have accepted capitalist exploitation and coercion. The harrowing genocides and vicious religious and sectarian hatreds that in particular drenched Punjab and Bengal in innocent human blood during the sweltering, humid and stifling summer of 1947; are still tearing apart the social fabric of south Asia. These would have never transpired. The united class struggle would have gone forward for the socioeconomic transformation through a socialist revolution. With the revolutionary storm sweeping through China and most of the East, at the time, a revolutionary victory in the united Indian subcontinent would have become the precursor of the red dawn setting the Asian continent alight. With the overthrow of capitalism and breaking up of the strangle hold of imperialist oppression and plunder its revolutionary impacts on a world scale would have brought the destiny of human emancipation close to sights.

For a fighting ecological trade-unionism

21 February 2019, by **Daniel Tanuro**

The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) has drawn a radical conclusion: under the guise of fine words in favour of the "fair transition", it has chosen to accompany the evolution towards an impossible green capitalism. The Vancouver resolution (2010) is clear: this document advocates a transition that "does not endanger the competitiveness of companies and does not place undue pressure on state budgets" (Article 5). We feel that we are dreaming: the demand for the respect of competitiveness is not even accompanied by a reservation concerning the fossil fuel sector, the main cause of climate change! However, without breaking the power of this sector of capital, it is strictly impossible to avoid the climate

catastrophe ...

The ITUC wants to believe that a "democratic governance" integrating the "fair transition" would open up "new opportunities", that it would create massively "green jobs", good and "decent". This is wishful thinking. Capital invested in the "energy transition" in no way derogates from the ruthless capitalist offensive against wages, working conditions and trade unions. Germany is at the forefront of both renewable energy and expanding an underclass of poor workers. In many countries, governments use ecology to dismantle union strongholds in traditional sectors.

Developing a genuinely trade-union

alternative to the class collaboration policy of the ITUC leadership is of strategic importance. The working class occupies a decisive position in industry and services. Without its active participation, an anti-productivist transformation of the economy will remain impossible. But how to win workers to the struggle for the defence of the environment? That is the question. The answer is difficult. All the more difficult because the balance of power is deteriorating and the poison of division is spreading in the working class.

Self-organization

of the working class

What must be done? To begin with, the problem must be posed correctly on the theoretical level. For here we are touching on a fundamental question: capital is not a thing, but a social relation of exploitation that subjects workers more firmly than chains would. Like it or not, this system compels every worker to produce more than is necessary for the satisfaction of their needs, and to realize this production in the alienated form of the commodity. So, to collaborate in productivism, which "exhausts the only two sources of all wealth: the Earth and the worker" (Marx). Today this collaboration is becoming more and more unnatural, since it threatens the very survival of humanity. But in "normal" conditions, capitalist competition imposes it on everyone.

We must therefore get out of "normal" conditions, out of the competition of everyone against everyone. How? By collective organization, by the action of the exploited for their demands. "The emancipation of the workers will be the work of the workers themselves". This famous phrase of Marx is more than ever valid. Faced with the ecological crisis, the enormous problem of the submission/integration of workers to the productivist race of capital can only be surpassed by self-organized struggle. Practical conclusion: any collective resistance against austerity, dismissals and closures must be supported, even critically (when it is not really democratic, or its starting point is antithetical to the defence of the environment). Because one thing is certain: workers who are defeated in the immediate economic fight against austerity will not progress to a higher political consciousness, integrating the ecological question.

Workers' control and democratic self-organization can work miracles in terms of consciousness. Even at the level of an enterprise. A remarkable example was provided in 1975-1985 by the "surplus workers" of the glassworkers' sector in Charleroi:

following the fight against the closure of their company, they imposed their conversion in a public enterprise of insulation/renovation of housing (the enterprise was created but sabotaged later by politicians and employers).

Form an ecosocialist consciousness

Such examples, however, remain exceptional. In general, the formation of an ecosocialist consciousness requires an approach and experiences at a broader level than the enterprise. It is at the inter-sectoral level that trade unionism can best pose structural demands consistent with an anti-capitalist approach to the transition. To take some examples: the extension of the public sector (free public transport, for example); the expropriation of the fossil fuel sector (a condition sine qua non for a rapid transition to renewables); the radical reduction of working time, without loss of salary (a condition sine qua non for reconciling decreasing output and employment).

But the programme and the struggle are not enough. An ecological and combative trade-unionism requires us to look beyond the inter-sectoral level. A strategy of convergence with other social movements - peasant, youth, feminist, ecological - must be conceived. This implies abandoning the misconception that work is the source of all wealth. In truth, the exploitation of wage labour presupposes the appropriation and exploitation of the natural resources which necessarily provide the material object of labour on the one hand, and on the other the patriarchal exploitation of care work, carried out mainly by women and "invisible" in the context of the family. The capital-labour contradiction is thus embedded in a broader antagonism between capital, on the one hand, and reproduction on the other.

If it places itself at the heart of this antagonism, trade unionism can get out of being on the defensive, make alliances with other social movements, develop with them an attractive

ecosocialist project. It is not a question of reviving the chimera of a progressive social transformation by the accumulation of micro-experiences that are supposed to make it possible to avoid a global trial of strength. On the contrary, it is a question of preparing this trial of strength at the territorial level, by systematically developing practices of control, solidarity, self-organization and self-management. These will encourage the exploited and oppressed to take things into their own hands, to become aware of their strength, thus promoting an overall ecosocialist and feminist awareness that will strengthen trade unionism.

This strategic proposal will seem to some people to be far removed from the real relationship of forces. Let them not forget this: the relative calm that reigns on the surface of social relations is misleading. Capitalism is mutilating life and nature. Human nature in particular. The majority of the population are forced to exhaust themselves and to exhaust the environment in alienated work, more and more useless, ethically unbearable and which produces a miserable existence. The explosive material accumulated in this way can release its energy to the left or to the right.

And the climate strikes by young people over recent months in an increasing number of countries are only one positive example of this dynamic - which also is shown by movements like Black Lives Matter and the Women's strikes planned again for March 8 this year. The political discussions, including on issues such as productivism and growth, taking place amongst young climate activists need to be spread in trade union circles - as well as the energy and militancy of their mobilisation.

It is an understatement to say that trade-unionism has an interest in the liberation on the left of the social energy accumulated in the society by forty years of neoliberal policies. It is by linking the struggle for social justice and environmental justice in an anti-capitalist and anti-productivist perspective that it will have the greatest chance of succeeding.

Feminism: Why a women*'s strike on March 8?

20 February 2019, by Oksana Shine

Participation in the meetings is free, activities are planned for children, translations are arranged according to need, and biscuits are shared! The Collecti.e. f 8 maars is the bilingual name for the structure built through the meetings with the primary purpose of organizing a national strike of women* on March 8 and, most likely, beyond!

Several members of Gauche anticapitaliste (Anti-capitalist Left, the Belgian section of the Fourth International) are actively involved in the construction of this movement and the many meetings. In this article, we explain why it seems essential to participate in the strike on March 8 but especially why we believe it is the responsibility of an anti-capitalist, feminist and revolutionary group to get involved in its organization, while respecting the autonomy and internal democracy of the movement.

1. A women*'s strike, something new?

Since the beginnings of capitalism, and particularly since the economic crisis of the 1970s, work has become increasingly feminized. Today, women* represent a little less than half of employees (against +/- 30% in the 80s). At the same time, working conditions are deteriorating, real wages are falling, and part-time work is becoming more widespread.

Women*'s wages are still structurally considered as "extra pay" while those who work also care for and support the needs of the people around them. In addition, women* are pushed into care professions (health, education) and service professions that require great flexibility (cleaning,

distribution). Under these conditions, 90% of part-time work is imposed on women* who will never be able to obtain the recognition of a complete career even if they multiply daily their working days. Undocumented women* are the majority in informal work (domestic work, hospitality, prostitution) and non-white (or racialized) women* are the first victims of precarious work (part-time, precarious contracts, split hours, jobs of little value) and discrimination in hiring, including in the public service, which structurally prevents them from having access to employment.

But that's not all ... Since the economic and financial crisis of 2008, attacks on public services and social security have accelerated. It is becoming increasingly clear that governments are at the service of the bosses, imposing a rescue of the richest 1% by the working class. Along with wage insecurity, women* face austerity head-on: pensions, income support, unemployment benefits and social benefits, co-payments, unjustified time credits, maternity leave shortened in the event of sickness, nurseries, rest homes, transport, health care... everything is unravelled, cut, privatized and converted into a commodity to consume. Women* are directly affected by all these measures, but they do not have the time to take care of themselves, they are forced to plug the breaches of a broken solidarity with a backhoe. They fall ill or become mentally overloaded. Their absences from work are now regarded as "absenteeism" that employers can legally sanction by dismissals without compensation. Where no space is left for illness, relaxation, recreation, breaks are chimeras that have a price.

Faced with the deterioration in working conditions, social security

and public services, women* are still present in struggles but systematically made invisible. We talk about workers, we forget female workers, with or without jobs, with or without papers, sick or in good health. For some professions, the affront is even stronger, half of women* employees work in the non-profit sector and 40% work in the service sector. When housekeepers, cleaners, early childhood educators, caregivers, babysitters, secretaries, nurses, teachers, midwives or cashiers strike, these are women*'s strikes. In a context where women* are systematically erased from history, this statement can only appear as an offense (or worse, a division of the working class) to those who deny us the right to self-determination. They refuse to understand that the working class cannot free themselves by relegating half of the people who are part of it to the background

2. Organizing and making women* visible is a necessity!

Strikes by employees are means of struggle that emerged in the 19th century when the capitalist system was booming, and wage exploitation was becoming widespread. These strikes were often represented as involving groups of men, but women*, often migrants and/or children, were also active in the mobilizations with their own demands. For example, the strikes of women* workers in industrial production workshops in Germany in 1880 who protested against the sexual harassment of bosses, foremen and their colleagues. We can also talk about the "bread and

roses" strike of women* migrant workers in the textile industry in Lawrence, United States, in 1912 against the reduction of their wages.

While not entitled to union representation, more than 2,000 workers were on strike for more than two months until they won. They set up a strike committee, a strike fund, translations, day-care centres and community canteens. In addition to being exploited, women* are specifically oppressed, so women*'s strikes must be more creative than conventional strikes to fight on several levels. The Women*'s Tax Resistance League was created in 1909 by British suffragettes advocating a reproduction strike (refusing to bear children), a domestic strike and a strike on civic duties such as paying taxes. Their main slogan was "no vote, no tax". In 1961, during the Cold War, the Women*'s Peace Strike in the United States brought together more than 50,000 women* in more than 60 cities against the Vietnam War and nuclear tests. In 1974, four years after the strike for women*'s rights in the United States, the women*'s liberation movement in France organized a strike of wage labour, domestic work, childcare and sexual tasks to raise awareness about patriarchal oppression. In recent years, we have heard a lot about the 1975 women*'s strike in Iceland, where more than 90% of women* workers went on a wage and home strike and came together for a day to demand equal wages for women*.

In Belgium, the best-known women*'s strike was that at FN Herstal, involving 3,000 women* striking for more than 3 months to claim "equal pay for equal work", despite the union's attempts to suffocate the movement. A strike, perhaps less well-known, but just as important was that of the workers of the Bekaert-Cockerill company in 1982. To increase their profits, the bosses proposed either an increase to 36 hours for all workers, the dismissal of 13 people or a shift to part-time for women* who were not heads of household. The shop stewards supported the last option, which women* strongly opposed because it was out of the question to consider the casualization of women* as a solution. Finally, 13 women* who

rejected the part-time solution were dismissed and replaced by 13 male workers hired on a higher wage.

History shows that men never rose spontaneously to combat inequality, sexism and violence against women*. They must fight on all fronts and they are guilty if they dare to denounce the violence of colleagues or comrades. At the same time, women* are raised and educated to care for others, to be smiling, to be attentive, to be fragile and dependent and to pay attention to our appearance. Gender stereotypes are real barriers to women*'s liberation. For all these reasons, our self-organization in an autonomous movement without cisgender men is imperative, not as an end but as a means to build our power to act and carry our own demands without being swept away. and judged as "non-priority", "irrelevant" or "bourgeois". The women*'s strikes are the political link between the need to impose a balance of power in the workplace, but also in all areas of daily life.

Feminists of the 1970s used the slogan "the personal is the political" to show that the oppression and exploitation of women* is exercised everywhere and all the time, at work, on the street and at home. In a context where we are increasingly isolated from each other, the mixed spaces chosen allow us to share our experiences, to re-establish links and to become aware of our collective strength. We do not rely on other social actors (state, bosses or even leaders of the trade union movement or male comrades) to defend us, as summarized by the slogan "don't liberate me, I will take care of it!". What we need are willing accomplices to fight our demands, not men who speak for us, not lesson givers.

3. International strikes against capitalism, this racist and hetero-patriarchal system

Monday, October 3, 2016 was known as "black Monday" in Poland, where

several thousand women* went on strike and demonstrated in the streets of Warsaw against the restriction of the already limited right to abortion. On October 19, Argentine women* followed suit in response to Lucia Perez's feminicide (a woman murdered because she is a woman). They stopped work for an hour all over the country and made the link between feminicide and economic, social, colonial and territorial violence. In January 2017, the Women*'s March on Washington brought together thousands of women* against the Trump presidency and for the rights of women*, migrants and LGBTQI + people.

In the process, an international call for women*'s strikes was launched at the initiative of the movement Ni Una Menos and the US Women*'s Strike. On March 8, 2017, women*'s strikes were held in more than fifty (!) countries around the world. In Spain, on March 8, 2018, more than 5 million (!) strikers beat the pavement in a gigantic movement. Women* strike in domestic work, education, consumption and wage labour. They reject violence against women*, evictions, racism and economic exploitation and want to put the right to live with dignity in the centre of concerns. This international feminist movement is re-politicizing the strike, it is the will for a radical change of system that is only possible through an international struggle. It revives the link with the historical origin of the International Day of Women*'s Rights initiated in 1910 at the Second International Women*'s Congress and with the massive strike of Russian women* that kicked off the revolution on March 8, 1917.

In most cases, women* are forced to take a day off to participate in strikes because trade union activity is weakened, rare or even prohibited in many countries. But this does not prevent them from having an impact on economic production. In addition, the strength of these strikes resides in their ability to support an autonomous movement of women* who discuss political strategy and who radicalize in the street. This is even more necessary because it has become very difficult to get organized politically in the workplace precisely because it is

more and more difficult to have a job and to have a long-term contract. Many women*, notably among the *gilets jaunes*, show their desire to hit harder, “stop the machine” and not just gather on weekend days. But the radicalism and convergence of the mobilizations is far from being given, they are constructed and must be imposed by the construction of the movement and the collective debates within it.

It is fundamental to fight against a reformist, white and bourgeois feminism, dominant in the media and institutions, that fights sexism with quotas in the state and capitalist hierarchy, and the heads of millionaire companies like Proximus. It is also essential to build bridges and links between capitalist exploitation, racist oppression, sexist oppression, the oppression of trans and intersex people, the oppression of sick and invalid people, and ecological destruction.

These links are not made by adding demands one on top of the other but by their permanent connection. The ultimate goal is not to bring together ecologists, anti-racists, feminists and so on but to make the workers’ movement understand that it is anti-capitalist to fight radically against racism and sexism, that the feminist movement understands that it is feminist to radically fight capitalism and ableism, and so on. The victories of massive and self-organized struggles in one sector also weaken the dominant capitalist order, open gaps and reinforce the entire social movement and the confidence of the working class in its own forces.

The Black Lives Matter movement initiated by three women* in the United States in 2013 against systemic racism and the assassination of black people (mostly men and trans people) has had an impact on the radicalization of the American feminist movement, which has in turn favoured the return of the strike as a political and economic weapon of workers throughout the country (recently again with flight attendants and teachers). The murders of the Honduran environmental activist Berta Caceres in 2016 and the Brazilian PSOL activist Marielle

Franco show that women* are decisive actors not only in feminist and LGBTQIA + movements but also environmentalist, peasant, anti-racist and anti-capitalist movements ... including at the cost of their lives. They are in our memories when we fight.

4. And in Belgium?

On March 8, 2019, Belgium joins the international movement with a first feminist national women*’s strike. The demands relate to pensions as well as equal pay, free and high quality public services, socialization and sharing of domestic tasks, non-sexist education, the development of feminist self-defence, free unrestricted access to abortion, listening to women* who have experienced violence, regularization of all undocumented people, dismantling of closed centres, ecological transition, stopping Belgium’s direct or indirect participation in military interventions, the recognition of Belgian colonial history, the freedom to love who we want, to move, to create and to have fun as we feel it.

As in many European countries, Belgium is currently marked by the political power of the racist neoliberal right. The fall of the government was not the result of a massive social mobilization that was needed since its formation in 2014, but around the signing of the UN Pact on Migration. [3] The result was immediately felt with the rebirth of a street far-right and a rally of more than 5,000 of them in Brussels on December 16th 2018. We know very well that migrants and/or non-white, and/or Muslim or Jewish and/or women* and/or trans and/or non-heterosexual people and/or trade unionists or radical left activists are directly targeted by the extreme right. Anti-fascist re-mobilization, particularly in Flanders, is essential before the federal and European elections on May 26.

At the same time, since January, the country has been shaken by the massive strikes (tens of thousands!) of high school students and students in higher education for climate. This incredible mobilization imposes the

ecological issue with the slogan “no climate, no future”. It is also a demonstration of the power of student strikes. Finally, several rallies and actions of *gilets jaunes* against the rise in fuel taxes and more widely against the cost of living have taken place in different parts of the country since November 16, 2018. At the beginning of the year, the unions finally woke up and a general strike will take place on February 13, 2019 to demand a real increase in wages.

The feminist women*’s strike is part of the landscape of all these mobilizations. Its organization into committees, with mobilization groups and monthly general meetings, revives the autonomous feminist movement. This movement strengthens anti-capitalist forces because its demands are incompatible with a logic of economic growth and profit. In addition, the strike by women* gives a new dimension to the strike, since it stops both productive and reproductive work, this work which is necessary for the workers to be “operational” on a daily basis to produce value for capitalism. Work stoppage, self-organization, the perspective of another society: the radical potential of this movement is obvious. It is giving a new impetus to a trade union movement currently in a strategic stalemate. The activity of many participants of Collectief 8 maars has already allowed several union federations to file a strike notice such as the CNE (hospitals, early childhood, cleaning, rest homes), the Centrale Générale de la FGTB (cleaning, service vouchers, nursing homes) and the CGSP-Brussels (public services, education, public hospitals, transport, nurseries). The entire CSC (a Christian union, all sectors combined) will also observe the strike but will not give notice.

The general demands of the Collectief 8 maars, will not be realized in a day. That is why the main goal of this first women*’s feminist strike is to allow us to come out of our isolation, denounce all the violence we suffer, ensure our self-defence and make visible all the work which we carry out on a daily basis and which goes well beyond paid work. This is the meaning of the slogan “if women* stop, the world stops!” And women* plan to stop.

5. How to organize for March 8?

Gauche anticapitaliste calls on all its members and supporters to participate in the actions of March 8! "In solidarity, each with their

possibilities, experience, demands and desires, make March 8, 2019 an intense day of struggle and liberation!"

Regarding the Prespes Agreement and the nationalist rallies

19 February 2019, by **OKDE-Spartakos**

The problem that the agreement is supposed to be solving is a problem created exclusively by Greece itself, on the basis of its economic intrusion into the Republic of M and its capability of exerting its economic and political coercion over the country, to the point of economic strangulation. [4] The Greek side emerges as the definitive winner, since it has managed to compel another state to change its constitutional name, which is something unprecedented in peace time, as the SYRIZA government boasts; and it has certified, once again, its key role in securing the domination and expansion of the imperialist economic and military institutions (EU, NATO) it takes part in.

The SYRIZA government is trying to present the agreement as a rational solution of a burning national issue, with mutual concessions and gains for both sides, and as a powerful blow to nationalism on either side of the border. In fact, though, both the content of the Agreement and the official rhetoric of the government officials and the prominent SYRIZA members leave no doubt about the supposed progressiveness of the Agreement. The government brags, on the one hand, that it has succeeded where all previous governments failed and, on the other, that it has fully implemented the national line determined by those previous governments, especially by the Karamanlis right-wing government and its notorious veto at the 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest. It is indicative that the adherents of the

Agreement support it in the name of the national interests as well as of the facilitation of Greek investments in the Republic of Macedonia. As for the argument that the admission of the Republic of Macedonia in the EU and the NATO will bring peace and prosperity to the Macedonian people, it is just not serious.

Of course, this is all inconceivable for the nationalist mob that has claimed the public space for itself since last year, against the supposed betrayal against Greece and the Greek part of Macedonia. Starting with the nationalist rallies of January and February 2018 in Athens and Thessaloniki and ending up to the rallies of this year (far less massive, nevertheless), a heap of human dust, including fascist organizations, formal and informal religious groups, nationalist unions, retired military officials, ridiculous dressed up Macedonian warriors and reactionary circles within parliamentary parties came out and tried to dominate the public discourse. Putting forward the aggressive irredentist moto "Macedonia is one and only and it's Greek", the extreme right rallies managed to gather some thousands, including some that don't really belong to the extreme right; but they certainly did not achieve their objective, since they remained far smaller than the respective rallies in the early 1990s. Nevertheless, the impact that the nationalist and populist discourse as well as the national myths have on certain popular strata, and the often violent attempt of the hit squads of the Golden Dawn (the Nazi party) and

other fascist gangs to massively go out to the streets again, enjoying some consensus too, meant increased duties for the internationalist antifascist movement. OKDE - Spartakos has highlighted those duties from the very beginning and struggled to undertake some of them, given its modest forces.

The bourgeois opposition in the Parliament aided and abetted the nationalist rallies and criticized the government in a cheap, old-fashioned, reactionary manner. This was not without contradictions, though. The parliamentary group of Potami (Liberals) was dissolved, torn between its pro-European neoliberalism, which dictated a vote for the agreement, and its flirt with the New Democracy (the largest right-wing party), which dictated a vote against. PASOK voted against the Agreement, but had to expel the Democratic Left, who voted for, from its Centre-left Alliance (KINAL). At the same time, the relationships between PASOK (Social Democrats) and the group of the former Prime Minister Papandreou (the one who introduced the 1st austerity pact in 2010) [5], who was also in favor of the Agreement, were tested. New Democracy was officially against the Agreement, but, in practice, a doublespeak was obvious among its deputies, with some of them trying to compete with the Golden Dawn in terms of nationalist paroxysm, and others only raising minor issues while supporting the basics of the Agreement, despite their vote against. It is no secret that a New Democracy government would have approved the same Agreement. However, in the opposition, New

Democracy chose to invest on an old fashioned ultra-nationalist rhetoric, despite the pressures of Merkel and the European People's Party (both the European People's Party and the Party of European Socialists supported the Agreement, as a means to enlarge the European Union).

On the occasion of the Prespes Agreement, but also reflecting deeper trends, the political set-up has been rearranged. The Independent Greeks (ANEL) [6] have officially left the government, objecting to the Agreement. However, SYRIZA was able to obtain a new majority in the Parliament and stay in power with the support of individual deputies from almost all bourgeois parties in the Parliament: Potami, Enosi Kentroon [7], New Democracy, and ANEL (whose parliamentary group was dissolved too). It seems that, after quite a lot of years, a new two-party system might be emerging (SYRIZA vs New Democracy), hoping to make the bourgeois political system restabilize.

It is anyway meaningful that both the adherents and those opposed to the Agreement are perfectly unanimous on the objective for economic intrusion of the big domestic capital in the Republic of Macedonia, against the rival bourgeois classes, as well as on the need to defend the "national interests" against the supposed foreign threats (which is practically the same thing). In face of the accusations by the opposition, thus, the supporters of the government insist that the Agreement is a response to the supposed irredentism of the neighbors, that it helps preserve "our" history, that it provides a protective shield against the nationalist plans of Albania and Bulgaria, and that it takes the Republic of Macedonia away from the influence of the main enemy, Turkey, which is, according to all, the biggest threat for "the country", that is, for Greek capitalists.

A special mention must be made of the issue of the Macedonian ethnicity, which the Agreement arguably recognizes, according to the bourgeois opposition. SYRIZA is right (and cynical enough) to answer that the term Macedonian/Citizen of North Macedonia in the Agreement only

refers to citizenship, and not to a particular ethnicity. According to its constitution, the Republic of Macedonia is a multinational state, with several officially recognized ethnic groups and minorities, where each citizen has the right to self-determination regarding their ethnicity. This is the legacy of the Yugoslavian Constitution of Tito. In Greece, this sounds inconceivable simply because it is the only state in the Balkans where no ethnic minority is recognized, thus identifying citizenship with the Greek ethnicity. This is exactly the biggest scandal about the Agreement: it wipes the Macedonian nation and ethnic community from the map, and SYRIZA is very proud of that. In SYRIZA, they obviously believe that the best way to fight nationalism is to make "rival" nations disappear. The second point on which the government and the bourgeois opposition are unanimous is the negation of the existence of a Macedonian minority in Greece. The Agreement concludes this issue once forever, thus consolidating the oppression and sanctioning the persecutions that ethnic Macedonian citizens have suffered by the Greek state for decades.

Unfortunately, the mainstream left opposition, both the parliamentary (KKE - the Communist Party of Greece) and the extra-parliamentary (Popular Unity) [8], share the same basic assumptions. They only emphasize on the role of NATO in imposing the Agreement, omitting the oppressive role of the Greek state. They equate "nationalism and irredentism" on both sides of the border, and, in effect, they reject the Agreement because, in their opinion, it does not adequately secure the Greek side. They deny the existence of the Macedonian nation, which is a striking contradiction with the very history of the Communist Party, which in the 1920s adopted the position for an independent Macedonian state and in the 1950s organized an autonomous Macedonian guerilla army within its ranks during the Greek civil war. The leadership of the Popular Unity even expressed their sympathy for the nationalist rallies, although they didn't dare to officially participate.

Against this background, as soon as

the Agreement was first proposed, OKDE-Spartakos determined a double task: to oppose the Agreement from an internationalist viewpoint; and to fight against the nationalist campaigns and rallies of the bourgeois opposition and the fascists. This required us to promote our internationalist positions as well as to claim the public space against the extreme right and the fascist groups. Last year, along with other internationalist and antifascist organizations, we took the initiative to organize an internationalist demonstration against the nationalist rally in Athens, on February the 4th. The demonstration was supported by several left and anarchist groups. Insisting on the position that the starting point to build an internationalist opposition to the Prespes Agreement is to recognize the Macedonian ethnic minority in Greece and the Republic of Macedonia under this very name, we organized a number of meetings and mobilizations in the context of our internationalist collaboration with other groups. We have also created links with the Macedonian left Party Levica and participated, along with other anticapitalist and revolutionary organizations, in a common international meeting in Skopje, to promote the fraternization of Macedonian and Greek workers.

Our view was, and still is, that the Agreement is not about a conflict between a supposedly progressive solution put forward by SYRIZA and the nationalist right-wing and fascist opposition. It is a conflict between the modernized and rationalized bourgeois nationalism of SYRIZA and its allies, on one hand, and the reactionary, old-fashioned and loud-mouthed nationalism of the oppositionist bourgeois parties. Our opposition to the Agreement is founded exactly on the role that the Greek state is playing both as an autonomous player and as an agent of its international imperialist allies.

The reappearance of the fascists in the streets made it necessary to organize a new internationalist demonstration in Athens, on January 20, to oppose the nationalist rally that was announced for that day. Our demonstration was successful and broke the monopoly of nationalists in

Athens downtown. A qualitative breakthrough in comparison with last year was the active involvement of ANTARSYA (the anticapitalist front in which OKDE-Spartakos participates) in the preparation and in the demonstration, which secured much broader participation. Let's remember that last year, ANTARSYA confined itself to a campaign of propaganda against any participation in the nationalist rallies (which was of course important in itself, since ANTARSYA was the only visible political force to do it, whereas the Popular Unity was ambivalent), to a mobilization for defending the offices of its organizations against possible fascist attacks during or after the nationalist rallies (necessary as well, but nevertheless not enough) and to a rather vague and passionless initiative of heterogeneous political groups which ended up with a declaration of hardly any political value. By

participating in the internationalist demonstration of January 20 this year, ANTARSYA has improved its influence in the antifascist and internationalist movement.

In contrast with had happened on January 20, in the mobilizations organized by KKE, the Popular Unity and other smaller groups for the day when the Agreement was initially supposed to be put to the vote in the Parliament (January 24) it was impossible to promote an internationalist political position (against the nationalist rallies and the extreme right mob, against the policy of the government, for the right of the Macedonian people to self-determination and maintain the constitutional name of their country, for the recognition of the Macedonian ethnic minority in Greece). The nationalist position of KKE and the Popular Unity made it impossible to

march with them. Realizing that it was impossible to change the character of these mobilizations, ANTARSYA made the correct choice to not participate, insisting on the internationalist profile built in the demonstration of January 20.

The fight against Greek nationalism and the imperialist ambitions of Greek capitalists in the Balkan and in the Eastern Mediterranean is crucial for the fraternization of the peoples and working classes of the broader area. It is also a precondition for the emancipation of the domestic working class, since a people that oppresses another can never be free either. It is, finally, a prerequisite for the defeat of the big imperialist institutions, the NATO and the EU, whose Greece aspires to be the official representative in the broader area.

OKDE-Spartakos, January 2019

Kashmir's agony, terror, occupation and repression

18 February 2019, by Lal Khan

On February 14th, a convoy of the Indian paramilitary police (CPRF) in Kashmir suffered a massive attack with a bomb-laden vehicle, killing 46 paramilitary personnel. The bomber was identified in a video as Adil Dar, a 22-year-old youth from a nearby village. Claimed by Jaish-e-Muhammad, an Islamist terror group, this suicide attack was the deadliest single targeted attack on Indian security forces since the latest episode of the upsurge in Kashmir began in 1989.

The immense coverage of this terror attack has completely eclipsed any news or analysis of the mass revolt against the occupation and repression perpetrated on the Kashmiris for generations. This incident once again illustrates that how the ruling class uses such acts of terror to justify the brutality and exploitation that has

inflicted intense agony on the ordinary Kashmiri people. Individual terrorism and sectarian violence become tools by which repressive bourgeois states divide the people and crush popular movements with state terrorism. The subcontinent's states have been fostering their respective religious fundamentalist groups for decades to serve their strategic and financial interests. Most of these sectarian groups are used to sabotage and undermine genuine national and class struggles.

Amid the hysterical outrage whipped up by the corporate media and with national elections coming up in April, India's Narendra Modi used jingoistic invective to promise a "jaw-breaking response". After a similar terror attack in 2016, Modi had already conducted revengeful "surgical strikes" across the Line of Control (LoC) in Kashmir.

This time, facing probable defeat in the coming national elections, the BJP's far-right communalist regime is likely to go for an even more vicious reaction, thus creating a dangerous confrontation between the two nuclear-armed adversary states of the South Asian subcontinent.

Relations between India and Pakistan have been increasingly jittery over the last few years. Political pundits on both sides of the Radcliff Line had been expecting a relaxation of these tensions following the impending Indian elections. While the Pakistan's deep state was signalling some thawing in relations, the Modi sarkar was behaving more adamantly – perhaps hoping for some similar terror incident which might give it a pretext to come out, guns blazing with chauvinistic rhetoric, to prop up Hindu bigotry and counter the impact

of the devastating anti-worker policies that it has inflicted upon the oppressed classes in India during its five years' rule.

After the attack, the Indian corporate media along with the politicians were quick to emphasise the Pakistani state's relations to Jaish-e-Muhammad, the group claiming responsibility for the attack. Jaish's leader is Masood Azhar, who was released from an Indian prison after Islamic terrorists had hijacked an Indian Airlines plane to Kandahar demanding his freedom in 1999. After release Azhar had then set up this religious outfit involved in sectarian and proxy terrorist acts. According to some reports, Masood Azhar is protected by the Pakistani deep state. In 2016 he had opened the new headquarters of the Jaish in his hometown Bahawalpur. India's foreign ministry has issued a statement accusing the Pakistani regime of propping up Masood Azhar "to carry out attacks in India and elsewhere with impunity." At the same time, Pakistan's "close friend" China has obstructed Indian efforts to get Azhar included on the UN Security Council's list of designated terrorists. However the Pakistani foreign ministry spokesman condemned the attack but rejected "insinuations" of any link to the Pakistani state.

The partition of the Indian subcontinent was the crime of the British imperialists in connivance with the native elites, political scions of the imperialist-grafted local ruling classes. After more than seven decades, the wounds of this bloodied partition are still festering. Kashmir was torn apart and occupied by the forces of both India and Pakistan. The promised plebiscite never took place and its resolutions still languish in the vaults of the UN. The ruling classes of the two adversary states use Kashmir as a political ploy and an external diversion to whip up nationalistic chauvinism and jingoistic rhetoric, suppress internal dissent and crush mass movements of youth and workers. It's the ordinary people of Kashmir that have suffered the most. Despite the agony and misery inflicted upon them, they have refused to be suppressed and bravely defied the aggression and state terrorism by the Indian state.

Their socio-economic and political predicament across the LoC in Pakistani-administered Kashmir has not been any better.

The mass movement that erupted in Kashmir in July 2016 openly defied the subjugation of the Indian state and its military – the fifth largest in the world. The upsurge also refuted the corporate media's portrayal of the movement as being religiously motivated. This struggle has been about the will and determination of Kashmir's oppressed people to achieve their national, social, economic and cultural emancipation.

An article on this uprising in Indian Express entitled "Sinking Valley" lays bare their situation: "Every element of Indian policy in Kashmir lies in tatters. The conflict seems to be going from a deep and violent conflict to a state where there seems to be a death wish all around. Security forces have no means to restore order other than by inflicting death. Indian nationalism is now more interested in showing machismo than solving real problems. There is an increasingly radicalised militancy with almost a touch of apocalyptic disregard for life. We are looking at a situation where our strategy of containment by force has failed, our political instruments are hollow, and there is a deepening death wish in the state. Kashmir is looking at an abyss."

External interference and terrorism have inflicted heavy blows against the indigenous movement of the Kashmiri masses spearheaded by the youth. With the failure of the UN and the other international institutions masquerading as peacekeepers and saviours of victims of tyranny, armed struggle has become an intrinsic part of the mass uprising. Various religious terror outfits sponsored by strategic interests have been trying to use this situation to the detriment of the movement. The Jaish has rebuilt its network and overtaken two rival religious outfits (Hizb ul Mujahideen and Lashkar-e-Taiba) in these terror activities. This February 14 attack is a mark of their growing activity. Some Kashmiri politicians have acknowledged that armed militancy has now attained a local base, and have pointed to the BJP's repressive

policy and security flaws as contributory factors in this attack. Sheikh Farooq Abdullah, the most prominent pro-India Kashmiri politician, has now come out with an outright rejection of the accusation that Pakistan is responsible for the security lapses and the intensification of the mass revolt. Ever since the installation of the Modi regime in 2014, its communal Hindu xenophobic policies have provoked the mass revolt even more.

"Terror-related incidents" in Jammu and Kashmir rose by 177% between 2014 and 2018, and deaths of armed forces personnel surged by 94%. Despite the military's claims of having killed more than 800 insurgents over the last five years, their numbers have been rising, mainly due to the defiance of local youth indignant at the continuing repression and discrimination. Pellets fired by the police have left hundreds blind and others severely injured. Such has been the resentment and political pressure of the movement on Kashmiri politicians that the BJP's former coalition government with the PDP fell and the toppled elected state government was replaced by direct dictatorial rule from Delhi. The main base and spur for the upsurge are the crippling socioeconomic deprivation, along with national oppression and religious discrimination. The Kashmir valley's severe and freezing winters have been made even harsher with the prolonged electricity cuts. It is ironic that Kashmir exports hydro-electricity to the rest of India, while its subjugated inhabitants are deprived of this basic necessity. The masses are aware and resentful of their treatment as a colonized people at the hands of the repressive Hindutva state with its callous imperial designs.

Successive wars between India and Pakistan have failed to resolve the conflict; a negotiated settlement has proved to be a non-starter. There is a new awareness on the part of the youth and ordinary people of Kashmir that the region's main states and their masters actually don't want to resolve the Kashmir issue. This "irritant" has become a vital element in their much-needed hostility and diplomatic jugglery. Through this hostility the top military brass of the regions armies

enjoys privileged positions, social honour, political hegemony and massive kickbacks in dollars through arms procurement deals with the military industrial complexes' of the imperialist masters. Above all, the ruling elites use this issue to whip up chauvinism by creating a 'state of war' even when they are unable to launch or fight an actual war. The reality is that these rulers can neither go to war nor sustain a durable peace.

The Kashmir issue is continuously oscillating from high to low "burners" and vice versa to engineer the theatrics of war and peace. These are contrived to confuse and distract the oppressed, deprived and exploited masses from the real issues of their existence. They use this chauvinistic nationalism to quell and distort the class struggle and perpetuate their odious rule. For generations this rule of capitalist coercion has brought misery to the region, which has the highest concentration of poverty in the

world. The Kashmiri masses have suffered the most bloodletting, atrocities and repression; yet they have revolted and fought with a valour that has given courage and inspiration to more than a billion and a half youth and the oppressed of the entire sub-continent. Paradoxically, it is these very youth and working classes of the region who are the real comrades in arms of the Kashmiri masses in the struggle to put an end to this system of tyranny and oppression. They are not likely to go to a full fledged war, but the Modi regime can launch more deep and intense surgical strikes or any other belligerent act to use this terror attack to further its games of hatred, extortion, plunder and war. As Lenin once remarked, "War is terrible - but it's terribly profitable."

This terrorist act can have negative impacts on the mass revolt in Kashmir. But the struggle of the Kashmiri masses shall not go in vain. Despite periodic temporary aberrations and travesties, the rulers cannot

disorientate or weaken this upsurge. It will re-emerge sooner rather than later. The crucial task is to link and unite this struggle to the movements of the workers and youth throughout the subcontinent. This is only possible if the struggle in Kashmir is recognised as an integral part of the class struggle throughout the region. In the coming period, these struggles of the students of the youth in Kashmir will kindle uprisings throughout India and Pakistan. A revolutionary victory of this class struggle with the overthrow of these coercive capitalist states in any of these countries will light the torch of revolution throughout the region. Such a successful outcome will lead to the formation of a voluntary socialist union of the South Asian sub-continent, in which the oppressed can live in a national, social and economic realm of genuine freedom and emancipation.

Sunday 17 February 2019

Gilets Jaunes: a popular movement of a new kind

17 February 2019, by Christine Poupin, Patrick Le Moal

Nonetheless, since the neoliberal turn of the 1980s, social struggles have multiplied in France. But these successive struggles, strike actions and mass demonstrations have only at best been able to limit the breadth of the destruction of the social conquests of the previous period and have not prevented a long series of defeats and social setbacks which have continued in recent months with the employment law which has unravelled a part of the Employment Code, the privatisation of the SNCF and the destruction of the status of rail workers.

There months ago, we sought in vain to break this spiral and defeat the new pensions counter-reform planned by

Macron for 2019. Today the breadth and the radical determination of the Gilets Jaunes movement, a social movement which is impetuous, inventive and uncontrollable, has modified the relationship of forces, perceptibly transforming the social and political situation in France.

Whatever happens next, it has already destabilised the Macron government, at least temporarily halting its crazed race towards counter reforms. It seems that some reforms will be indefinitely postponed in the areas of pensions, health and the civil service.

An enduring movement

For more than 2 months this movement has endured, respecting neither the end of year truce nor the national union following the attack on the Christmas market in Strasbourg in December. 2018 The movement began with the signature of a petition which spread like wildfire on the social networks. It thus developed outside of any political or trade union framework. In November the blockades of roundabouts on highways began. Crossroads just outside of towns were targeted to disturb

economic functioning and hinder lorry traffic. Some hundreds of thousands of Gilets Jaunes (at least 300,000) participated in around 2,500 blockades.

From Saturday November 17, 2018, unauthorised demonstrations which were not coordinated with the police brought hundreds of thousands of participants out every week. In Paris, in the wealthy neighbourhoods, the offices of government ministries, the sites of power which the demonstrations of the workers' movement don't go to and in the city centres. The police repression against these demonstrations has been growing. On December 1, 2018 the symbolic Arc de Triomphe was tagged and defaced during very violent confrontations, in Puy-en-Velay the prefecture was set on fire and the airports in Nice and Nantes were blockaded. On December 8, the government wanted to send a message, mobilising 85,000 police officers with a military arsenal and tanks, and making more than 2,000 "preventive" arrests without stopping the demonstrations in the streets of Paris and most of the big cities.

Since this date, repression has prevented the Gilets Jaunes from demonstrating en masse in Paris, but not in the rest of the country. Even if the number of demonstrators has fallen since mid-December, it has remained at a very high level every Saturday. The movement is still present and mobilising tens of thousands of very determined people. Yet the government has done everything to break the mobilisation, with an unprecedented police and legal repression, while conceding a little and opening a simulation of debate to seek to isolate the Gilets Jaunes politically from the rest of the population.

After the demonstration of December 1, it announced the cancellation of the fuel tax increase which had been at the origin of the protest, but it was too little too late. After the demonstration of December 8, it made announcements according to the general principle of "I am giving you a present, but it's you who pays". They are all financed by taxation, without a single euro being taken from the rich

and the bosses: an increase of €100 per month for employees on the minimum wage "without this costing their employer anything", an end of year bonus in enterprises (at the choice of the employers), the return of the tax exemption on overtime, the cancellation of the increase in a tax which helps finance social security for pensioners whose income is less than €2,000 and so on. It's a trick, but symbolically they have retreated!

Until March 15, 2019 a "Grand Débat" has been organised, where everyone can express themselves in their neighbourhood or on the internet. This debate is entirely steered and locked down, with closed questions of the type "what taxes should be lowered", "should some public services be suppressed", "how should the ecological transition be financed: by levies, by taxes? and so on" etc. and open questions of the "keep talking" type! Although this fraud has not fooled the Gilets Jaunes, it allows a mobilisation of the media and gives more space to the discourse of the government and Macron.

The repression against the "dangerous classes" has reached an unprecedented level, based on the security laws originating from the state of emergency established during the terrorist attacks and deploying an unparalleled level of police violence. There have been thousands of arrests, sometimes preventive as on December 8 in Paris, thousands of bans on demonstrations in certain towns, hundreds of convictions and prison sentences of several months, indeed several years, mostly during expeditious procedures. An 80-year-old woman has been killed by a tear gas grenade, while hundreds of demonstrators have been seriously injured: 4 people have had a hand torn off by grenades, 20 persons have been hurt by flash-balls and stinger grenades, dozens wounded by fragments of explosive grenades, hundreds molested. Tens of thousands of non-violent demonstrators have been compared (by Macron) to a "hateful mob". The government demands the adoption of a new hyper-repressive "anti - looters" law.

Here again, the Gilets Jaunes movement has changed the situation.

The Macron government, like that of Hollande, has used and abused repression as a political weapon: generalisation of the measures originating from the state of emergency, repression and criminalisation, generalisation of the methods applied to the popular neighbourhoods and immigrants in all the social and political expressions with the media focusing on scenes of confrontation to undermine the mobilisations. But the scenes of violence have not reduced the tacit support of the population for the Gilets Jaunes movement: it is the police who are seen as largely responsible for the violence. And a mobilisation has begun against the use of flash-balls (the last resort before real bullets) and explosive grenades, supported by human rights organisations. The multiplication of complaints and investigations is weakening the government's repressive policy.

Who are the Gilets Jaunes?

The movement has made visible those who have been made invisible, bearing witness to the condescending paternalism, indeed the class contempt of the media and the dominant which has been openly expressed towards this mobilisation without representatives or the spokespersons so important to the political-media world. It is a movement of workers, employees, the unemployed, the precarious, pensioners, artisans, micro-entrepreneurs... For half of them it is their first mobilisation, while others are sometimes former or current trades unionists, especially among the retired.

Nearly half of them are women. They are not the poorest sectors, but modest layers who mostly own a car and live in the popular neighbourhoods of the towns and the rural and peripheral deserts: there are hardly any Gilets Jaunes in the big cities and notably in Paris. When the Gilets Jaunes demonstrate in the city centres, it is in spaces which are not familiar to them.

Every day 17 million people go to work outside of their municipality of residence, 14 million of them having to use their personal vehicle, joining the inhabitants of the small towns forgotten by metropolization, where jobs are increasingly rare as 80% of jobs created are in the 15 biggest cities. Spatial segregation has relegated them still further, in the neighbourhoods, the small towns distant from the big conurbations, places deprived of any public service, of everything needed to live properly. They have to work hard in increasingly difficult conditions, but find it hard to make both ends meet, to live decently, with dignity. They experience a downgrading and in addition to this are subject to the mockery of the élites!

They speak up, denounce the growing inequalities, the difficulties of their everyday life, and the contempt and arrogance of the dominant. This popular exasperation has an obvious class character, which explains its popularity in all layers of the popular classes. Because it is a profound social movement coming from a part of the class of the exploited and oppressed as it is today in France. A class which is fragmented and rendered precarious, with various statuses. The majority of the employees who are in this mobilisation do not have contact with #trade union organisations, strikes, or collective defence. When a worker becomes self-employed because they can no longer bear the hierarchy, or because they can't find a job, they find themselves alongside artisans who are strangled by the banks and the big groups. All of them live in the same neighbourhoods, the same zones, the same conditions of relative relegation, the same grind.

What demands?

The mobilisation began from the rejection of a new increase in the carbon tax on fuels, which was socially unjust and ineffective at the ecological level. The anti-tax character which seemed to dominate at the beginning and the attempts at instrumentalization by the far right were relativized by the specific dynamic of the movement, which broadened considerably: fuel taxes

were only "the straw that broke the camel's back". The reject of injustice has provoked a movement towards a more global social opposition. The point of departure was then quickly overtaken by the drawing up of a set of demands, going beyond the denunciation of tax injustices to the rejection of governmental measures, and advancing offensive demands.

We cannot reduce popular aspirations to purely material demands, even if they are certainly present. There is in the speed and depth of a mobilisation which rejects state arbitrariness and the denial of democracy, the expression of a profound emotion, well beyond material demands alone, which seek to translate into figures this rejection of injustice. They are "fed up" with the contempt of the powerful, can no longer bear the humiliation which is forced on them by society and particularly president Macron.

What are the demands of the movement?

- Against an unjust tax system: the rich enjoy tax breaks like the suppression of the wealth tax (ISF) while the public services are in a poor indeed inaccessible state. Tax evasion should be punished, and each should contribute according to their means.

- Against the accumulation of attacks against purchasing power and the retired, expressing the moral imperative that the weakest should be protected, that workers are paid fairly, that solidarity functions, that public services are ensured.

- Rejection of the contempt of the powerful and humiliation - the demand for dignity and respect explain the focusing against Macron. He represents the oligarchy, he is the president of the rich who, through his haughty and contemptuous exercise of power, incarnates a policy of inequality, a world of superiors and inferiors. "Macron resign" is thus the most popular slogan everywhere!

- The discredit of the political system

and elected representatives as well as the will to find means to make themselves heard and to place at the centre the demand for a real democracy, which is not reduced to the right to vote. This is the meaning of the demand for the citizens' initiative referendum (RIC). In the anger against injustice and the dominant, in the solidarity of the dominated seeking to build a new political expression.

- With this the political dimension, the experience of meeting places, of social and friendship links which break with isolation, individualisation and solitude.

Reaction to the neoliberal offensive

The Gilets Jaunes movement is the reaction of a part of the popular classes to four decades of neoliberal offensive which has amplified and deepened social inequalities. The dominant class has failed to maintain its leading role, its authority: it can no longer impose consent on the exploited and oppressed. Macron had benefited when elected from the discrediting of the political parties who had led neoliberal policies since the 1980s. His project of an ultra-neoliberal policy in the framework of an authoritarian political regime today comes up against a sizable obstacle: the reaction of its victims!

Since his election, he has implemented policies which amplify the neoliberal politics of previous governments. He wished to impose often-postponed neoliberal reforms through ostentatious use of the monarchical institutions of the Fifth Republic. [9] Surrounded by political personnel in his own image, he ruled out any discussion of compromise with the parties and trade unions. For this oligarchy, democracy is a waste of time, in extreme cases consultations might be envisaged, but never negotiations.

The Gilets Jaunes movement opposes unjust policies and the government and president deemed responsible for

them but does not target the employers or capitalist exploitation as such. It calls for a reparation of the most flagrant injustices. As Samuel Hayat has written: "Their list of social demands is the formulation of essentially moral economic principles: it is imperative that the most fragile (the homeless, the disabled and so on) are protected, that workers are properly paid, that solidarity works, that public services are provided, tax evaders are punished... This is surely what gives strength to the movement, and its massive support in the population: it articulates, in the form of social demands, principles of moral economy that the current regime has attacked explicitly, or even boasted about. From this, the coherence of the movement is better understood, as is the fact that it was able to do without centralized organizations". [10]

The dynamic of the movement has followed its course without the political and trade union organisations playing a role. This movement has confronted the government full on, but also the trade union and political leaders! The contrast has been stark between the massive support of the population, primarily the popular classes and the caricature made in many left circles. But in the workplaces, while employees massively supported the movement, there is not for now any contagion in the form of strike action, even when unionists and radical activists have sought to mobilise for this.

If the leaders of France insoumise, like Jean-Luc Mélenchon or François Ruffin, like Olivier Besancenot of the Nouveau parti anticapitaliste (NPA) have supported the movement, all the big trade union organisations, not only the CFDT and FO but also the CGT, refused to support the demonstrations. On the ground, some union and activist structures have given their support and called for participation in the actions of the gilets jaunes. The absence of unitary reaction from the trade union organisations to the violent repression and arrests of December 1st and 8th, for example in the form of a day of strike action with demonstrations across France, was a missed opportunity to show support for members of the popular classes in

struggle.

The situation began to change In January: in numerous towns, the trade union "gilets rouges" were increasingly present and accepted in the demonstrations. And when the CGT alone called, albeit tardily, for a 24-hour strike on Tuesday February 5, significant sectors of the Gilets Jaunes called for it to be made a "renewable general strike". This was reflected by demonstrations more numerous than those of the Gilets Jaunes alone or of the trade union organisations alone. For those who participated in these demonstrations the convergence was real and with a real joy at being together. Also, this coming together showed a certain resistance to the most reactionary currents. However, we are a long way from a 24-hour general strike, let alone a renewable strike. There is for now no qualitative change in the mobilisation of other sectors of the popular classes.

A product of successive defeats for the social movement

The movement also directly questions the trade union movement on the (in)effectiveness of its modes of action. The existence of the gilets jaunes is the product of the succession of defeats of the social movement in recent years in France. Their novelty, tenacity and successes cruelly highlight the limits of the struggles of recent years. In the period of the post war boom, the class conflict was a form of link inside society: the capitalists negotiated with the workers' movement over social security, pensions management, professional training and so on. For the neoliberals, as Thatcher put it, "there is no such thing as society", there are individuals and the market. Exit the trade union movement. The state is the guarantor of competition and when it is necessary, as it increasingly is, it ensures repression.

The policies pursued by the capitalists of economic restructuring have reduced the capacity of blockade of

the economy by strikes in the workplace. The industrial groups are increasingly large and internationalized with increasingly small units of production, dispersed by subcontracting. Only 34% of employees work in enterprises employing more than 500 persons and a good part of these are in workplaces of smaller size. With some rare notable exceptions (refineries, transport and so on) employees do not feel that their strike will be effective. Increasingly, working conditions - with the explosion of precarious work - and workplace activism with the effects of the law on staff representation - have changed. If we add the unemployed and the self-employed, the sector of the exploited and oppressed who are in contact with trade union organisations is increasingly limited.

The recent national mobilisations (pensions, employment law) saw a succession of demonstrations, sometimes very powerful, mobilising millions of people, but incapable of doing more than allowing a counting of the numbers of the discontented. We are no longer in the period where the power of demonstrations carries the threat of another level of confrontation. Today these union demonstrations are, on the contrary (including when they are massive), the mark of impotence. We demonstrate because we have no other means of effective pressure. Also, the political organisations no longer structure employees at the workplaces and have only an electoral relation with the popular classes, that is a very distant one!

The appearance of the Gilets Jaunes, after that of Nuits Debout, outside of the old frameworks, highlights the externality of the organised social movement with respect to many sectors of the popular layers in which these organisations no longer have any implantation. The Nuit Debout movement, although limited in France, had mobilised other social layers, urban youth, more educated, more inclined to debate, although also outside the organised social movement, who sought to change the relationship of forces by the occupation of town squares. There was in this movement as in that of the

Gilets Jaunes a rejection of all the organisations who seemed useless, indeed harmful, in any case not adapted to the situation, not responding to the needs of the dominated. This externality also affects the existing associations who are not perceived as natural representatives of those who want to take action. Thus #citizens' appeals to feminist (#Metoo) or ecologist (#ilestencoretemps) mobilisations have multiplied.

The movement of Gilets Jaunes also highlights the fact that the workplaces are no longer the centre of organisation of class confrontation. It has sought and found other places (roundabouts), other tools (the social networks), other forms (blockades, undeclared demonstrations), and other targets (the wealthier neighbourhoods, the sites of governmental power).

Horizontal self-organisation

What acerbic comments have been made on a movement which is not capable of having representatives! No representatives does not necessarily mean no organisation, debates or democracy. These sectors of the popular classes have built collectives, have sought to come together outside of the workplaces, in public spaces like the roundabouts and highway toll booths. What is completely unexpected is the dimension of national importance of a spontaneous movement which has developed simultaneously everywhere through thousands of local coordinated actions. The social networks have linked individuals who don't know each other, in a manner which is quite horizontal and egalitarian, although mediated by the algorithms of the said social networks. But the power of social networks alone cannot explain the breadth of the movement.

Little by little, it is around these roundabout groups that the movement has spontaneously organised. Where they have lasted, groups have been created under the most diverse forms: from the group which meets regularly, decides by majority vote after

debating its actions, and also has a public expression, to the sector which decides without any debate and those who are there, sometimes with a self-proclaimed leader. Sometimes one or several roundabouts designate a spokesperson. Each group decides by itself what its rules will be, here the far right excludes an anti-capitalist activist, elsewhere it is the opposite! For common actions, the basics are decided on the social networks. A group makes a proposal, for example the occupation of a shopping centre, sends the information on social networks, the others react, or not. The action takes place if there are enough people.

The weekly Saturday demonstrations are increasingly joined by other participants, sometimes trades unionists. During these demonstrations, the route is decided by informal consensus (when it is not imposed by reaction to police offensives). It is a movement where everybody decides what they do, most often in tacit agreement with their group. For most participants, including those who are union members, and have participated in strikes, it is the first time that they have decided and acted thus by themselves.

Obviously, this absence of structuring allows different manoeuvres, both personal and in terms of the far right groups. If the far right is not dominant in the movement, as shown by the fact that it has not succeeded in imposing the anti-immigrant theme, it is all the same present at certain roundabouts and in the demonstrations. In the latter, the absence of any democratic structuring allows small groups to organise operations like that of the demonstration of December 1 in Paris, or the attack against the NPA contingent on January 26, 2019. Globally the surveys indicate that a third of participants declare themselves "apolitical", neither right nor left, and among those who take a position, more than 40% identify as left, 15% far left, less than 15% on the right and around 5% on the far right.

The desire of the Gilets Jaunes to be in control of their decisions and actions at the local level has undoubtedly rooted the movement and contributed

to its success. But it needs to be coordinated at the regional and national level. The maturing of the movement has not so far produced any democratic structuring. The beginnings of national structuring through the Assembly of Assemblies at the initiative of the group in Commercy are positive, but still limited. The meeting held on January 27, 2019 brought together 350 people, but only about 60 mandated delegates from roundabouts/groups/local assemblies, and about 20 observer delegations, not counting individual participants and journalists.

The absence of a democratic national debate reinforces one of the constitutive features of the movement: the imperative of unanimity. Demands are advanced which can immediately gain a consensus. The citizens' initiative referendum (RIC) is a typical example, points that are likely to divide are side-lined. The desire for a homogeneous people without divisions leads to denying the political dimension of its action. Cleavages, contradictions are repressed. But there are debates between various options. For example, there is an option more open to negotiation, a "dégagiste" option (simply getting rid of the existing regime without stating what should take its place), an electoral option that calls for the formation of a political movement in the fashion of the Italian "5-star" movement, which for the moment has not taken on. Finally, national-identitarian options can also take root.

Overcoming the rejection of political debate is one of the key issues. The "people" is neither homogeneous nor unanimous, it is traversed by divergent interests and opinions. It is the disappearance of oppression and exploitation that will allow equality and social justice, not the negation of their existence. Oppressions are not soluble in the invocation of a "people", fighting them requires the self-organization of those concerned. Far from suppressing politics, direct democracy can express different social choices. We must accept the political antagonism, the conflict, which is necessary for democracy.

The movement has advanced some debates

On the issues of ecology and climate change. While we are witnessing the development of the climate movement - regular and numerous climate marches since September, with the success of the petition "l'affaire du siècle", supporting legal action against the French government for its inaction on climate change, which has received more than 2 million signatures. The increase of the carbon tax on fuels has appeared for what it is: unfair socially (like other indirect taxes that penalize the poor more than the rich) and ecologically inefficient. The moralization/punishment of the use of the car is ineffective while the car is imposed by the entire organization of work, housing, public services. Capitalism is not content to exploit labour power but structures time and living spaces, shaped by the car, land speculation, social and economic organization centred around some major cities in the context of neoliberal globalization.

This spatial segregation has been highlighted by those who are forgotten and sacrificed, deprived of public services and all that is necessary to live properly. The indispensable link between social justice and climate justice has moved forward, in the slogans of the climate marches and the concerns of the environmental movement.

The place of women: Many are surprised by their strong presence, which contrasts with their low visibility in trade union and political action. Their mobilization reveals that they are the majority of the working

poor, part-time, precarious, poor pensioners and so on. It shatters the invisibility of this part of the proletariat, responsible for most work in care, in health, in personal services and so on. They are little recognized, poorly paid, with difficult working conditions, many raise their children alone. The demands do not only concern work and wages, but also everything that makes up life, such as housing, transport and access to public services - issues that women are mainly concerned with and that are not taken up by trades unionism.

And now?

This huge upheaval opens new possibilities ... but nothing is written in advance. There is a difference between the most mobilized segment (up to 500,000 people) and what is happening politically in the rest of the population. The deep trend of the rise of the extreme right is not reversed, on the contrary. The evolution in the confrontation has an anti-Macron dynamic, questioning neoliberal capitalist choices, but the current political dynamic is such that movements of this type can also benefit the extreme right: the movement cannot itself alone resolve these debates spontaneously. While the far right can take advantage of the Gilet Jaunes movement, it would be wrong to think that it is the movement that strengthens the far right.

The few hundred thousand Gilet Jaunes supported by the vast majority of the population have managed to destabilize Macron and his government, but it is clear that to make it give way, it is necessary to set in motion the other layers of the exploited and oppressed, those who, if they support this movement, have not themselves taken action. It is not

enough to say "convergence" to unify all anger, and above all it cannot be done under a single banner, even that of the Gilets Jaunes which has shown its effectiveness. This unity in action of the exploited and oppressed can only be achieved in the cross-fertilization of forms of organization and means of action, in the recognition that there is no homogeneous people, but that oppressions, dominations (gender, class, race) require the self-organization of those concerned to fight them.

We live in an unprecedented situation with an impetuous, inventive and uncontrollable social movement. In extremis, we finally celebrate by struggle the 50th anniversary of May 68, with this mobilization of Gilets Jaunes whose characteristics show how much the conditions of class struggles have changed over the past 50 years. It's an upheaval, we have entered the 21st century! But, if the current movement has created a major political crisis, we are far from inverting the fundamental dynamics of the period, that of "the possibility of fascism", inscribed in the global relationship of forces.

This new wave of mobilization again shows the glaring absence of a political expression of the exploited and oppressed and of a useful political tool for their daily action. Such an activist collective, network, organization can only be built around an emancipatory project, from a political perspective, which must be developed from the demands for social justice, redistribution of wealth and democracy. From real movements, from collectives to movements, rethinking democratic forms of organization ... this is more than ever the task of anti-capitalists, revolutionaries, and those who want to end exploitation and oppression.

Letter from Zapatistas to Women Who Fight All Over the World

16 February 2019

Sister, comrade:

What we want to say or warn you is a little sad because we tell you that we will not be able to hold the Second International Meeting of Women Who Fight, here in our Zapatista lands, this March 2019.

Well it turns out that the new bad governments already said it clearly that they are going to do their megaprojects of the big capitalists. From the Mayan Train, from the plan for the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, from planting trees for wood and fruit merchandise. They also said that mining companies and large food companies will enter. And there is also an agrarian plan that will attempt to destroy us original peoples, by converting our lands into merchandise. They want to complete what Carlos Salinas de Gortari could not accomplish because we stopped him with our uprising.

These projects are destruction. It does not matter how much they want to cover it up with their lies. The truth is that they go for everything against the original peoples, their communities, their lands, their mountains, their rivers, their animals, their plants and even their stones.

So not only do they go against us Zapatistas, but against all the women who say they are indigenous. And then also against men, but right now we are talking about women.

They want our lands to no longer be for us, but for tourists to come and take a walk and have their big hotels and their great restaurants, and the businesses that are needed for tourists to have those luxuries.

They want our lands to become farms that produce precious woods, fruits and water; mines to extract the gold, the silver, the uranium, and all the minerals that there are and that the capitalists want.

They want us to become their peons, their servants, to sell our dignity for a

few coins a month.

Those capitalists, and those who obey them in the new bad governments, think that what we want is money.

They cannot understand that we want freedom; they do not understand that the little we have achieved is fighting without photos, without interviews, without books, without consultations, without polls, without voting, without museums and without lies.

They do not understand that what they call "progress" is a lie, that they cannot even take care of the safety of women, who continue to be beaten, raped and murdered in their progressive or reactionary worlds.

How many women have been killed in these progressive or reactionary worlds while you read these words, comrade, sister?

Maybe you know it, but of course we tell you that here, in Zapatista territory, not a single woman has been killed in many years. But yes, they say that we are the backward, the ignorant, the little thing.

Maybe we do not know what the best feminism is, maybe we do not know how the words change, or what is gender equality. And it is not even fair that they say "gender equality," because they only speak of the equity of women and men, and even we, who they call ignorant and backward, we know well that there are people who are neither men nor women, who we call "otroas," but who can call themselves as they please, and it has not been easy for them to gain that right to be who they are without hiding, because they are mocked, persecuted, violated, murdered. Are we still going to force them to be either men or women? If those people do not want to do it, it is done badly if they are not respected. How can we complain that they do not respect us as women if we do not respect those people? But hey, maybe it's because we talk about what we've looked at from other worlds and we do not have

much knowledge of those things.

What we do know is that we fight for our freedom and that we now have to fight to defend it, so that the story of our grandmothers' pain will not be suffered by our daughters and granddaughters.

We have to fight so that history does not repeat itself and we return to the world of only making food and giving birth to children, to see them later on growing up in humiliation, contempt and death.

We did not take up arms to return to the same thing.

We have not been resisting for 25 years now to serve the tourists, the bosses, the foremen.

We will not stop being promoters of education, health, culture to now become employees in hotels and restaurants, serving strangers for a few pesos. It does not matter if there are many or a few pesos, what matters is that our dignity has no price.

Because that's what they want, comrade, sister, that in our own land, we become slaves who receive alms for letting them destroy the community.

Comrade, sister:

When you arrived in these mountains for the 2018 meeting, we saw that you looked at us with respect, and sometimes with admiration. Although not everyone came like this, because we know that there are people who came to criticize us and look badly at us. But that does not matter because we know that the world is big and there are many thoughts and some people understand that we cannot all do the same thing, and some do not understand.

And we do not want you to now look at us with sorrow or pity, like servants who are given orders in a good or bad way; or like those who are bargained with for the price of their product,

sometimes crafts, sometimes fruits or vegetables, sometimes whatever, as women capitalists do. But when they go shopping at their shopping centers they do not bargain, but they pay what the capitalists say and they even get happy.

No comrade, sister. We are going to fight with everything and with all our strength against these megaprojects. If they conquer these lands, it will be by the blood of the Zapatistas.

This is what we have thought and we will do so.

Suddenly these new bad governments think or believe that, as we are women, we will quickly lower our heads, obedient to the boss and his new foremen, because what we are looking for is a good employer and a good pay.

But no, what we want is the freedom that nobody gave us, but we conquer it, fighting even with our blood.

Do you think that when the forces of the new bad governments come, their paramilitaries, their national guards, we will receive them with honors, with gratitude, with joy?

No, no matter what, we will receive them fighting and see if they learn that Zapatista women do not sell, and do not give up.

Now it is not safe anymore, because we know that capitalism comes for everything and wants it no matter at what cost. And they are going to do it because they feel that many people support them and that they can commit atrocities and people are still going to applaud them. And they are

going to attack us and check their polls to see if they have good points and so on until they finish us.

While we are writing this letter, the attacks of your paramilitaries have already begun. They are the same as before: the PRI, then the PAN, then the PRD, then the PVEM and now they are from MORENA.

Comrade, sister:

Do not stop fighting. Even if those damned capitalists and their new bad governments get away with it and annihilate us, then you have to keep fighting in your world.

Because we agreed in the meeting that we are going to fight, so that not a single woman in any corner of the world is afraid of being a woman.

Your corner is your corner, comrade and sister, and it's your turn, as we are here in Zapatista lands.

These new bad governments think that they will easily defeat us, that we are few and that no one supports us in other worlds.

But no matter what, comrade and sister, even if only one of us remains, that one will fight to defend our freedom.

And we are not afraid, comrade and sister.

If we were not afraid more than 25 years ago when nobody looked at us, then less now that you looked at us.

Comrade, sister:

Take care of the small light that we

give to you.

Do not let it go out.

Even if ours is extinguished here with our blood, and even if it goes out in other places, you take care of yours because, although times are difficult now, we have to remain who we are, and we are women who fight.

Well, that's all companion and sister. The summary is that we are not going to hold the meeting, so we are not going to participate.

And if you do the meeting in your world and they ask you where the Zapatistas are, why do they not come, tell them the truth, tell them that the Zapatistas are fighting in their corner for their freedom as women.

That's all, take care of your comrades and sisters.

Maybe they tell you not to think about the Zapatistas because they are over now, that there are no more Zapatistas.

But when you think that that they already defeated us, without you noticing, you will see that we look at you and that one of us approaches and asks you in your ear, so that only you listen: "Where is your little light? What did we give you?"

From the mountains of the Mexican southeast.

The Zapatista Women, February 2019.

Originally found at [Enlace Zapatista](#).

Translation from [Abolition Media Worldwide](#).

Palestine on a Precipice

15 February 2019, by **Toufic Haddad**

In typical bombastic fashion, the Trump administration has taken a series of policy steps that appear to radically shift traditional U.S.

positions regarding the "Israel-Palestine conflict," resulting in direct financial and diplomatic pressures on the Palestinian movement.

While the true nature of these shifts is not evident without appreciating the broader arc of U.S. engagement, these measures nonetheless further

embolden Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and effectively green-light”and even turbo-boost”the revisionist Zionist agenda he has led for the past eleven years in power.

Adding to these blows are a series of longer-standing dynamics that further weaken Palestinian strategic positioning. These include the ebbs and flows of the region’s post-2010 revolutionary/counter-revolutionary currents, which have sidelined the Palestinian issue, leading to less political and financial interest from donor states and the world at large; the abandonment of non-normalization norms by increasing numbers of Arab (particularly Gulf) states vis-à-vis Israel, as survivalist instincts and anti-Iranian fixations consume them; and the internal Palestinian geopolitical divide between the Fateh-governed West Bank and the Hamas-governed Gaza Strip, greatly complicating the formulation of a unified Palestinian institutional and political position capable of overcoming the grave contemporary and historical predicaments that Palestinians face.

The combined effect of these trends places the Palestinians”people and leadership alike”in an unenviable and complex position of historic vulnerability, insufficiently recognized, but not to be underestimated.

While disorientation and demoralization may be natural consequences of these trends, the situation is actually too dire locally and globally to allow a loss of focus or heart.

Alternatively, and as this article will argue, significant opportunities have actually opened up within these dynamics, allowing for real advances toward progressive causes, including in and *through* Palestine.

This article will attempt to unpack these entanglements with an eye toward informing progressive audiences and invoking debate, organizing, and action.

Trump on a Rampage

In a relatively short amount of time, the Trump administration has shifted a series of traditional U.S. positions vis-à-vis the “Israel-Palestine conflict.”

These shifts include the moving of the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem; the withholding of all funds to the Palestinian Authority (PA), excepting to its security services; the closing of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Mission in Washington DC; and the cancelling of annual funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), which has been providing health and educational services to millions of Palestinian refugees in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) and regionally since 1949.

While the rapid succession of these shifts indeed makes them appear radical in nature, a sober historical assessment reveals a more complex picture.

The formal relocation of the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem, for example, represents a public acknowledgment (hardly hidden) of the truly bipartisan U.S. support for Israel’s annexation of the city. It also simultaneously removes any pretense that the United States constitutes an honest broker regarding Israeli-Palestinian “final status” issues, of which the fate of Jerusalem is one.

Ever since the passage of the 1995 U.S. Embassy Act, both the U.S. House and Senate have overwhelmingly recognized Jerusalem as Israel’s “eternal and undivided capital,” despite the fact that Israel’s occupation, annexation, and colonization of the city represent clear breaches of international law and were opposed by Washington in earlier years.

While all presidents since Clinton have publicly supported the principle of Jerusalem as Israel’s “eternal undivided capital,” they nonetheless withheld the embassy’s final transfer citing national security concerns.

Keeping the embassy in Tel Aviv was considered a nod of appeasement to the broader Muslim world and pro-U.S. Arab allies (inappropriately referred to as the “moderate Arab regimes””Jordan, the Gulf Cooperation Council states, Egypt, and Morocco), allowing them to maintain close U.S. ties despite congressional recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital.

Trump’s decision to move the embassy thus aligns an existing, public, two-decade-old U.S. political position with operational reality, simultaneously removing pretenses that allowed for the coexistence of seemingly contradictory positions.

Removing More Cosmetic Pretenses While Tightening the Rope

U.S. cuts in non-security-sector Palestinian aid also echo the theme of removing cosmetic pretenses surrounding American imperial agendas.

This aid, which totaled \$230 million in 2018, will now be “reprogrammed” to other hitherto undisclosed priorities.

Non-security-sector U.S. aid to the PA used to ensure the buoyancy of Fateh as the animating political entity within it. This aid came in the form of budget support (subsidizing PA operating costs and debt), together with funding for developing and running certain infrastructure projects (particularly water and roads”often alternative networks needed because Israel closed off roads to Palestinian access). It also used to support Palestinian “private sector development,” which can be read as code for indirectly supporting Fateh’s businesspeople, who inevitably used to enjoy the lion’s share of these economic perks.

By reprogramming this aid, however, while retaining its security dimensions, the United States has decided to tighten the rope around Fateh: In one swoop it weakens the

ability of Fateh to create and retain economic loyalists, while also strengthening the security networks within the PA that Washington views as vital to controlling the West Bank in a post-Mahmoud Abbas era.

The U.S. shift thus speaks to the squeezing of Fateh while aligning the public spectacle of U.S. diplomacy with the *actual and historically consistent* position of U.S. imperialism toward the Palestinians—namely, that the United States unequivocally opposes Palestinian self-determination, sovereignty, or statehood *anywhere*, and that the PA should be prevented from means that could enable it to realize sovereignty. From this U.S. view, the PA's role should be delimited effectively to that of an apparatus capable of administering constrained Palestinian autonomy while serving subcontracted Israeli security and governance interests. The persistence or existence of *any* genuine democratic or national dimensions to PA activity contradicts the reasons for its founding, and hence is summarily opposed by the United States and Israel.

Turning Back the Clock, Liquidating the Cause

When we analyze the final two major steps taken by Trump against the Palestinians, and combine them with the others, a sinister image of Trump's agenda emerges.

The shuttering of the PLO mission in Washington DC effectively turns the political clock back to the days before the Oslo Accord, when the United States refused to acknowledge or accept independent Palestinian representation. Before 1993, the United States designated the PLO as a "terrorist entity," and attempted to enforce Jordanian suzerainty over Palestinian affairs. Today the issue of enforcing Jordanian suzerainty is back on the table, as floated by Jared Kushner and U.S. Middle East Envoy Jason Greenblatt in September 2018.

Whether Trump actually believes he can turn history that far back is

ultimately less important than the fact that the closure of the PLO mission means that the Trump administration is only interested in dealing with the PA, and particularly its security services, and not the PLO. Despite the latter being the nominal body to which the former is accountable, *de facto* the PA is financially and diplomatically accountable to donors and Israel, with only these actors occupying the commanding heights over PA political legitimacy and finance.

Similarly, U.S. cuts to UNRWA funding also aim to strike a decisive blow to another core "final status" issue—namely the Palestinian refugees. The United States used to be the largest funder of UNRWA, providing \$6 billion since 1950, and \$360 million in 2017. But come 2019, these streams will end entirely.

UNRWA is the main supranational body linking the Palestinian issue to international legal norms protecting their right to return to the properties from which they were expelled or fled during the 1948 War. The agency's very existence creates institutional continuity with the legal regime protecting Palestinian refugee rights *qua* refugees and hence is a very public obstacle to the elimination of the Palestinian question overall.

U.S. cuts to UNRWA aim to break this continuity and institutional guardianship, weakening the ability of Palestinians to use UN fora—or *any* fora—to argue their case.

Of course the United States historically financed UNRWA not because it supported Palestinian refugee rights, but because it understood that social provisions to this constituency provided a modicum of social and political stability in countries where Palestinian refugees were located—particularly within Jordan, a key U.S. ally where the largest concentration of Palestinian refugees reside. The decision to defund UNRWA thus throws caution to the wind regarding Jordanian stability and that of other Palestinian refugee host states, while aiming also to aid the institutional and political weakening of Palestinian claims overall.

The Trump Agenda in Sum

To summarize these steps: Trump's bombastic moves appear to *aim at the liquidation of Palestine's core facets from within*—chiefly the issue of independent Palestinian political representation, the question of Jerusalem, and the question of refugees. The elimination of these core facets is believed to *remove the need for negotiations at all*, as it clears the way for a Trumpist vision of U.S. imperial interests to be consolidated and aligned with Revisionist Zionist interpretations of "securing Israel" and accomplished without the hindrance of a Palestinian "partner." When combined with the Trump administration's broader regional efforts to bring about public Israeli-Arab state normalization, seen as necessary to confront Iran, we begin to understand what Trump means when he speaks of his "Deal of the Century."

Of course a good many of these maneuvers—like much of the Trumpist spectacle in general—relies upon a not inconsiderable dose of sleight of hand.

Defunding organizations like UNRWA cannot magically disappear millions of refugees, their legal claims, memories, organizing efforts, and institutions. There are other possible donors to the organization, while lessened aid also lessens U.S. influence and leverage.

Equally so, U.S. recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel cannot and will not discount Palestinian claims to and presence within the city, nor the wide swaths of other interests (Arab, Muslim, and Christian among others) that equally resent Israel's commandeering of the "holy city."

But there is no question that these moves complicate the task at hand in a context where the Palestinians have few reliable allies.

Even if we can expect Trump's moves to simplify and unravel years of more carefully constructed U.S. regional diplomacy and political arrangements,

further narrowing U.S. influence and leverage and raising its risk level, and those of its partners, the task before the Palestinian movement remains daunting.

The Israeli Front

The gravity of U.S. moves, however, can only be fully appreciated once we combine them with Israeli maneuvers in the shadow of Trumpist encouragement.

Indeed, since Trump's election, Netanyahu and his coalition of unapologetically racist, fascist, neo-messianic settler allies have made a dash to pocket as many political, demographic, and legalistic achievements as possible in the service of their broader agenda.

This includes the ratcheting up of genocidal policies in the Gaza Strip, including tightening the 11-year siege; mass maiming and killing of thousands of civil protestors attempting to bring attention to the devastation the siege has caused; a robust colonization impetus in the West Bank that includes accelerated land grabs, preparing for Israeli annexation (minus the areas of dense Palestinian population—Areas A and B in the language of the Oslo Accords—which total roughly 40 percent of the West Bank) and where 2.8 million Palestinians reside; the strategic and targeted ethnic cleansing of 300,000 Palestinians from the areas prepared for annexation (Area C), especially in and around Jerusalem (Khan el Ahmar) and the Jordan Valley; and the elevation of apartheid legislation within Israel to constitutional status through the "Nation-State" bill, aiming to permanently disenfranchise Palestinian citizens of Israel and undermine their ability to use the limited democratic channels afforded within the "Jewish democratic" state for purposes that might protect their individual, let alone collective, rights.

This non-comprehensive list of assaults under Netanyahu, encouraged by Trump, is hardly trivial and more often than not entails the exercising of brutal colonial force of different orders and magnitudes.

Ground Zero: The Gaza Front

The most brutal of these frontiers is unquestionably the Gaza Strip, where weekly showdowns between Palestinian protestors and Israeli snipers separated by a narrow buffer zone of fencing and barbed wire have led to recurrent bloodbaths of varying intensity.

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the human toll of the Great March of Return stood at 228 Palestinians killed between March 30 and mid-November 2018; 43 of the killed were children and two were women. An astonishing 24,362 persons have also been injured (nearly a quarter of whom are children), while 12,778 of these have been hospitalized—5,866 from live gunshot wounds. According to an October 21 report from the World Health Organization, 86 amputations have taken place, while 1,200 patients require long-term limb reconstruction.

These gruesome statistics from the Israeli-Gaza Strip frontier only couch an even longer list of yet more brutal humanitarian statistics documenting 11 full years of besiegement. Gaza today suffers from 53.7 percent unemployment, with 85 percent of the population being food dependent. The UN already considers the Gaza Strip to be an unlivable toxic wasteland, with poisoned water, crumbling infrastructure, a collapsed economy, and with indications that the territory's biosphere is now prone to the spread of waterborne diseases thanks to chronic electricity shortages and the lack of sewage treatment. (A recent RAND Corporation report warns that if the chronic state of emergency in Gaza's water and sewage sector continues, an epidemic disease outbreak or other public health crisis is imminent, with the risk of it spreading to Israel and Egypt.) In the past five years alone, the strip's population density has increased by more than one thousand persons per square kilometer—from 4,383 people/km² to 5,479.

Qualitatively, the siege aims to isolate

and target the expression of any new forms of Palestinian political organization. Its initial imposition came in the wake of Hamas' dramatic winning of the 2006 Legislative Council elections in which the movement promised to implement a wide series of democratic civil governance reforms to the PA while realigning its political agenda. The realignment was to include acknowledging that the Palestinians were still in a phase of "national liberation" and had "the right to strive to recover their own rights and end the occupation using all means, including armed struggle." This collective agenda resonated with Palestinian society in the context of heavy disappointment with the structure and outcomes of the Oslo process (which had never been put to a national referendum), the disappointing performance of the Fateh-led PA during 1990s, and the devastation wrought on Palestinian society in the wake of Israeli repression during the second Intifada. After a 2007 U.S.-backed coup attempt through right-wing Fateh elements was exposed and aborted, Israel and the international community imposed a full-blown siege on the territory, attempting to contain and suffocate this reformist political tendency. The aim was to force Palestinians to accept the Oslo process framework, and its strict political parameters designating the PA as a subcontracted Israeli security-provider, as the "only game in town."

By combining horrific military assaults with siege tactics, Israel—and Egypt and the Western bloc of states who observe the siege—aims to generate humanitarian, political, and financial crises that create leverage over the Palestinian movement, while scuttling the ability of Hamas to perform its political and reformist mandate.

As it did with Fateh previously, Israel seeks to tame Hamas by forcing it to internalize compromises generated through the management of these crises. Israel thus works to divide the Palestinian front by splitting it between its Gaza and West Bank wings, ensuring that each individual territory is governed by Oslo or Oslo-like arrangements. Israel becomes the overseer of an indirect governance

arrangement of Palestinian affairs, leveraged and managed through the self-preservation instincts of each of the two main political parties of Palestinian politics today—Fateh and Hamas. International donor aid subsidizes this arrangement at no cost to Israel, with Western funds used in the case of the West Bank, and with Qatari/Turkish/Islamist funds plus residual Western aid (through UN bodies and NGOs) subsidizing Gaza.

Through these means, Israel effectively divides and rules the Palestinian polity, with Gaza receiving the stick to Fateh and the PA's West Bank carrot, albeit with the latter also being whittled down in size. Between the two, Palestinian organizing is hamstrung and with it the possibility of generating significant leverage on the regional and international fronts. Israel is seemingly absolved from its responsibility to conform to international legal norms or even to engage in negotiations, thus freeing it to accelerate its settlement project without restraint.

Oslo's Carnage

This cunning approach to liquidating the Palestinian question has made important advances since the Oslo process began a quarter century ago. The "peace process" laid waste to the historical political and institutional structures that were launched locally and in the diaspora to protect and mobilize the Palestinian people and movement. Of course the PLO's deterioration preceded Oslo and in fact led to its signature of the accords. The Oslo agreement has since successfully coopted or corralled significant sections of the rich field of popular committees and organic intellectuals who emerged across the OPT after the 1967 occupation and who witnessed the height of activity and political effectiveness during the first Intifada. A quarter century of peace process effectively led to the mass demobilization of wide swaths of these actors, as the creation of the PA, and the process of NGOization, set in motion powerful institutional and political parameters for activity and finance that reversed accountability, from the grassroots to donors and the Oslo agenda. This led to exposing the

vulnerability of Palestinian communities and their historical political agenda and rights, generating the shift of popular support toward Hamas.

The nature of PA "self-rule"—"autonomy rather than sovereignty"—also ensured Israeli control over borders and movement, thereby allowing Israel to funnel Palestinian economic activity toward its own designs. Israel's imposition of Palestinian de-development ensured that no forms of horizontal economic linkages and synergy could be created between the OPT's fragmented parts. The result was the geographical, political, economic, and institutional fragmentation of the OPT, dependent on Israel and donors. All of this occurred beneath the rubric of "peace building," "state-building," and "security," funded by Western taxpayers. The de facto apartheid archipelago that has emerged has meant that Palestinians are now fragmented into more than 200 different islands across the OPT, while more than 150 Israeli settlements enjoy territorial contiguity, with an infrastructure that is integrated into pre-1967 Israel.

Within the new territorial and institutional map emerging from Oslo, it is the Gaza Strip that actually represents the largest single demographic and political obstacle for Israel, despite its smaller territorial size and population in comparison to the West Bank. The latter's effective transformation into Swiss cheese through Oslo has meant that Gaza now carries the majority of the historical and political mantle of the Palestinian cause. If Gaza can be broken, Israel will win another generation of settlement expansion across the West Bank, while conducting mop-up work across the individually fragmented West Bank cities. This process will be accelerated in the post-Abbas era as there is no clear successor within Fateh powerful enough to assert leadership over the entire movement. Fractious dynamics and Israeli deal-cutting with local elites and security bosses will increase.

However, if Gaza can withstand its predicament, the moral, political, and institutional model can continue to

influence and spread beyond its borders, weakening Western- and Israeli-backed designs for the West Bank and the view that the PA is "the only game in town."

The Importance of the Great March of Return

Gaza's grave humanitarian predicament and the historical and political questions it encapsulates have thus transformed the territory into an erupting volcanic fount of political, social, and military magma.

The launching of the Great March of Return demonstrations by ad hoc popular committees, working with political factions, was an attempt to direct the process of combustion, ensuring that it was an explosion rather than implosion. The weekly confrontations on the front lines in Gaza, despite their enormous costs to a population with little means, have subsequently provided inspiration to Palestinian communities across historical Palestine and beyond.

On top of this one cannot ignore or discredit how Gaza has also produced a not-insignificant military potential led by Hamas (but including all other factions, including non-Abbas-led Fateh branches), which includes a wide range of infrastructure (bunkers and tunnels, potentially *hundreds* of kilometers long, described sometimes as an "underground city") and industries (for rockets, weapons, and bomb production).

While Israel clearly enjoys asymmetric military superiority over its Gaza rivals, there is also no question that the Palestinian experience with employing armed force in Gaza has significantly matured. The Gaza armed force is now significant enough to selectively hold in check Israeli military excess, through targeted disruption of "normal" life in the south, as well as potentially beyond. It is able to do this not because its military might is so significant, but rather because it has developed tactical field acumen and coordination through the creation of a unified, 13-

faction-strong, *joint* command and control room. It is also able to exploit the fact that Israel has become increasingly concerned with Gaza's grave humanitarian conditions and its potential to impact Israeli communities in the south and beyond: diseases don't respect human-made barriers; Gaza's sewage flows into the sea with currents that head north to Israeli beaches; rocket barrages weaken investment and tourism, as well as Israel's strategic interests in "strengthening the [Jewish] population of the south"; resistance factions also retain the ability to hit areas further north (including the airport) for extended periods of time, creating factors that Israel cannot summarily discount. Israeli militarism is somewhat restrained through these factors, especially in a context where Israel does not intend to invade and eliminate Hamas because it would subsequently become responsible for the horrendous humanitarian situation in Gaza. In fact, this responsibility is precisely what Israel was attempting to free itself from through Oslo and the 2005 Gaza "disengagement" in particular.

The strategic, tactical, and political alignment in Gaza around one agenda (resistance), with its multiple forms—chiefly popular unarmed demonstrations but retaining a military option—has taken the initiative away from Israel, while giving it to Palestinian actors in Gaza. Gaza today should be identified as the key site where contemporary and future questions about Palestine will be determined, especially if dynamics around resistance, and principles and practices of field unity, can be generalized to other Palestinian theaters.

Projecting Gaza Beyond

One should not discount the moral, political, and organizational implications of what is happening in Gaza for the other Palestinian theaters, particularly the West Bank and Jerusalem, although it is unclear at this stage how those implications will take form.

There is broad consensus across Palestinian society that the Oslo process and Fateh's approach have failed to protect or achieve Palestinian aims and that the two-state solution is by this point chimerical. What replaces this vision and strategy has yet to be definitively determined; however, all eyes look to Gaza as providing some of the most mature articulations of the answers.

While reproducing the "Gaza model" is not practical for the other clusters of Palestinians, what these dynamics have done is shift the center of gravity of Palestinian political and moral legitimacy from the West Bank and the PLO/PA and definitively posited them in Gaza.

Concomitantly, the West Bank and Jerusalem struggle in their own right to resist the wave of Israeli repression and colonization as it articulates itself locally.

Both territories have actually been in distended states of low-intensity conflict for the past two years, as evidenced by the persistence of almost weekly stabbings, car rammings, and shooting attacks, to say nothing of daily confrontations with settlers and soldiers. Most of this activity is unorganized, and it often reflects the actions of individuals under conditions of particular despair. One also should not discount the fact that the West Bank and Jerusalem—unlike Gaza—are under more-immediate forms of occupation, in the sense that Israel does not even respect or observe the PA's self-policing role in Area A and simply enters these areas when it pleases to conduct arrests or assassinations. (Israel has less room to maneuver for this in Gaza.) This means that the political and institutional organization of these areas is much more difficult, as political actors are forced to operate much deeper underground in comparison to Gaza.

One also should not forget that Jerusalem witnessed a short-lived but significant mass uprising in the summer of 2017, when Israel attempted to impose new restrictions and electronic metal detectors in and around the Al Aqsa Mosque compound. The mass mobilization and

fightback by Palestinians in East Jerusalem was so powerful it actually forced Israel to fully retreat. Though the nature of the mobilization was defensive—to return the situation in the Old City to the status quo before the imposition of metal detectors—the episode demonstrated that the Palestinians in Jerusalem had not been bought off because of their more privileged identity-card status, which allows greater freedom of movement and economic opportunities within the Israeli labor market. On the contrary, it demonstrated that despite the immediate and daily confrontation that East Jerusalemites have with the occupation, they can organize around collective goals and win.

Concluding Thoughts

The point here is to emphasize that in the post-Oslo world, the main clusters of Palestinian communities in historical Palestine from the river to the sea—those in the West Bank, Gaza, Jerusalem, and Palestinian communities in Israel—all interact and experience Zionist settler colonialism differently, in ways particular to the historical and local evolution of conflict dynamics and Israel's particular interests in each locale together with other factors. While the Oslo process did indeed do grave damage to the Palestinian movement overall, it did not succeed in killing it. What it did do was fragment it and develop sophisticated means of controlling it, which in turn transformed the way the conflict was experienced collectively and subsequently the relationship of the Palestinian movement to itself and to its oppressor. The resulting diversification of national expression that emerged regionally and institutionally remains a process in flux, but one that is not all negative.

Today, Trump's demagoguery and the very public association of his tenure with Israel have set the stage for more organically integrating the question of Palestine into the vocabulary and actions of the broad progressive countercurrents to that agenda and slowly making moves to gain traction against it.

Moreover, the United States and Israel have largely exhausted the traditional carrot-and-stick toolbox used to such effect against the Palestinians since the Oslo process began. Though these techniques have certainly chalked up important strategic advantages in managing their “Palestinian problem,” the victory is pyrrhic in that these methods have not fundamentally altered or defeated Palestinian aspirations for national self-determination. The result is the diversification of Palestinian national activity and expression, politically, institutionally, and territorially. Palestinian national resiliency now manifests itself in resurgent ways across Palestine’s fragmented landscape. While this poses problems in coordination and communication, it nonetheless creates conditions to imagine a genuine post-Oslo politics and movement, both locally and internationally, un beholden to the cynical buzzwords around “peace” and “state-building” that derailed the movement and its supporters for the

past quarter century. Moreover, especially after the launch of the Great March of Return popular movement in Gaza, a defiant political movement and tenor is emerging that will continue to influence the other theaters of conflict, doing so in dialectical fashion according to its own time frame and according to the particular local structure and articulation of power therein.

As these dynamics play themselves out, it is incumbent upon progressive political actors in the West to inform themselves of the new and evolving dynamics of Palestinian politics and to find ways to integrate those dynamics into their politics and action. Palestinian oppression is directly subsidized by Western military, diplomatic, and financial support, such that it is possible to articulate a clear conflict of interests between the interests of average U.S. taxpayers and those of imperialists and Zionist sympathizers. The case can indeed be strengthened when one considers the

central role Israel has played in the post-9/11 world, fashioning itself as a chief research and development facility for the control, surveillance, and repression technologies used globally—from the Mexican-United States frontier, to the scandals of Israeli private investigations corporation Black Cube. Moreover, since revisionist Zionism under Netanyahu has sought to capitalize on global right-wing populist trends and abandoned the pretense of representing liberal Jews and their concerns, important cleavages between these have been more clearly exposed and can now also be widened. These contradictions must be exploited as part of a broader strategy of building left political forces that can pose an alternative to the slippery slope of fascism down which world politics seems to be sliding. The fate of Palestine, and of a great many other causes of global concern—and survival—appears to be held in the balance.

[New Politics](#)

Breaking with bad politics

14 February 2019, by **Brais Fernandez**

We will choose three causes that, in my opinion, have given rise this situation and, if we are able to understand them, they will give us clues to start on a new path with new perspectives and on new bases. [11]

First, Podemos itself. Podemos is not a party: it has failed as a partisan project, in the historical sense of the term. Parties, in their modern sense, are groups that “represent” classes or organized class fractions, with roots in civil society and grouping their support around a programme or long-term political objectives. Podemos does not have the project of a different society, because, presumably, people can only imagine society as it is today. Podemos does not have an organized social base because, apparently, to storm heaven you did not need to have

your feet on the ground.

Podemos, more than a party, is a drifting apparatus, which oscillates in a disoriented fashion between what could have been and what really is: a despotic regime in which the absence of pluralism means differences are resolved on the basis of intrigues, manoeuvres and disloyalty. Pluralism, the assumption that emancipatory traditions cannot be reduced to one, is an irreducible reality: it is the only way to articulate the unity we desire.

Secondly, collective agreements have been ignored again and again for the sake of the whims and the particular opinions of the “leaders”. The case of Manuela Carmena (Mayor of Madrid) is perhaps the most flagrant. A collaborative, participatory

programme, with a lot of intelligence behind it, was dismissed by the mayor as a list of “suggestions”. The incredible thing was the submissive acceptance of this by the Podemos bureaucracy in any of its versions: the “Carmena brand” was more important than the mobilizing impulse that had allowed the City Council to win.

But there are more examples: Ramón Espinar won the primaries in an agreement with Anticapitalistas, which included a “unitary” and transformative road map that, a few months after the triumph, was abandoned without explanation, an operation that culminated with the “parachuting” of Errejón as a candidate for the Community of Madrid. Or Pablo Iglesias winning Vistalegre II with a speech against the

PSOE, and then adopting the strategy designed by his rival Errejón. "Más Madrid" is the latest movement of a politics based on the caprices and blackmails of leaders, public faces, general secretaries: as was, on the other hand, the "fingerprint" of Pablo Iglesias imposing Errejón as a candidate.

Third, Podemos's deep transformational turn inevitably had to generate a parting of the ways. Manuela Carmena and Álex Errejón represent the most consistent sector of that section of the left that seeks integration into the regime, accepting the traditional division of the latter's politics (progressive restoration / conservative reaction), and which opts for abandoning any constituent perspective. That is, accepting the current political-economic framework as the only one possible and renouncing the formulation of a political strategy in other terms.

Unfortunately, the hegemony of the public relations rhetoric of "majorities" has provoked a deep regression in popular aspirations, accepting an increasingly narrow framework that is only functional for the particular interests of a new political class.

The basic problem is that all the manoeuvres and bureaucratic drifts respond to one mission: getting rid of the real ties that linked the new policy to 15M (assemblies, consensus, radical reformist programme), turning it into something similar to what the 1st of May means for the big union bureaucracies: an event which has no practical meaning. [12] Both the manoeuvres of Errejón and the whole political-organizational line of the state-level leadership of Podemos are the last attempts to get rid of the remains of those ties.

Errejón's movement undoubtedly has a political background: it is about

radicalizing this turn towards the centre-left and of gaining full autonomy not only against the leadership of Podemos (with which, by the way, they fundamentally agree politically), but also IU and other sectors further to the left. A manoeuvre similar to what Manuela Carmena did when she liquidated Ahora Madrid, launching her Más Madrid project and breaking with the sectors grouped in Ganemos (IU, Anticapitalistas, or municipal sectors now grouped around La Bancada).

Now comes the fundamental question: what to do faced with this parting of the ways? In my opinion, the fundamental debate is not about the future of the left: it is about whether we accept that the monopoly of institutional policy is in the hands of a neo-progressive centre-left or if we try to maintain in Madrid (and in the medium term, at the state-wide level), a wedge with a constituent, challenging and struggling programme that allows us to face in better circumstances a new period characterized by a normalization of the multiple crises of Hispanic capitalism, the radicalization of the privileged classes moving towards the extreme right and the end of the mobilizing "offensive" dynamic that we have felt in recent years.

Obviously, I think we must go unambiguously for this option, provided that this recomposition is not led by the same people that have led us to disaster. The Podemos leadership has failed miserably when it comes to setting up a project in Madrid, lacks a broad, dynamic and articulated militant base, and has behaved with terrible arrogance towards the other sectors, combined with political opportunism. Their trajectory and the results of their disastrous and erratic political line make them incapable of leading anything and we must finish once and for all with the idea that they have

that role: that is an illusion based on their role in the previous political stage. Any hypothesis led by this faction is bound to fail.

The embryo of new candidacies in the CAM, in Madrid City Council and in many towns of the Community is in the experience of the six "critical" councillors of Ahora Madrid. IU, Anticapitalistas and La Bancada have the activist network and organizational capacity to promote candidacies that are the embryo of a new space opposed to the resignation, cynicism, verticalism and political normalization combined with social misery to which these times seem to lead.

There are programmatic agreements that make this possible, including on how to proceed, especially around pluralistic and cooperative organizational methods, such as open and proportional primaries. Also, on the need to incorporate as an active factor working people, linked to neighbourhoods, movements and struggles, outside the small militant elites. Podemos could join them, but not imposing their rules: the times of domination by the sword have already passed.

We must be sensitive to the concerns of many people around the current situation. The concern for unity is understandable. Although the lessons are painful, a parting of the ways in which we can improve the left's options is not necessarily bad news: we can collect more votes and, at the same time, normalize the fact that there are different projects to deal with the situation. It is about continuing but learning the lessons: not to delegate or relinquish command capacity either to a bureaucracy or to a leader, even if it promises to take heaven by storm. Let's make it possible for assemblies, activism and transforming programmes to return. It is the best guarantee to avoid decomposition in these dark times.

The Jasic Struggle in China's Political Context

13 February 2019, by **Au Loong-Yu**

At the turn of this century, some older Maoists in the North were active behind the scenes in resisting the privatization of state-owned enterprises (SOEs), viewing SOE workers as having more revolutionary potential. This older generation of Maoists invited rural migrant activists and students to their classes and training but did not view rural migrants as having sufficiently advanced political consciousness. After Maoists splintered in 2012 following a failed effort to push the party to the left, one wing became more vocal in criticizing the party, arguing a qualitative capitalist change had taken place. They became more explicit in appealing for resistance from below, although they continue to try to win over leading party cadres, invoking the "socialist" principles enshrined in the constitution or in Mao's legacy. Thus the Jasic struggle represents a new generation of Maoist students interested in workers, and this time they are working with rural migrant workers in the South. This new generation of young Maoists has also changed tactics, choosing high-profile resistance and support for the Jasic workers, which is very unusual given the highly repressive political situation in China. During the height of the Jasic campaign, old and young Maoist supporters carried photos of Chairman Mao and called for support "for the sake of working class's awakening, for the sake of Chairman Mao!" Another Maoist supporter published an article, "Where Has Janggangshan Gone? On the Jasic Struggle and Revolutionary Revival," linking the Jasic struggle to Jinggangshan, the mountain where Mao first established his guerilla base in 1927. Although the escalation of the Jasic struggle from a workplace trade union organizing drive to a political struggle against the local officials has been described by some as an

indication of the political transformation of Chinese workers' consciousness, that seems too bold a claim. It is also doubtful that making a direct comparison between Jinggangshan, a symbol for guerilla warfare, and the Jasic workers is really helpful to the latter's struggle.

Although the Maoists have accumulated a lot of experience in the North in supporting the rights of SOE workers, their experiences cannot be directly applied to the private enterprises of the South without substantial modification. When the SOEs underwent privatization, the workers sometimes directly confronted corrupt local officials, as they were the criminals who were directly responsible for the theft of public property. Therefore, workers' actions often began with political resistance and called on the revolutionary ethos of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as a spiritual basis. This was natural and was even sometimes useful. But in the private companies of the South, it is different. The conflict is chiefly between the employees and the employers. Moreover, the revolutionary ethos of the CCP is less likely to resonate with migrant workers, and so if actions escalate into political resistance those workers are less likely to be motivated. Surely in the Jasic case, as in many other cases, when the local government cracked down on workers then the struggle could potentially have become political. But to escalate the struggle one must also ask whether workers are fully prepared for a political confrontation. Experiences already tell us that they were not.

The state paid no attention at all to the Maoists' appeal to the "socialist" principle or to Mao. Though Xi Jinping continues to demand the people learn

from Marxism-Leninism and Mao's thought, the state continues to crack down on any independent and collective effort at seriously studying left classics¹ and to crack down even harder when these efforts carry an aspiration to sympathize with working people. This should not surprise us. Back in 2004, the Zhengzhou police arrested and charged local Maoists who tried to assemble to pay tribute to Mao. Maoist website Red China had placed their hope for a left turn within the CCP led by Bo Xilai. Minqi Li, a Chinese scholar currently lives and teaches in USA and also the theoretician of the Red China, argues in his book that Bo represented "the last significant faction that was in opposition to neoliberal capitalism", and that "by purging Bo Xilai from the party, Communist Party leadership may have foregone their last and best opportunity to resolve China's rapidly escalating economic and social contradictions in a relatively peaceful manner." [13]

The "Social Democrats"

About three years ago, liberal left labor activists suffered a similar crackdown. On December 3, 2015, the state arrested eight activists from four labor groups and later prosecuted and sentenced four of them. This was to curb these groups' campaigning for collective bargaining, an effort supported by China Labor Bulletin (CLB), an NGO in Hong Kong founded by Han Dongfang, a worker leader in the 1989 democratic movement. That year also saw the arrest of more than a hundred lawyers for the "crime" of making a legal defense for prosecuted dissidents.

With the tremendous growth in the

number of rural migrant workers and their spontaneous strikes since 2000, a new current of liberals emerged. On top of calling for constitutionalism and civil liberties, they began to support rural migrant workers and call for the three basic labor rights (the rights to freedom of association and to strike as well as to collective bargaining). From a labor perspective, this is a step forward. One of their main writers was Wang Jiangsong. He, along with Han, described themselves as “social democrats,” a term that should be treated with care in the China context, for reasons explained later. He criticized the capitalists for being “too dependent (on the party officials),” “never daring to fight for their civil rights, and only being interested in bribing officials, either actively or passively.” He contrasts the ability of rural migrant workers, understood as the new working class, to organize democratically to fight for their rights.

The social democrats, however, did not support the SOE workers’ struggle against privatization earlier—or at most confined themselves to calling for better compensation—something the Maoists never forgave nor forgot. Unlike the Maoists, they opposed the “socialist tradition” of the 1949 revolution and saw the SOE workers as privileged, conservative, and alien. In contrast, rural migrant workers, who do not share the political consciousness of SOE workers, are now considered by the social democrats as both super-exploited and the new social bearer of changes, although previously the social democrats, or liberals in general, mainly looked to party leaders like former premier Wen Jiabao as agents of change.

Han Dongfang has long dropped his previous position of campaigning for independent unions and has argued instead for reform within the All-China Federation of Trade Unions. In 2013, Han saw Xi Jinping’s speech for ACFTU reform as a signal of real pro-worker change. In March 2015, Wang Jiangsong initiated a campaign for collective bargaining and was endorsed by 15 labor NGOs and a hundred individuals. This campaign was also supported by CLB and helped to spread the idea of collective bargaining among workers. Yet in

June of the same year, Han spoke at the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the U.S. House of Representatives, reassuring the audience that “President Xi was going in the right direction with his very important 3rd Plenum Decision in 2013.” He observed, “It is not in the CCP’s interests to crack down on civil society,” and, “This is the first time in the history of modern China that the interests of the CCP and the workers have been fully and beneficially aligned.” To help the CCP go in that direction, Han said he was prepared to “depoliticize an overly politicized labor issue” by “targeting workplace collective bargaining, rather than freedom of association.” [14] However, the state replied to Han’s goodwill with arrests and prison terms in 2015-2016. And then in less than a year the state struck again—and this time the victims were the Maoists. Ironically, both the social democrats and the Maoists nurtured hope in the party, with the former looking to the “liberal” wing of the party while the latter appealed to those party leaders who are still committed to the “socialist tradition,” but both received the same treatment from the state.

It is a good thing to advocate for collective bargaining or workplace union organizing, but it is problematic to link these efforts with the idea of supporting this or that wing of the party leaders and to make political concessions to them. It is time to stop nurturing the illusion of party self-reform. Doing so will simply lead labor to play into the hands of the faction fight among top leaders, leaving labor with nothing except more repression and hopelessness. Instead of self-reform, the CCP is evolving into a “totalitarian” regime (a debatable term, surely) which now aims at brainwashing the population to the degree that not only are all potential dissidents repressed, but that everyone must think the same as Xi.

Only a united resistance from labor could stop this madness. Precisely how to achieve this is doubtless a big question and there is no easy answer available. The increasing repression also implies that Xi’s regime is much more ruthless than its predecessors, hence existing legal channels for collective action are closing up as

well. At this stage, however, we can at least preserve our forces as much as possible and not become involved in hopeless confrontation. The time for an offensive will come, but it is not now. Secondly, in the face of repression we should try to forge a united front among labor groups and support each other. This is possible through public debate: Despite repression, on-line discussion is always heated among activists in mainland China, since all labor currents run websites both inside and outside the country.

Maoists Against Social Democrats

It is sad to review the past twenty-year intellectual history of China. Both the liberals and the New Left treated each other as the main enemy while both sides pledged allegiance to the party-state so as to maintain links with the two main ruling cliques. When the Zhengzhou Maoists were repressed in 2004, certain liberals forgot about their commitment to freedom of speech and stayed silent, giving tacit support for the arrests. In 2008, the New Left and the Maoists applauded the conviction of Liu Xiaobo, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate. These are just the most famous cases of intolerance from both currents.

In recent years, such hostility between the two sides has receded a bit as both are increasingly facing repression. The rise of social democrats in China, who are also mildly critical of the right-wing liberals, has laid a common ground for all labor currents to fight for basic civil and labor rights. However when the state repressed the NGO that supported Wang’s campaign for basic labor rights in 2015, the Maoists did express solidarity with them. Minqi Li has recognized the need for basic labor rights and has added that they are far from enough (which is true), and that what is also needed is a class struggle to reestablish public ownership (which is desirable). As Minqi Li debates the future and notes that “when the time of a labor movement climax arrives” it will necessarily make class struggle sharpen to a point where class collaboration and even collective

bargaining will be impossible, he challenges Wang by asking, "Which side will you be on when the time comes?" But we should ask as well about the present, when the state is ruthlessly persecuting everyone.

From a left perspective, a socialist transformation in China is surely desirable. But a debate about program and class strategy, however necessary, should not be counterposed to a common struggle to win basic civil rights at present. Without these rights it is very difficult for spontaneous strikes to develop into organized struggles, let alone a "socialist transformation," especially when government's control is so strong that underground work is very difficult if not impossible in most situations. The inconvenient truth is that long before the arrival of "the labor movement climax" we may all be already crushed by the state.

In China, these two constitute the main labor currents. Now both are in a dire situation, and the world labor movement must come to their aid, learning from the bitter fruits of sectarianism, as in the failure of the German Communist Party and the Social Democrats to forge an alliance against the Nazis in the late 1920s. As China is quickly evolving into a totalitarian state, the greatest danger among labor activists is being sectarian. Although the German case is not entirely comparable, it is common sense that ideological differences between the two main labor currents should not become an obstacle to tactical alliance for civil and labor rights at present. Different currents will continue to disagree among themselves on many things, but right now we should recognize that there is also something in common, and then even if we march separately let us strike together.

There are indications this is occurring, with Chinese social democrats more willing to express solidarity with the Maoists. CLB, for instance, endorsed the solidarity statement "prepared by other Hong Kong labor groups" with the Jasic Maoists. These Hong Kong groups are slightly to the left of Han Dongfang, as they have less illusion of a self-reform of the CCP under Xi. Despite ideological differences with the Maoists, they also came out in support of the Jasic struggle, partly because they focus on practical work rather than theoretical debate.

The Revolutionary Marxists

Besides the two main currents as described above, there has existed since the turn of the century a tiny stream of Revolutionary Marxists (RM). The RM often turns to Trotsky, not Mao, as their chief theoretical reference point. As Minqi Li puts it, besides their own "Marxist-Leninist-Maoist" faction there is now a "Marxist-Leninist-Trotskyist" faction. The RM cannot be compared in influence to the social democrats and the Maoists, who have strong connections to the institutions and the establishment and hence enjoy much more resources. The RM is at best composed of individuals and a few tiny groups with little resources and connections. On top of this the authorities see them as even more dangerous than the other two currents. Hence, they are very low-profile, if not entirely underground or hidden in NGOs and such organizations.

Some members of the RM have done

good work, such as introducing European Marxist writings and working on labor rights. The more visible RM members are usually those who are active on the internet (and in private gatherings). Their debate with the Maoists on the character of the Chinese regime did pressure the latter to respond to this important question, and thus contributed to a rethinking process among leftists. Probably they were also among the first set of leftists who started debating about *ronggong*, or students going to work in factories. Therefore even when the RM is so seemingly marginal and insignificant, in relation to leftist ideas it is still worth noting. Individual RM members, however, sometimes curiously echo a Maoist tendency to deny the progressive nature of winning civil liberties during the present stage. They criticize social democrats like Wang Jiangsong as "reformist" (which is true) and treat them as the main enemy (which is problematic).

To sum up, we need to get rid of the idea of self-reform of the ruling clique and rely on the awakening of the working masses instead. In order to accomplish the latter task, it is important that labor currents come to the understanding that a common struggle to win basic civil and labor rights is paramount for a labor future and that ideological disagreement does not hinder this struggle. In the end, instead of treating an "-ism" as dogma or even worse, a new religion, labor should treat it as their working hypothesis in the practical fight against a new totalitarian regime.

A version of this essay first appeared in Chinese in the Mingpao Daily, August 30, 2018. All information reported here comes from the internet or personal contacts.

[New Politics](#)

The Philippine Left in a Changing Land

12 February 2019, by **Alex de Jong**

Three weeks before the killings of the trade unionists, the *Philippine Daily Enquirer* published the headline “Duterte fires last leftist in government.” The leftist in question is Joel Maglunsod, undersecretary of the Department of Labor and Employment, formerly a leader of the Kilusan Mayo Uno trade-union movement. [15] 1 Meanwhile, attacks by the armed wing of the Maoist Communist Party of the Philippines, the New People’s Army (NPA), increased after a ceasefire broke down in early 2017. Lasting roughly half a year, it was the longest ceasefire ever between the NPA and a Philippine government. But even when it still had allies in the government, the CPP had begun to denounce the Duterte regime as fascist and a pawn of the United States.

How to explain such contradictions? Much international news about Duterte is concerned with the “war on drugs” he unleashed. Since Duterte assumed office in July 2016, conservative estimates indicate that the police or state-sponsored death squads have killed more than 12,000, almost exclusively from the most impoverished sections of Philippine society. The real number of casualties is likely much higher.

During his presidential campaign, Duterte made clear that he was planning to organize large-scale violence. But there was another side to Duterte’s election. He combined macho posturing as a crime buster with demagoguery about taking care of the weak and the poor. His campaign slogan “compassion and strength” was typical of his approach. Duterte went so far as to describe himself as a socialist.

Allying with Duterte

This approach convinced significant parts of the left that it could cooperate with Duterte for progressive reforms. Others, who were skeptical about Duterte’s claims to be a “leftist,” thought it better to keep their fears and criticism to themselves. It had become clear that Duterte had massive support, including among the

poor, and parts of the left feared they would alienate themselves from this audience if they strongly criticized the candidate.

The convergence between parts of the left and Duterte peaked in late 2016. Angered by the outgoing Obama administration’s tepid criticism of human rights violations, Duterte denounced U.S. neocolonial interference and reminded his audience of atrocities committed by U.S. troops during their occupation of the Philippines in the early twentieth century. Around the same time, he announced his geopolitical turn away from the United States and toward Russia and China. Supposedly leftist writers cheered Duterte’s “nationalism” and “independent orientation,” while trying to downplay the growing number of murders. One academic declared Duterte had “exploded the century-long stranglehold of global finance capitalism” over the Philippines.

The part of the Philippine left that went furthest in this convergence was the National-Democrats, or NDs. The political and ideological center of this current is the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP). The party leads a broad range of underground “sectoral organizations” that organize specific groups (youth, artists, church-people, women, and others). Some of these organizations are little more than empty shells, others are more substantial. Above ground, there is an equally wide alliance of groups that are identified with the political line of the party.

According to this line, Philippine society is not capitalist but “semi-feudal.” Therefore, the CPP aims for a two-stage revolution. The first stage will be the National-Democratic revolution, “anti-feudal” as well as “anti-imperialist,” to break the grip of foreign domination that supposedly has locked the country in this stage. A second phase will be socialist, by which the CPP means it will install one-party rule and a command economy. Aboveground supporters of this line often combine great militancy with surprisingly modest demands—the goal in this phase of the struggle being to confront not capitalism, but “semi-feudalism.”

After his election in May 2016, Duterte offered cabinet posts to the CPP. The party politely declined, saying that as a revolutionary organization, it could not be part of the “reactionary state.” Instead, four leaders of the aboveground ND movement received cabinet-level posts, while others (like Maglunsod) were given lower-ranking posts. “The alliance between the National-Democratic movement and the incoming Duterte regime continues to be forged,” the CPP journal *Ang Bayan* rejoiced in June 2017; by offering cabinet posts to the CPP, Duterte had “strengthened his alliance with the National-Democratic movement.” [16]

Duterte’s history as a mayor of Davao City, and his role in organizing a death-squad there during the 1990s and early 2000s, was not reason enough to refuse such an alliance. Back then, the NDs already had cordial relations with Duterte, who helped them gain political legitimacy. He coordinated with the NPA for the release of captured prisoners, spoke at rallies called by ND mass organizations, and hosted ND candidates on his slate for the city council elections. From their side, the NDs toned down their criticism. Most of the research on the human rights violations committed in Davao during this period comes from human rights groups outside the ND orbit.

After the presidential elections, it did not take long for the alliance to show cracks as it became clear Duterte was not willing to make real concessions to the NDs. They were serving in a government whose social-economic policies were in continuity with the previous market-liberal administration, while defending Duterte. One ND cabinet member, Social Welfare Secretary Judy Taguiwalo, in May 2017 claimed it was a “no-brainer” that Duterte was opposed to extra-judicial killings.³

An exception seemed to be the peace negotiations between the government and the CPP. The government panel went along with CPP negotiators in drafting an agreement that suggested far-reaching changes, such as land reform, the abrogation of international trade agreements, extensive social services, a break with the United

States, state control over strategic sectors of the economy, and the expropriation of certain categories of capital. However, the Duterte regime never planned on implementing anything like it, and negotiations collapsed in early 2017. The last cabinet-level official from the ND ranks, Liza Maza, finally left the administration in August 2018.

The alliance between the NDs and Duterte as president was unique in how far it went, but it was not the first time the ND current entered into agreements with bourgeois power holders. Since the turn of the century, the NDs have participated with considerable success in elections. In his study of the movement, Dominique Caouette describes how the project started in 2001 when ND organizations put up a political party, Bayan Muna (Nation First). [17] By what Caouette describes as a series of “tractations,” or clandestine dealings, and through support for Vice President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo during the revolt in which she replaced Joseph Estrada as president, the NDs were able to “secure support from the Macapagal-Arroyo clan.” Subsequently, Bayan Muna won three seats in Congress.

The NDs have expanded their electoral machinery and continue to make deals with bourgeois politicians to win seats in the notoriously corrupt Philippine elections. Embarrassingly, the NDs found themselves in the same alliance as Ferdinand Marcos—the son of the dictator of the same name, who would like to follow in his father’s footsteps—when in 2010 they supported businessman Manny Villar for president. When the campaign for president started in 2016, the NDs initially supported Grace Poe—a relatively inexperienced senator with an unremarkable track record. She owes her career mostly to her name: She is the adopted daughter of Fernando Poe Jr., a star of Philippine action movies.

During the 2016 campaign, though, it became clear that in the region of Mindanao where Duterte built his base, the NDs were campaigning for him instead. Jose Maria Sison, the ideologue of the movement (although in name only an advisor to its

diplomatic wing) made this orientation clear by declaring that either a Poe or a Duterte win would be good for “national unity” and either could supposedly open the way to progressive reforms. Sison had (by Skype) a sympathetic interview with Duterte and made sure to praise the candidate’s supposed progressive credentials.

The Persistence of the CPP

Reading CPP statements today, it is as if this CPP-Duterte alliance never happened. The CPP calls for the overthrow of Duterte, and Sison describes the government as “weak” and “isolated,” suggesting it might be ousted in some months.

It is difficult to say how large the ND movement is today. As usual, the movement’s spokespeople and press claim that it is going from strength to strength. One way to gauge support for the movement is by looking at election results of the candidates most closely allied with it. In 2016, the ND candidate for Senate received almost 6.5 million votes (15 percent; the total population is over 100 million). But the picture is unclear; since such candidates run on platforms that are limited to “progressive reforms,” support for them does not necessarily entail support for even the first phase of the CPP’s projected revolution. In addition, in these elections, voters pick 12 candidates, with one vote per candidate.

But it is clear that the NDs remain by far the strongest current on the Philippine left. The movement has grown deep roots in Philippine society, and through its network of “sectoral” movements and the NPA, it has in a way become self-sustaining.

That in the last two decades the most remarkable successes of the NDs have been in elections and in sustaining their capacity for open protest is ironic, as the CPP considers armed struggle the primary means of achieving a revolution. In theory, all other forms of struggle and all other organizations, legal and illegal, are subordinated to it and ultimately

should serve to strengthen guerrilla warfare. Part of the money raised by aboveground organizations, who often have a rather bland public image, is indeed funnelled to the underground.

The reasons for the persistence of the NPA are structural. Large parts of the rural countryside are seemingly stagnant, with people still facing the same problems they have faced for generations. Fewer than 10,000 individuals own over a fifth of the country’s total agricultural lands, while almost two million farmers own less than three hectares each and divide among themselves 18.5 percent of the country’s total agricultural lands. Still, a bit over half of the population live in the countryside, which is also home to over 70 percent of those officially considered poor. Since the seventies, not only NPA fighters but also commanders are increasingly the children of poor, landless peasants. But its “political officers” are still often drawn from the student movement, and the CPP remains under the leadership of the first generation, who often joined the movement as students.

A researcher at the National War College in Washington recently recognized that factors driving people to join the NPA are the same as they have been since its founding in the late sixties: “Many of the historical drivers of NPA recruitment remain in place today—widespread poverty and income disparity, land exploitation, labor exploitation, human rights abuses, political marginalization, and discrimination in the rural hinterland.” The government’s recent claims to be on the cusp of defeating the NPA lack credibility.

The NPA is strongest in remote rural areas where there is little presence of state institutions. In such areas, the NPA can play a role in protecting the local population against bandits and in intervening in local conflicts. The NPA is also a source of financial means; it imposes “revolutionary taxes” on companies that operate in areas where it is active.

The NPA also has an important symbolic role. CPP imagery and texts often depict the strength and heroism of the guerrillas, ever surging

forward. Those killed in combat are celebrated as martyrs and become subjects of books and articles. Such texts emphasize the conviction and sacrifice of those who chose the hard and dangerous life in the NPA. Such dedication is made into an argument for the movement's political line; disagreement would mean disrespecting the martyrs. The myth of the people's war, certain of final victory, still has power.

But 49 years after its founding, the NPA is far from its goal of "encircling the cities." According to recent statements, the NPA has between six and ten thousand regulars and about half of its strength is based on the southern island of Mindanao. In late 2016, the CPP organized a congress (the second since its founding in 1968) at which, it claims, representatives of "close to seventy thousand members" were present. The movement has been known to exaggerate its strength; for example, in the early 2000s it claimed that the NPA numbered in the tens of thousands [18].

The Left Against Duterte

Now mobilizing against Duterte, the NDs launched the Movement Against Tyranny, convened by a coalition of leaders of mass movements, priests, and political personalities. The ND mass organizations are the coalition's backbone and make it the opposition coalition with the largest mobilizing potential. Reflecting the usual ND strategy to build multi-class coalitions, its call is directed specifically against the Duterte regime's authoritarian attacks on the institutions and rules of liberal democracy.

The Movement Against Tyranny is not the only opposition. Another opposition coalition is Tindig Pilipinas, or "Rise Up Philippines." Philippine activist Joshua Makalintal describes it as "a broad coalition that includes minority blocs from Congress; figures from the previous Liberal Party establishment; the social democratic party Akbayan, which coalesced with the liberals in the previous administration of Benigno Aquino; and the nationalist, anti-communist

Magdalo group, composed of former junior officers of the armed forces led by Antonio Trillanes, Duterte's most vocal critic in the Senate." [19]

Finally, there is Laban ng Masa, or "Struggle of the Masses." A coalition of socialist and progressive groups and parties that opposed Duterte from the beginning, it is the only coalition to explicitly present itself as left-wing and to analyze the rise of the Duterte regime as a symptom of a structural crisis of Philippine society. Since the ouster of Ferdinand Marcos in 1986, the Philippines has been superficially a liberal democracy. In practice, however, cliques of capitalists (often families) have captured the state, combining economic and political power. Laban ng Masa targets this "elite democracy" and proposes "a system marked by real participatory democracy and real economic equality."

Laban ng Masa is led by scholar-activist Walden Bello. Bello became a member of Congress for Akbayan in 2010, when it was allied with President Benigno Aquino and the Liberal Party. Although remaining a party member, Bello resigned his seat in 2015 in protest against Aquino's attempts to wash his hands of a bloody, botched police operation and corruption in the government. In 2016, Bello ran for Senate in a campaign that remained independent from bourgeois alliances and politicians and won a little over one million votes, coming in 36th in a contest where the top 12 won seats. However, Laban ng Masa lacks the resources of Tindig Pilipinas or the infrastructure of the Movement Against Tyranny.

Laban ng Masa brings together much of the more radical, non-ND Philippine left. The leaders of the NDs often label this part of the left as irrelevant, call it "counter-revolutionary," or worse.⁷ During the 1990s and early 2000s, dozens of former ND activists as well as organizers from other progressive movements were killed by the NPA, and threats persist. The NDs used such violence to maintain their dominance. [20]

Although none of the non-ND groups have the strength of the NDs, they

have become part of political reality and play significant roles in parts of the country.

The collapse of the Marcos dictatorship in 1986, and of the Soviet Union a few years later, triggered a cycle of internal debates, purges, and splits in the CPP-led movement in the 1990s. Those who stuck with the CPP and the ND movement were labelled "reaffirmists" or RAs, after the document in which Sison laid down the line for the movement: *Reaffirm Our Basic Principles and Rectify Errors*. Those who disagreed were consequently called RJs, short for rejectionists.

Undoubtedly one of the most important reasons why the CPP has proven so persistent is that millions of Filipinos are caught in poverty in a stagnating countryside. The CPP's attacks on "feudal landlords" ring true to them, as does its insistence on the agricultural character of Philippine society. But continuing uneven and combined development has produced sharply diverging realities in Philippine society. Parts of the countryside remain underdeveloped, but the share of total employment that is agricultural has shrunk to around a third. Stagnating agricultural productivity has meant that agriculture's share of gross domestic product has declined from 22 percent in 1990 to 11 percent in 2014. Over the past five decades the urban population grew by more than 50 million people, and cities now represent more than 70 percent of the country's GDP. The power of the traditional landlords as landlords has been declining, although some have managed to expand their operations into other, growing sectors such as services and mining.

Duterte's election was a symptom of such changes. Since the fall of the Marcos regime, the Philippines has been ruled by a dominant bloc that included the local capitalist class (among them landlords), the Catholic Church, and representatives of U.S. influence such as U.S.-trained military commanders and neoliberal technocrats.

Duterte does not come from the traditional, landed capitalist class, but

instead built a coalition of local capitalists and ranted against “landlords” and oligarchic sugar planters (a reference to his rivals, the Aquino dynasty). Duterte is also defying another component of the old dominant bloc: the Catholic Church. Some years earlier, the struggle over the Reproductive Health Act made visible a relative decline of the church’s political strength. This law was intended to provide access to contraception, sex education, and family planning and was introduced after years of debate in 2012. Despite desperate attempts of Catholic clergy and media outlets, a majority of the population continued to support the Reproductive Health bill. [21] Priests have criticized human rights violations committed under Duterte, and he has gone on the offensive against his religious critics by ridiculing Catholic sanctimoniousness and hypocrisy.

While confronting some parts of the previous dominant bloc, Duterte has attempted to integrate others. The United States continues to play an important role in the Philippines. Important representatives of its influence are American-trained army officers and technocrats. Duterte included both groups in his government, and military ties between the United States and the Philippines continue. Initially, Duterte’s anti-U.S. rhetoric and seeming rapprochement with the Maoists led to doubts about support for him in the strongly pro-U.S. army. Duterte has, however, been busy trying to win the favor of soldiers, increasing their pay, visiting army camps, and appointing (retired) generals to high positions in his administration. Duterte has now given the army a free hand in its fight against the guerrillas. As he did earlier regarding the police in the “war on drugs,” Duterte promised to protect soldiers who violate human rights.

Duterte’s rhetoric about a “divorce” from the United States was proven to be overblown, but in terms of international politics he did move closer to Russia and especially China. This must be a source of dissatisfaction in Washington, especially since the United States has been pushing against China’s attempts to extend its power in the region.

Duterte’s reluctance to challenge Chinese territorial claims in the South China Sea is a complicated issue for the Philippine left. Opposition to U.S. imperialism is a key element of the whole Philippine left, and the policy of the previous government to rely on the United States against China was denounced as part of the neocolonial agenda to control the Philippines. But the days when the CPP referred to China as “an iron bastion of socialism” are long gone—it now considers that since the fall of the Gang of Four, China has restored capitalism. [22]

Chinese ambitions in the region have removed most of the left’s remaining illusions about Chinese “socialism.” At most, there is nostalgia for what was once a model for much of the Philippine left and the idea that the United States-China confrontation can somehow provide maneuvering space for progressive forces.

Different Paths

Diverging social developments mean that in different parts of the country, the left is faced with very different realities and is rooted among different social layers. Not surprisingly, this has produced different political trends. Although the influence of the ND tradition, in which many of the left’s older activists got their political training, is still visible, RJs have developed their own, diverging political lines. The Partido Manggawa (PM) or Labor Party, and the Partido Lakas ng Masa (Party of Strength of the Masses, although the party also uses Party of the Laboring Masses in English), for example, are two groups whose history can be traced back to the ND movement in the Manila region; these remain strongest among urban workers. PM’s orientation has been described as emphasizing “the gradual rebuilding of the strength of the labor movement in the short run, [enabling the party] to play a crucial role in the PALEA dispute,” referring to a trade-union struggle of the Philippine Airlines workers that drew international attention. [23]

Other groups remain more orientated toward work in the countryside and among poor peasants. The Marxist-Leninist Party of the Philippines, for

example, split from the CPP in the late 1990s. It considers itself heir to the ND tradition and sticks to the Maoist strategy of “Protracted People’s War,” the gradual building of a rural, peasant-based guerrilla force. In the south of the country, also mainly in rural areas, the Revolutionary Workers Party-Mindanao is active. Its name comes from a failed attempt in the late 1990s to unite RJ groups in a Revolutionary Workers Party-Philippines. The Mindanao group rejected the surrender by this party to the government and separated. The RPM-M is a member of the Fourth International and is primarily rooted among rural proletarians and peasants. An important focus for the party is the indigenous people of Mindanao, called the Lumad. This poses specific questions, for example the protection of remaining traditions of communal ownership and the working of traditional systems of justice. It also means the party has to navigate conflicting claims over land by Lumads and the movements of the island’s Muslim population, the Moros.

The political differences are real but don’t necessarily preclude the formation of united fronts. Sadly, personal conflicts and rivalries, sometimes stemming from the acrimonious splits that produced the different groups, hinder the forming of alliances and weaken the non-ND left.

But against the violence unleashed by Duterte and the increasingly authoritarian state, the greatest left-wing unity is needed. Recent signs that such unity is possible are points of hope. During the latest protest on the occasion of the yearly State of the Nation Address, different groups, including aboveground allies of the NDs and non-NDs, mobilized together and shared the stage. And on May 1, labor organizations allied with the NDs rallied together with groups from other political backgrounds. Even the ND movement is not as homogeneous as its leaders would like it to be. Especially younger activists are growing weary of the divisions on the left. They are aware that Duterte’s rise, a symptom of the bankruptcy of “elite democracy,” was partly caused by the left’s inadequacy as an alternative. As Philippine socialist Herbert Docena has written, only

through “building a broad, united, and democratic mass movement” that is capable “not only of ousting Duterte but also of resisting other elites

desperate to return to power” can an alternative become possible. [24] Philippine socialists deserve

international solidarity in building this alternative.

[New Politics](#)

Venezuela Defines the Future of the Region

11 February 2019, by Claudio Katz

Guaidó’s self-proclamation as Venezuelan president is the most ridiculous and dangerous coup attempt in recent years. With the shameless backing of Washington, the Venezuelan rightwing intends to place a complete stranger at the helm of the state.

This time around, the starting signal was neither a terrorist attack nor an assassination attempt directed against Maduro. Trump has chosen a group of conspiracy experts (Abrams, Pence, Bolton, Rubio) to pursue escalation and has opted to seize the Venezuelan oil enterprise operating in the United States (CITGO). He has brushed aside all principles of legal guarantee in his quest to appropriate the world’s largest concentration of crude oil reserves.

South America’s rightwing governments have their own motives for supporting the coup. Colombia’s Duque wants to do away with the Peace Accords signed with the guerillas, after having dismantled UNASUR. A contingent of the US Marines already stationed in Colombia is prepared for any sort of provocation.

Brazil’s Bolsonaro continues to identify Venezuela with the blight of “populism”. That rhetorical gesture is meant to paper over his largely improvised presidential debut and forestall the inevitable disappointment of his electors.

Macri leads the line in the crusade against Venezuela. The Argentine head of state is eager to show that his administration can be the most able servant of the empire, going so far as to designate one of his own party

officials as Guaidó’s ambassador. The president has reserved special exemption for Venezuelan immigrants in the midst of a wave of xenophobia whose ultimate purpose is to distract from runaway inflation, unemployment and utility hikes. For the Macri administration, the Venezuelan crisis has the additional benefit of dividing the opposition, where leaders of federal Peronism join the President in vilifying Venezuela.

Without the backing of the United States, Duque, Bolsonaro and Macri are completely ineffective. The so-called “Lima Group” could not even boycott Maduro’s swearing-in. There were more foreign delegations present at the ceremony than the investiture of the raving Brazilian military captain.

Meanwhile, Venezuela’s atomized opposition is clinging to a fictional president. It has never managed to win a presidential election and failed in every attempt to contest election results. It has unflinchingly accepted the United States’ veto of negotiations with Chavismo, and it periodically likes to plunge into brutal acts of violence. For the time being it is a simple marionette of the State Department, subject to the whimsies of Trump the puppeteer.

Double Standards

The Caribbean coup leaders have become media darlings. They draw on the complicity of journalists, attributing to Maduro a litany of sins that also happen to be extensive to other governments throughout the region. A cursory overview of these similarities would show the plot to be

completely unjustified, or, alternatively, would force a call for a continent-wide regime change.

The Venezuelan government is repeatedly characterized as illegitimate, as if it were the product of electoral fraud. But the reality is that the Maduro government was confirmed with the participation of 67% of the population, a level well beyond recent poll numbers registered in Chile or Colombia. No journalist thought to call for the ousting of Chile’s Piñera or Colombia’s Duque on the basis of low voter turnout.

It is true that one sector of the opposition called for abstention, yet another did participate in elections and did not contest the outcome. Nor was there ever any evidence of fraud in an electoral system praised by international organisms (Carter) and political figures (Zapatero). The very same electoral mechanism awarded the opposition with leadership of the National Assembly in 2015. Operating within the same electoral framework, Maduro is protested and Guaidó is recognized.

24 elections have been held over the last two decades of the Chavista regime, each one allowing for a recall vote. The right to a recall does not exist in any other country throughout the region. Voting is not obligatory [as is the case in many Latin American countries], and yet Venezuelan elections routinely show levels of voter participation above the regional average. The opposition never acknowledges defeat and always appeals to accusations of voter fraud when the results do not go their way.

With their habitual duplicity, the same

journalists and media who criticize Venezuelan elections do not find anything suspect about the commission of elections in Brazil while Lula sits in jail. They dispute the rulings of the Venezuelan judicial system while extolling on the virtues of the magistrate who brought down Lula (Moro). Nor do they object to his ministerial appointment by Bolsonaro.

Likewise, the media denounces the detention of opposition leaders (Carmona, Ledesma, López) but fails to mention the cause of their imprisonment. They are not in prison for their critical opinions; they are there for fomenting coup attempts or for their involvement in bloody guarimbastreet fighting. Chavismo is subject to a level of scrutiny that applies nowhere else in Latin America. Where Venezuela is concerned, it would seem that we should be more understanding of such attempts at regicide.

Nor does the media care to mention the brutal violation of human rights practiced by Venezuela's opponents. Since the signing of the Peace Accords, Colombian paramilitaries acting under the watchful eye of the government have murdered hundreds of social leaders. Political prisoners in Argentina are mounting and there is a cloak of impunity protecting those responsible for the murder of Santiago Maldonado and Rafael Nahuel (one, a solidarity activist with indigenous causes, the other, a member of Argentina's Mapuche community). Brazil has seen an escalation in attacks against the Landless Workers' Movement [MTS], and recent findings have implicated the sons of Bolsonaro in the murder of PSOL politician Marielle Franco.

Chavismo is even accused of maintaining -imaginary- connections with drug traffickers. But the same groups leveling those accusations have overlooked the very real financial backing by organized crime for the Colombian rightwing. No international organism has called for punishing that country as it continues to harbor the production of illegal drugs. What has taken place in Mexico is even more serious. The entire Mexican territory has been torn apart by a massacre claiming some 200,000 lives, without

so much as a suggestion of regional intervention from the Organization of American States.

Venezuela is of course experiencing a massive wave of emigration as a consequence of its economic troubles. But comparable forms of displacement have also been observed under similar circumstances in other countries. Poverty always leads those most affected to seek refuge in a neighboring country.

If these catastrophes amount to a "humanitarian crisis", it would be fitting to say the same of equivalent migrations elsewhere. No one is speaking in those terms of the harrowing flight of Central American families to North America. Their torments are apparently not worthy of pious calls for aid. Instead, they are the excuse for the construction of a border wall. The internal war in Colombia saw similar levels of human displacement without any call for foreign intervention.

Media conglomerates always frame their coverage of Venezuela with allegations of the violation of the freedom of press. But the disruptions they portray are irrelevant next to the systematic murder of journalists in Mexico and other Central American countries. The manufacturers of lies tend to apply a double standard to their own practices.

Contradictions Below the Surface

It suffices to recall what took place in Iraq and Libya to have some sense of the stakes involved. Imperialism is capable of wreaking unimaginable havoc. If a large-scale intervention should take place, Latin America will lose one of its major safeguards against the kind of catastrophe visited on Africa and the Middle East.

The Venezuelan rightwing dismisses the dangers involved, expecting a rapid victory with little collateral damage. It is already announcing the imminent retreat of Chavismo, Maduro's isolation and the desertion of the military's top ranks. It likes to point to the unity among its own ranks

and the international support behind it. But these are tall tales that unravel under the most superficial analysis.

The command center in Washington is compromised by a number of dissenting voices, while Trump is preoccupied by a complex political-legal context on the home front. Fiascos in the Middle East have put a damper on enthusiasm for foreign military incursions. The military is disoriented, recently having withdrawn troops from Syria and Afghanistan. The possibility of a repeat of the Granada or Panama occupations has been discarded, and the typical pre-invasion ultimatum, like that offered to Hussein or Gadhafi, is being postponed. The Pentagon is only entertaining limited engagements for the time being, starting with the shoddy pretext of humanitarian intervention.

Nor are the US's European partners eager to participate in adventurism. Their role in the plot against Venezuela lacks a credible threat. Divergences among Western leaders has led to an impasse over the agreement on sanctions in the Organization of American States and the UN, while the Vatican seeks to remain neutral.

Coup conspirators have also taken note of the augmented role Russia plays in supplying the Venezuelan military. A Russian presence could complicate matters for Trump's oil seizures, if it proves to be the case that Russia has shares in CITGO. Nor is it clear who would exactly be most affected by the seizure. Experts estimate that the United States has managed to separate its supply of Venezuelan oil. But those purchases make up 13% of imports and their cancelation could affect energy prices.

The media is at pains to conceal these dilemmas. Coverage is triumphalist, despite the failure on the part of the rightwing to register any type of achievement in the last two weeks. So long as bribes, threats and US enticements fail to erode the Armed Forces, Guaidó will continue to exercise command of a nonexistent post.

A Battle on Two Fronts

The rightwing has indeed recovered its capacity to mobilize, but Chavismo has responded in kind with equally massive demonstrations. The government maintains a remarkable ability to rally its supporters in the midst of the crisis. Both sides recognize that repeated marches will not be enough to force the government to relinquish power. The indeterminacy of the current situation could ultimately prove costly for the opposition.

Their leaders are left to choose between the path of violence (which led to their isolation in 2017) or accepting the status quo (which is sapping their energies). For the time being they have opted against the violent guarimbas in the wealthier neighborhoods, preferring to test their strength through provocations in popular neighborhoods.

The government too has learned from past confrontations and is exercising caution. It shows leniency towards Guaidó's photo ops and is betting on his slow demoralization. But economic collapse raises questions about long-term popular support in the battle against the rightwing. All of Venezuelan society is being torn apart by the collapse of income.

Contraction in production over the last five years has destroyed 30% of GDP. Such a downturn is on level with the 1930's Great Depression. No sector of Venezuelan society is immune to the debacle.

Crude oil extraction has been halved. Monetary financing of the fiscal deficit has triggered the largest hyperinflationary spiral of the twenty-first century. Price indexes leapt from 300% (2016) to 2,000% (2017). The current price average is unquantifiable.

The scale of the crisis is demolishing salaries, leading to barter exchange and a critical shortage of food and medicine. The daily suffering of the population is appalling, their survival often dependent on official

government supply networks (CLAPS).

The media portrays this collapse as the inexorable consequence of "Chavista populism", overlooking the role played by the architects of economic warfare. The foreign blockade and internal sabotage have led to a collapse in crude oil extraction, diminishing international reserves and skyrocketing costs of basic imports. Foreign and local capitalists have provoked this collapse as a means to expedite the arrival of a more business-friendly political regime.

Indescribable economic adversity has been aggravated by the government's own improvisations, ineffectiveness and outright complicity. Maduro has passively tolerated the destruction of production. Sectors of Chavismo have lobbied to penalize corrupt bureaucrats and their millionaire partners, to no avail.

These are the initiatives needed to forestall economic collapse. Other measures proposed include effective control over the banking system to impede capital flight, radical shifts in the assignation of foreign reserves to the private sector, progressive taxation of private fortunes, incentive programs to encourage local production of food and measures to generate popular control of prices.

This program also calls for a new approach to debt that would anchor the local currency and contain hyperinflation. No "petro" or "sovereign bolivar" will function so long as the *boliburguesía* [portmanteau of Bolivarian and bourgeoisie, i.e. the new bourgeoisie that prospered under the Chavez administration] enjoys official government protection. This privileged layer has thrived by over-billing imports, transferring funds abroad, engaging in currency speculation and scarcity. The rightwing is not the only force looking to topple Chavismo: similar forces are alive inside a government that has failed to counteract economic collapse.

Commitment or Neutralism

As the conflict grows more serious, many voices are calling to impose a set of conditions under which the Venezuelans could democratically determine their future. The legitimacy of that principle is beyond debate. The question is how it can be implemented, because if the coup forces take the upper hand then that aspiration will be as good as dead. The continued sovereignty of the country and the defense of popular rights demand, above all, that the *escualidos* be defeated [*escualido*, "the squalid," is a common pejorative for the anti-Chavista opposition].

The conflict underway is no longer an "internal affair" of Venezuela. The confrontation exceeds its territorial origin and now involves the entire region. The two principal interests stoking the crisis have very precise goals. The United States looks to recover dominion over its "backyard", while the Latin American elites want to bury the previous decade's popular demands.

If the coup conspirators manage to defeat Chavismo, they will move next on Bolivia and Cuba, extending neoliberal authoritarianism across the continent. The dispute over Venezuela is about the preservation of one of the last breakwaters as the reactionary tidal wave continues to expand.

The parties, organizations and intellectuals who categorically reject the coup are capable of grasping the dimensions of the dilemma. The strength of anti-imperialist demonstrations underlines this. Gone is the hesitancy that watched on from the sidelines during the 2017 guarimbas. The designs of an ascendant rightwing are all too plain to see; the portents of a Venezuelan Bolsonaro would mean irreparable damage.

The current dilemma should in no way deter criticism of the decisions made by the Chavista government. But it is of vital importance to situate any critique within a shared battle against the putschists.

Moreover, the current struggle calls for something more than the ambiguous neutrality expressed in recent pronouncements. By distancing themselves from the conflict's protagonists, those declarations situate either side on a common plane. With the same yardstick they question Maduro and Guaidó, suggesting that there is a shared level of illegitimacy. They simultaneously criticize the regime's authoritarianism and the adventurism of the opposition. They object to the US military threat and the geopolitical presence of Russia.

But does a mutual condemnation of

Maduro and Guaidó then entail recognizing neither party? A call for abstention from the rallies marshaled by the government and the opposition? Does it mean an indiscriminate censure of the Marines and the Bolivarian Army?

Neutralists praise the attitude of the Mexican and Uruguayan governments, who are advocating for the immediate renewal of negotiations between both parties. That initiative has opened a channel of dialogue which Maduro has already accepted, and Guaidó rejects.

It is clear that the concrete specifics

of negotiation will be decided with the outcome of the struggle. The rightwing will not accept dialogue so long as there is a perceived possibility that it can seize power. Therefore, defeating the Right is the basic condition for resuming negotiations. The outcome of negotiations will be a reflection of the balance of forces. Defeating the rightwing is the categorical priority for the present moment. In that battle, the destiny of Latin America is being decided.

5 February 2019

Source [Verso blog](#).

The Me Too Movement in the Middle East

10 February 2019

Turkey

In Turkey, a number of feminist and pro-feminist/leftist news sites covered the global #MeToo movement in detail. Numerous women have participated in the #BenDe (#MeToo) action in Turkey and shared on social media their experiences of sexual harassment and assault. (Men's participation in the respective #BenNas?lDe?i?e?im [#HowIWillChange] action was remarkably low.)

The most significant event inspired by #MeToo was the campaign #BenDeNEV?N (#MeTooNEVIN). In 2012, Nevin Y?ld?r?m was sentenced to life long imprisonment after killing Nurettin Gider, a man who had raped her systematically for several years. Nevin's case was taken to a higher court in January 2018 where appeal judges were to reevaluate the sentence. In January 2018, claiming that Y?ld?r?m's act was "lawful killing" based on self defense, a group of feminists launched the online campaign #BenDeNEVIN to demand justice for Nevin Y?ld?r?m. At a street demonstration in Istanbul organized as part of the campaign, campaigners drew attention to the situation of

women who for various reasons have to hide or cannot publicize the sexual assault they experience. They said, "We take strength from women who say #MeToo all over the world as well as from our own struggle and revolt."

Apart from this, several cases of sexual harassment in the film industry were publicized where women in the industry showed solidarity with victims of harassment at times by giving reference to #MeToo. All in all, the media attention to as well as the solidarity action in social media around these cases seem to be inspired by the global #MeToo movement.

Syria

In Syria, sexual violence has been enacted by three different agents. The Syrian regime, the religious fundamentalist extremists, local men and NGO employees.

Since the uprising in 2011, mass rape and sexual assault were often utilized by government forces as a tool to enforce submission and means for punishment. [25] The aim was not only to gain physical dominion over women but also to induce a sense of

humiliation on to the victim and her family.

"I lost my dignity"(2018) is a paper researched by the Human Right Council which covers cases of sexual and gender-based violence in Syria. [26] It found members of armed groups Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham responsible for rape war crimes and causing "severe psychological and physical harm on women and girls by imposing religious dress code and denying their freedom of movement."

Employees of NGOs in the humanitarian aid sector have also been found guilty of sexual misconduct. Reports surfaced earlier this year detailing Syrian women being exploited by local men where sex was demanded in exchange of humanitarian aid. [27]

In the wake of MeToo, forms of resistance came in two ways. In Idlib, resistance to extremist groups was expressed through women's organizations and an empowerment office. [28] Defiant radio shows, coordinated activities and raising awareness proved successful in challenging dogma.

The second form was withstanding cultural stigma surrounding rape by breaking the silence. [29] Self-condemnation, shame and disgrace often follow rape victims as a result of their assault. However, Syrian women found courage to come forward with their accounts and testimonies which enabled the monitoring and tracking of sexual abuse cases.

Lebanon

Sexual violence in Lebanon affects two distinct vulnerable groups: Lebanese Women and Migrant Domestic Workers.

A survey (2017) found that 1 in 4 Lebanese women are victims of sexual harassment. [30] Almost 50% of the assaults are perpetrated by family members or relatives. Marital rape is not criminalized under Lebanese law. This can explain why only 24% of the victims report the assault to the police.

Many Lebanese women suffer from unwanted sexual advances at the workplace but for migrant domestic workers, rape outlines a different form of subjugation. It is one that is compounded by gender, racial, and economic stratifications. [31]

Domestic workers arriving from East Asian and African countries find themselves legally bound to their employer under the Kafala sponsorship program. Under this exploitative practice, women endure harrowing circumstances of wage deprivation, verbal assault and rape which is often used to ‘discipline or punish’ the migrant worker. [32]

The suspicious death of Lembibo, last September sparked outrage among activists in Lebanon. Lembibo had drowned in the pool of the employment agency after the agency found out that she was pregnant. [33] During the same month the body of an unidentified pregnant migrant worker who was found beaten to death was found in a suitcase. Both incidents remain unaccounted for.

Efforts to combat gender-based violence in Lebanon have grown considerably in the MeToo era. Anti-harassment campaigns circulated via

social media addressed the pervasiveness of street harassment as women shared personal stories under the hashtag #MeshBasita (Not Ok) and #NotYourAshta. As of late last year, an online website was launched to track cases of sexual harassment. [34] Earlier this year, a new initiative under the Gender Equality Program by ABAAD (NGO) was launched. It aimed at redirecting the cultural habit of victim-blaming by launching a social experiment called “Shame on Who?”.

While these initiatives aim to be progressive, they are still limited in their scope as they do not include working class and African and Asian migrant women. Lebanese authorities have frequently targeted and deported volunteers fighting for Migrant Rights. For now, domestic workers escaping abuse are finding refuge in a secret underground network of churches, migrant community groups and local people’s homes. [35]

Palestine

In her latest essay, columnist Yara Hawari states “Patriarchy exists in Palestine not only in the form of problematic social dynamics and gendered violence among Palestinians, but also in the form of occupation and settler colonialism.” [36] She continues, “Palestine is a perfect example of how colonialism, capitalism and patriarchy work together to keep women, as well as the poor and the marginalised, under a devastating system of oppression.”

Me too has played a significant role in addressing these issues. Tweets shared on social media under the hashtag #AnaKaman demanded justice against sexual harassment. Earlier this month, research by the The Arab Center for the Development of Social Media found that 75% of Arab women experience sexual harassment online.

‘Not your Habibti’ which translates to ‘Not your darling’ is a campaign launched by 21 year old Yasmeen Mjalli in response to her own experience. [37]

Iraq

The wave of violence against women and the LGBT community demonstrates the confluence of regressive factors in Iraq and the Middle East as a whole. The UN/US sanctions regime changed gender relations dramatically. [38] The collapse of the state after the U.S. invasion in 2003, has also disproportionately harmed women through impoverishment of the welfare system and slashing of state jobs. Additionally, the repressive Saddam Hussein regime used the sanctions as pretext to target social liberties and empower religious institutions, causing further erosion of achievements made by the feminist movement. The US invasion, conducted under the pretext of liberating women despite the country’s strong tradition of feminism, increased the level of gender-based violence. This violence has included sectarian militias as well as those of the US and other invading forces themselves.

Since the invasion, the US-installed sectarian regime ruling the country has worked to undermine the progressive Personal Status Law set forth by leading feminists and communists in 1959. [39] As laid out in IraQueer’s latest report, “Fighting for the Right to Live; The State of LGBT+ Human Rights in Iraq” (2018), killings and a systematic campaign of extermination have been perpetrated by government-aligned militias with the help of the state’s Islamist regulations and lack of enforcement of any existing protections. [40]

Tara Fares, Rasha al-Hassan, Hamoudi Al Mutairi were some of the latest to be killed in a wave of misogynistic and homophobic attacks aimed at silencing diverse voices aiming to liberate their future from the dichotomy of extremisms. [41] [42] Such voices of resistance include artist Marina Jaber, whose “I am society” campaign set to reclaim women’s role in the public space. [43] Another is the Organization of Women’s Freedom in Iraq, which after rejecting the US invasion has continued to mobilize in its aftermath, organizing protests against domestic violence in Baghdad, calling for the International Criminal Court to prosecute the Islamic State for its crimes against women and

LGBTIQ individuals, and establishing shelters for women escaping domestic violence and later for those escaping society and the sexual violence of the Islamic State. [44] [45] [46] [47] The struggle for women's emancipation in Iraq is a fundamental one, extending that for independence and liberation.

Tunisia

Tunisian women's rights activists have generally been ahead of their peers in the Maghreb and the Middle East before and since the Arab Spring. In this vein, Tunisia's progressive Personal Status Law and advancement of and interest in women's issues brought against the feminist movement are notable, for example in setting in place protection mechanisms against domestic violence. [48]

In its nation-building project, Tunisia has portrayed itself as exceptional in the region with its modernist and Westernized system of women's rights. [49] These rights however, administered through an exclusive class of statist feminists, have been used to circumscribe the boundaries within which women are allowed bodily autonomy and to reinforce the state's control over society as the state continues to position itself as a bulwark against the regressive forces of Islamism.

Black and labor feminist movements have called for the state to move beyond state-sponsored feminism to set in place protections and enhance labor laws and confront racism, all issues which are dismissed as the relative progressivism of the state is pointed to. [50] At times, LGBT groups have also called upon ruling elites to gain the political courage and imagination to heed the calls of the community to confront such regressive rulings as the sodomy law and hold the law's bigoted enforcers to account. [51]

The inertia faced by such groups outside the circles of the state outline the limits of state-sponsored feminism as one that is of the liberal educated classes of the city, not only in Tunisia but beyond. The elite feminism of such groups must be transcended in working for a truly transformational

change to be affected by grassroots movements, in such a manner that does not act as an impediment to women's autonomy. [52]

Saudi Arabia

The regime of Saudi Arabia under its current leadership by Prince Muhammad bin Salman has intensified its longstanding assault on women. These assaults can be seen in the lack of rights of domestic and foreign workers, the onslaught upon women's rights activists and feminists, and abroad as intensified aggression upon Yemen, and support for such repressive regimes as those of Bahrain, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates.

Israa al-Ghomgham was arrested due to her participation in the peaceful protests that occurred in al-Qatif. The state's treatment of her has reflected the double repression that women and the Shia religious minority face in the country. Although the state prosecutor called for her execution by beheading, because of international protest and support for Ghomgham, the beheading sentence was dropped. [53] However, Israa will still have to serve a prison term. She has thanked her supporters but has pointed out that her husband and many other activists are currently in prison. Some might be beheaded because of their anti-government protest activities.

In an acceleration of the crackdown on civil society, and specifically the women's movement, dozens of women and feminist human rights activists have been arrested. One of the first to be arrested was Loujain al-Hathoul, whose torture was personally overseen by royal advisor Saud al-Qahtani. [54] Others include Samar Badawi, Nassimah al-Sadah, Hatoon al-Fassi, Eman al-Nafjan, Aziza al-Yousef, Mayya al-Zahrani, Nouf Abdulaziz, Noha al-Balawi, Maria Naji, Mohammed Rabiah, and Ibrahim Mudaimeegh. [55] [56]

Lately, some Saudi women have taken the step of seeking asylum and fleeing their country. One of the most ill-fated is that of Dina Ali, who attempted to flee an arranged marriage by seeking to reach Australia. [57] However, when she was in the Philippines, the

Philippines government held her until her family came and forcibly returned her to Saudi Arabia, where her fate remains unclear. Another woman, Maryam al-Otaibi, was arrested and later released after she attempted to live independently of her father in a challenge to the guardianship laws, with the regime colluding with her brothers and father to keep her under guardianship. One of the most recent cases is that of Rahaf Alqunun, whose family worked together with the Thai and Saudi states in order to return her to Saudi Arabia, where she may have been killed. However, due to international attention, she was able to gain refugee status from UNHCR, allowing her to reach Canada.

One of the most prominent women's issues in the country is that of migrant domestic workers. As noted by United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), these women are disproportionately vulnerable to abuse due to male guardianship laws, lack of access to legal avenues, lack of governmental oversight and enforcement, and lack of social services and protection for survivors.

Regionally, the war that Saudi Arabia has been waging on Yemen has had a disproportionate effect on Yemeni women. The majority of civilian casualties and internally displaced due to the war have been women and children, while gender-based violence has increased by 63 percent since the war broke out. Healthcare and services generally have broken down, causing a disproportionate effect on women's health while women's economic status and gender roles have placed them at much greater risk of famine and cholera.

In the field of women's rights as in many other fields, the situation has seen even further erosion despite the rhetoric being put forth by the ruler, Bin Salman and his beneficiaries. However this has not stopped women from continuing to push for emancipation. They are resisting the male guardianship system and civil laws, organizing against migrant domestic worker conditions and Saudi Arabia's military interventions abroad.

Egypt

Despite their strong political and civil tradition, Egyptian women are under assault by the Sissi regime and its allies as well as by Islamists including the Muslim Brotherhood. During the 2011 revolution and other protests afterwards, the state allowed for and participated in sexual violence against female protesters, subjecting them to specifically sexualized assault as compared to men.

The Sissi regime has unleashed and empowered the so-called ‘morality police’ to an unprecedented extent, targeting sex workers and the LGBT community. The Egyptian street continues to grapple with an epidemic of sexual violence including street harassment and honor killings in part due to cultural conservatism and incitement from the media and political elites.

In addition to the feminist movement, the labor movement is calling for an end to harassment and other sexual violence in the workplace, where labor and gender relations contributes to high rates of sexual assault.

Revolutionary feminist and liberal feminist women must confront the fact that the anti-Sissi liberal class has not stood with survivors of sexual assault committed by those of their own liberal ranks. Deutsche Welle has confirmed that reports of former host Yosri Fouda committing sexual abuse are credible. [58] [59] However, liberal supporters have propagated his own conspiracy theories of regime-plots. The leadership of the revolutionary Bread and Freedom Party has been accused of committing rape and harassment against women and subsequently covering up their actions up.

Such cases indicate the gravity of the crisis and the sweeping nature of the challenge facing Egyptian feminists. Within the revolutionary movement we see the reproduction of the same violence and sexism that can be seen in the broader society.

Iran

The courageous acts of the Girls of Revolution Avenue (women have taken off their headscarves in public and have faced assaults and prison time), and a movement called “Me Too” among former and current political prisoners (women and men) to expose the torture and abuse which they have endured in the prisons of the Islamic Republic, are important developments.

Now, some of the Girls of Revolution Avenue, other feminist and human rights activists as well as the mother of a woman executed for killing her rapist, the parents of a feminist political prisoner and parents of political prisoners killed after the 2009 Green Movement, have issued a petition. They demand justice for Iranian women after 40 years of torture, physical, sexual and emotional abuse and rape by the Iranian regime. [60]

Last June, protests took place in Iranshahr (province of Sistan & Baluchestan) against the abduction and rape of 41 women. So far, no suspect has been prosecuted. In early January, Zahra Navidpour, a young Iranian woman published audio and video clips on social media in which she accused Salman Khodadadi, a member of parliament of having raped her. Subsequently, Navidpour’s dead body was found at her mother’s home. Her body was secretly buried by the

authorities without an autopsy. It was reported that she had “committed suicide.” A campaign started by “Justice Seeking Teachers” in memory of Navidpour, issued the Persian-language petition below:

Conclusion

In sexual violence, gender oppression and the reproduction of power are intertwined. Rape is often used as a weapon for subordination and degradation in the name of honor and pride. [61] The recent killings of Rasha Bassis in Syria and Hammudi al-Mutayri in Iraq are examples of this phenomenon. [62]

Me Too is not a heteronormative issue nor is it bound to a specific geographical location. [63] It is a movement that is striving to include an intersection of class, race, gender and sexuality to thoroughly examine the underlying power dynamics of oppression.

Dove-Taylor oppression as the marriage of power and prejudice. Through it, a reality is defined which grants privilege to the dominant group and consequently restricts the rights of the marginalized. More importantly, oppression operates through a structural format as it enlists institutional policies to enforce dominion in a systematic manner.

So if oppression under capitalist patriarchy is structural and systematic, it seems logical that that which would counter it is a rhizome-like network of interconnected struggles and resistance.

February 5, 2019

[Alliance of Middle East Socialists](#)

Socialists and the fight for democracy in Venezuela

9 February 2019, by **Eva Maria, Gonzalo Gomez**

Note from the interviewer and editors: This interview was conducted on January 27 with Gómez, a leading voice of Venezuela's Marea Socialista, which has consistently opposed U.S. imperialism, supported the gains made through the Bolivarian process, and criticized both Hugo Chávez's and current President Nicolas Maduro's concessions to national and international business interests, bureaucratic tendencies and anti-democratic maneuvers. On February 5, Gómez participated in a meeting with U.S.-backed opposition leader Juan Guaidó as a representative of the Citizens' Platform in Defense of the Constitution. This platform is organized by leftist figures who oppose U.S. intervention and propose a popular referendum (Consulta Popular) to avoid a violent confrontation. [64]

We understand the Platform's goals and their hope to use publicity from this event to make their own views known. [65] However, we feel compelled to state that we are concerned the meeting with Guaidó, a leader who is receiving direct support from imperialist governments in Europe, from reactionary heads of state in Brazil and Argentina, and from the Trump administration itself, runs the risk of allowing the Venezuelan right to portray itself as "talking to all sides" in a media war designed to pave the way to intervention.

ON JANUARY 23, Juan Guaidó, the president of the National Assembly, declared himself acting president of Venezuela and was immediately recognized by the United States, member countries of the Group of Lima and many other states. But for most of the world, this is the first time that we've heard of Guaidó. Who is he and what has been his role in Venezuelan politics?

Guaidó was an assemblyman for the right wing opposition party Popular Will (VP), which is headed by its imprisoned leader Leopoldo López.

Guaidó had just been named president of the National Assembly as part of the power-sharing agreement among the largest parties in it. He participated in

the opposition's street mobilizations against Maduro in 2017, but aside from that, he had no great prominence, not even as a leading public figure in his party.

The Supreme Tribunal of Justice declared the National Assembly in contempt in 2015 when it refused to unseat Assembly members from the Amazonas state who had been charged with electoral fraud for buying votes.

This was something carried out by the ruling PSUV [United Socialist Party of Venezuela] to stop the new right-wing majority in the Assembly, but then the PSUV abandoned the Assembly itself and pushed for a National Constituent Assembly "on highly questionable conditions, by the standards of both democracy and the Constitution inaugurated under Hugo Chávez in 1999.

It was from this opposition-led National Assembly, declared to be in contempt, that Guaidó emerged as a figure. When he declared himself president, he announced that Maduro was a usurper and that the elections Maduro had won were illegitimate. He stated that he was assuming the presidency in a "provisional" manner to form a "transition government" that would then hold new elections.

However, the Assembly didn't proclaim him the president. It was only after an immense anti-Maduro demonstration held on January 23 that Guaidó proclaimed himself president, without having been elected by the Venezuelan people or even chosen by the National Assembly.

SO WHO is the true president of Venezuela? Are the events of January 23 and after a coup d'état?

The president of Venezuela was elected in May 2018: it is Nicolás Maduro.

Even though the election took place under severe restrictions, with some political parties banned and state resources used to favor the PSUV, Marea Socialista called for participating in these elections, despite our criticisms, because we considered that voters should not give

up our right to choose.

The conservative opposition called for abstaining from the vote, and the rate of abstention rose to over 70 percent.

Even though we voted, we believe that Maduro's government has lost its legitimacy because of its anti-worker policies, its terrible corruption, its predatory extractivism that gives away our resources to foreign powers, its unconstitutional decisions and the repressive authoritarianism by which it governs.

It was elected under highly questionable conditions and has lost any claim to legitimacy with a whole number of serious violations to the Constitution. The vast majority of the working class has shown that they reject Maduro and his government "there have been many mass manifestations of this rejection.

Guaidó took advantage of this discontent to declare a rejection of Maduro's government and put forward the Assembly's proposals and policies.

Afterward, he called for the national mobilization on January 23, and, seeing the strength of the response and the immense anger against Maduro, seized the opportunity to proclaim himself president. He took the oath of office as "president" in front of this demonstration "once again, without any constitutionality to this actions.

Looming behind all this was Trump's government, along with several right-wing governments in Latin America, organized in the so-called Group of Lima. After the declaration of the parallel government, the threats started up of intervention by the U.S. to impose it by force.

Therefore, the true government in Venezuela is Maduro's, even though we consider it illegitimate and an oppressor of our people that has been destroying the Bolivarian Revolution. Maduro is not a self-proclaimed president supported by the U.S. He can only be replaced by the Venezuelan people, exercising its sovereignty and voting under acceptable and constitutional conditions.

So what is taking place does have the characteristics of an ongoing coup d'état, even if has not been carried out by the Venezuelan military, but instead through sanctions and threats from U.S. imperialism, in alliance with the most right-wing governments of Latin America and the European Union. These governments have not even gotten support from bodies like the Organization of American States and the United Nations.

U.S. intervention has taken the form of sanctions, confiscation of Venezuelan holdings abroad, blockades of particular goods and the strategic use of "humanitarian aid," but also preparations for military escalation in case the political and economic pressures don't yield results.

We know that Trump and the U.S. government are driven by imperialist, colonialist and capitalist interests "the geopolitical drive to dominate other peoples. We repeat our slogan: "The people no longer want Maduro, but no one chose Guaidó." We are against foreign interventions and seek a solution accomplished democratically by the people.

In this conflict between an elected but illegitimate president and another who is neither elected nor legitimate, we call for dialogue to take place, but dialogue in the interests of popular sovereignty. Let us ask the people what they want.

Speaking for Marea Socialista and the Citizens' Platform in Defense of the Constitution, we have proposed a call for a consultative referendum, under the terms of the Constitution's Article 71, which specifies that "matters of national importance" can be put to a vote.

That referendum could be invoked in an agreement between the Maduro government and the Opposition National Assembly or by gathering the of 10 percent of voters. We are working in alliances with other political organizations and popular movements to make this happen, as we do not want anything being decided for us behind closed doors.

Let the people decide on their destiny

"let them be consulted if the desire is for the government to regain legitimacy. Let general elections decide these questions. But we do not accept other governments or imperial forces imposing their will, nor the political elites within Venezuela who pretend to stand for democracy, but ride roughshod over it.

WHAT IS the difference between the large demonstrations of January 23 and previous phases of the opposition against Maduro? Could you elaborate on the different factors involved?

The year 2018 was marked by workers' and community protests and a union resistance emerging in an increasingly notable way. These struggles centered on defending wages that have been destroyed by hyperinflation and the government's anti-worker policies; defending collective bargaining agreements that the government began to undermine by lowering benefits; and opposing the repression of workers' protests.

Also, working-class communities came out into the streets in greater and greater numbers to protest shortages and the scarcity of utilities like water, natural gas and electricity, public transportation; and health services and medications.

The main difference between these protests last year those the year before is that the earlier ones were more connected to and driven by the opposition's political demands, and they were mainly middle-class in character. These 2017 protests began as large mobilizations, but ended with episodes of street violence that were crushed by the government, using drastic repression.

This year's protests started around questions of basic needs erupting in the barrios, which were then channeled towards the Open Assemblies and the January 23 demonstration, where Guaidó declared himself president, to the surprise of many of the demonstrators.

Workers' struggles have begun expressing themselves around new Venezuelan workers' organization, with activists and union leaders

promoting and tying these struggles together from a class perspective, but with a diversity and plurality in their political alignments.

Some are linked to the opposition, others are "neither-nor," and still others come from the current of dissident Chavismo that has developed as the PSUV trade union bureaucrats have become an instrument of the government, which is the main boss in the country.

The Bolivarian Socialist Workers Central Union, the largest trade union, is today an arm of the state apparatus that assists in posing anti-worker policies, either justifying them or dampening protests in order to help manage the rebelliousness of the working class against the destruction of its rights by the PSUV government and the military.

The situation with Guaidó puts this new surge of the union movement at risk. It was born of struggles from below, but a fight will be required to keep the movement independent of the different poles that would like to co-opt and dismember it.

HOW ARE the United States and its allies influencing the development of this political crisis?

Many Venezuelans look with some "vete and sympathy for "support" against Maduro because they aren't seeing all the implications of this support for the sovereignty and independence of the country, let alone the terrible risks it carries. Another part of the population incensed about the U.S. interference and is guided by nationalist feeling.

The Bolivarian and revolutionary sectors critical of Maduro that are against the government have held their positions, but they must necessarily place top priority on the struggle against imperialist intervention. The threat of intervention favors the Maduro government and hinders the development of peoples' autonomous struggles against this right-wing government.

HOW WOULD you describe the

alliance between Trump, the Latin American right wing represented by Bolsonaro and Duque and the Venezuelan Opposition?

For Trump, this is an opportunity to recolonize parts of Latin America in which the U.S. has lost influence. For Trump's lackey governments, this is the chance to eat the crumbs from a feast for the U.S. that is provided by the pillaging of their own peoples.

Despite the reactionary character of Maduros' bureaucracy, the U.S. won't forgive its origins in the revolution led by Chávez. Nor can they forget how Chávez orchestrated the traditional bourgeoisie's removal from power to directly administer the state in a country as important as Venezuela.

Several regional right-wing governments maintain historical and business links with the U.S. Washington resent the influence of emerging imperialist interests like China and Russia on a neighboring government. So we see the U.S. embarking to impose conditions, dominate its "backyard" and maintain the global balance of power it desires.

What do you think of the proposal advanced by Uruguay, Mexico and the Vatican for a negotiated solution to the crisis?

In the face of the dangers of a possible civil war or invasion, this proposal has positive aspects, as long as it doesn't foster closed-door agreements between the political elites and as long as it respects the people's right to choose their own government "a government that aims to restore healthy institutions and re-establish health and the provision of food supplies, along with a democratic political life and human rights.

What do you expect will happen in the next few weeks? What do you

think should be the task of socialists in Venezuela at this time?

It's very difficult to foresee because Trump and the US government are wielding a stick to create their own favorable conditions. If they don't get the results they want with the stick, they may resort to directly destroying their opponent, which in this case is not just Maduro, but the entire country. We are hoping to avoid war through negotiations, thus escaping from even greater suffering. We demand a democratic and constitutional solution from which the people can reorient their course.

Nothing will be favorable for the people without intense participation and mobilization from workers' and working-class communities in defense of their own interests, in autonomous, self-organized, and conscious ways. The people must aim to conquer their own power and hegemony in the service of the greater good.

A large part of the left in the U.S. is principally opposed to U.S. intervention "and rightly so" but it adopts an uncritical stance towards Maduro's government. What would you like the international left to say and do to establish solidarity with the Venezuelan people?

International solidarity is necessary in the face of what the U.S. and its allies are carrying out against Venezuela. Solidarity from leftist, progressive, workers and intellectual organizations opposing interventionist policies is especially important. These groups know the high cost of intervention for peoples on the receiving end as well as the high cost born by the North American people themselves.

We ask for strong opposition to

Trump's intervention against Venezuelans, and we are convinced that this will also assist the struggle for freedom and against oppression imposed by the pro-war hawks within the United States.

We need an international campaign against U.S. imperialism and the imposition of illegitimate governments, and for the democratic rights of the Venezuelan people to decide the future of their own country through constitutional means and free elections. This solidarity must not tolerate intervention behind excuses like "humanitarian concerns."

But this anti-intervention campaign cannot mean any support for Maduro's government as such, since it is an oppressor of its people.

The opposition to intervention must be for the Venezuelan people to make their own decisions, based on sovereignty and freedom "not to help further consolidate a government that betrayed and dismantled the Bolivarian revolution in the name of a false "socialism."

Under Maduro, a bureaucracy has become a "lumpen-bourgeoisie" and made itself comfortable in power by exploiting workers, delivering our sovereignty to transnational corporations and foreign powers, destroying our environment, and sacking public resources, all to enrich an elite of bosses.

Opposition to U.S. intervention must not extend to giving support to a despotic government and predatory castes. Let there be no confusion. The support we request is for democracy, sovereignty and dignity for the Venezuelan people.

Translation by Alejandro Q

February 6, 2019

The left case for open borders

8 February 2019, by Cyril Ryzak

Her argument is not entirely original. In a New York Times opinion piece, John Judis admonished liberals and leftists for belittling “national identity”. [66] Like Nagle, he thinks we are too soft on immigrants.

Behind Nagle and Judis’ anti-globalization position is an economic argument. When foreigners migrate to another country, they increase competition with native born workers on the labor market, lowering conditions for everyone. Globalization has created a situation where, fleeing poverty at home, migrants are flooding the more advanced economies. The result is a boon for business, the secret benefactor, maybe even the puppeteer, of illegal immigration.

Wrapping herself in the red flag, Nagle argues that “the Left should take its bearings from its own long traditions.” Didn’t Cesar Chavez’s UFW oppose illegal immigration at one point? Using an out of context quotation from Marx, Nagle attributes to him the view that competition between native born and immigrant workers is the source of racial tensions.

A left case for this?

In the minds of “Left” anti-immigrant polemicists, since competition drives down wages, the Left should accept the need for greater restrictions on immigration and at the same time tackle “its root causes”-“the financialization of the world economy. To prevent emigration, every country should adopt “state-led development” leading ultimately to a robust social democratic welfare state

Nagle conjures up a parody of “internationalism” to save her from accusations of right-wing pandering. According to her scheme, migrants will have to endure greater repression until a basically revolutionary, worldwide political shift cuts across

regional particularities in all of Asia, Africa, and Latin America putting in power strong Lefts building social democracy in every poor country.

“The Left case Against Open Borders” is wrong on the immigrant rights movement. It is wrong in its supposed materialist analysis. It is wrong on how we should view the legacy of Old Left. Nagle’s views are a mockery of socialism, removed from the struggles raging in the present.

Organize Immigrant Workers Rather than Excluding Them

Immigrants currently staff many of the key sectors of the American economy, including agriculture, meat-processing, and construction. It’s impossible to effectively organize those industries without also organizing immigrant workers.

In the past many unions advocated using repression against migrant workers as a defense against competition from immigrant workers. This was always, however, counter-productive. The great waves of unionization in the 19th and 20th centuries required the combination of vast multitudes of immigrants from a wide array of origins. The labor movement was most effective when it organized among immigrants rather than against them. Since 2000, American trade unionists have recognized that the restrictiveness of immigration policy “not its looseness- allows for migrants to be super-exploited; undocumented workers have no legal recourse to violations of labor law. Employers use the threat of deportation to prevent the undocumented from organizing.

A recent case in Alabama shows the harmful effects of restrictive

immigration policies. HB 56 required employers to report the immigration status of their workers through the E-Verify system. It was a disaster for Alabama’s poultry workers. Many undocumented workers fled the chicken processing plants. Those undocumented who stayed were intimidated by employers to perform even more dangerous work lest they be reported.

Very few new workers were hired. Instead, as the number of workers on the job dropped, line speeds increased. As the Southern Poverty Law Center reports, employers “threatened mass firings if workers cannot keep up with the faster pace...”. [67] In plants already notorious for their lax safety standards, speed-up meant increasing the risk of serious hand injuries.

Nagle supports a national E-verify mandate, which the AFL-CIO opposes:

“Absent broader immigration reform, a national E-Verify mandate will push millions of working people deeper into the shadow economy, further undermining our freedom to join together and fight to raise wages for all.” [68]

Nagle’s favorite rhetorical trick is to oppose an “Old Left” sensibility to an adolescent, moralizing “identity politics”. But those she attacks as “upper middle class” “identitarians” are community and workplace organizers performing extremely heavy political labor in unfavorable circumstances. And by arguing that marginalized minorities are completely irrelevant to socialism, and, moreover, harmful to it, she reinforces prejudices about Marxism’s supposed class reductionism.

Social Solidarity in Proletarian

Struggle

It is insightful to compare Nagle's concept of "materialism" with that of Karl Kautsky, "Pope" of Marxism before the First World War, often characterized as an arch-economic determinist and class reductionist. In his explanatory booklet for the German Social Democratic Party's program, *The Class Struggle*, he, contra Nagle, seemed to think the working class had a great capacity for solidarity, [69] "The proletariat, as the lowest of the exploited strata, cannot free itself from exploitation and oppression without putting an end to all exploitation and oppression. It is, therefore, their sworn enemy, no matter in what form they may appear; it is the champion of all the exploited and oppressed."

Socialists claim that workers have an interest in production being run according to social, co-operative, and humanitarian criteria, rather than for competitive imperatives, enrichment, or the destruction of war and environmental degradation. Production, however, cannot be run for the common good if social relations in production are egotistical and based on the unquestionable superiority of a master. Production must be transformed by the very organization of the proletariat-in-struggle, a collective united by common disadvantage. As Georg Lukacs put it in one of his essays written during the 1919 Hungarian Soviet Republic, "The very solidarity propagated as an unattainable social ideal by the greatest bourgeois thinkers is in fact a living presence in the class interests of the proletariat."

Socialism is collectivism in a pure form. It is not an egoistic collectivism based upon a prefixed racial or national category, in endless struggle with other collective egos. Socialism is the sincere substance of a collective bond. This collectivism, like capital, its enemy, cannot acknowledge any arbitrary limits. The ascendant bourgeoisie of the early 19th century in Marx's famous words "drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervor, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation."

Instead of "the icy water of egotistical calculation", a socialist working class must wash society with solidarity.

The social principle around which socialism wishes to see society organized is born in production, but precisely because our existence is shaped by the economy, it is a powerful force for shaping other non-economic spheres. The "primacy" of class derives from socialism's goal: the transformation of society as a totality.

Materialism is not an excuse to belittle "non-class" forms of oppression, but, on the contrary, the key to understanding how to unite seemingly unconnected fights against various injustices. This unity begins within the working class itself, which across its ranks includes people suffering from every inequity. It is senseless for workers fighting together in a common struggle to ignore the plights faced by their fellow workers, even when they are not shared by all.

Some will object that not only are these wild hopes, they also belittle the efforts of anti-racist, feminist, and LGBT activists, privileging class solidarity over the solidarities formed in struggles, for example, against police brutality and for reproductive rights.

This objection is a serious one. The "primacy" of class always has the potential to degenerate into something akin to the position of Sarah Wagenknecht of Germany's *Die Linke*: eliminate neoliberalism first, help refugees, if ever, later.

Socialists cannot ask social movement activists to put everything on hold until we achieve some new "New Deal" government policy. It must acknowledge their labor, their collective commitment, and the power of their solidarity. It is the lowest form of "Marxist" analysis to say that churches housing undocumented migrants are superficial, while run of the mill business unionism is something radical.

Nonetheless, socialism has to be straightforward. The social movements are like the Polish insurrectionists of 1863 in support of

whom the Workingman's International was founded, or Castro's guerillas in the Sierra Maestra. While Cuba's July 26 Movement would win with the crucial support of the Cuban working class, culminating in the general strike of January 1959, the Polish uprising would fall on Tsarist bayonets, demonstrating the need for an international working-class movement that could effectively challenge Reaction worldwide.

Guerilla wars fought by small bands are heroic endeavors and sometimes they can defeat a vastly superior force. But it really helps to have an army. The working class is that army.

The social movement Left is not "neoliberal" or an ally of "the forces of cognitive capitalism, especially financialization" as Nancy Fraser once argued. It is, however, a victim of capitalism's own compartmentalization of "morality" as something outside of bread and butter concerns. When Adam Smith argued that human nature is divided between self-interest and sympathy, he was describing the nature of bourgeois man. The efforts of social movement activists to awaken society are not entirely in vain, but greatly weakened under capitalism, where, alongside their moral commitments, people inhabit a realm of exploitation, ruthlessness, and indifference. No matter how powerful the solidarity of social movements, the rot of bourgeois society can always undermine it. They need a force that can fight the rot on its own terrain.

Socialism gives social movements a powerful motive force to charge their efforts. Even short of social transformation, a socialist working class reworks the fabric of daily life. "Theory" Mark wrote, "becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses". Socialist ideals once had a living, breathing existence in Communist factory cells, welfare provision through "ghetto socialism", and clandestine meetings at kitchen tables during anti-fascist struggles. They were alive in Red Clydeside in Glasgow, in Red Wedding in Berlin, in the Red Basin of Upper Silesia. Socialism became an organic part of these and other working-class communities

Class struggle and social movements complement one another. The solidarity of the working class is qualitatively strengthened by participating in social movements, while social movements gain a completeness and foundation when based in the working class. Rosa Luxemburg expressed this relation when she wrote, "To the credit of mankind, history has universally established that even the most inhumane material oppression is not able to provoke such wrathful, fanatical rebellion and rage as the suppression of intellectual life in general, or as religious or national oppression. But only classes which are revolutionary by virtue of their material social situation are capable of heroic revolt and martyrdom in defense of these intellectual riches." [70]

The goal of a socialist working class from the point of the view of the present seems like an unattainable goal. It would be foolish to deny that building such a class movement requires a tremendous effort. The history of the American labor movement's relationship to white supremacy is one of a tortuous struggle with deeply settled social prejudices within the leadership and membership of unions. But the ultimate lesson of this history is that black workers, organizers, and socialists were capable of forcing the movement to take its principles seriously. By the time of the civil rights movement, unions, at least in rhetoric, gave their support to the struggle against Jim Crow. And when they failed to live up to their rhetoric, they were challenged by powerful movements from below, like the League of Revolutionary Black Workers.

Socialist Ideals Are Alive in the Immigrant Workers'

Movement

Given the scale of the task, when a movement of workers emerges which points in the direction of what socialists wish to achieve, they must celebrate and give aid to it. If there's any place today where the ideals of the socialist movements of the past still have life it is the immigrant struggle. Far from being opposed to the ideals of the Old Left, movements of immigrant workers, and efforts of solidarity with them, are a testament to socialism's basic hope.

Nagle's imagined immigrant rights movement is completely at odds with the really existing one. What other struggle has exemplified what going beyond mere "identity politics" can achieve? By its nature, the immigrant movement combines labor organizing and anti-racism in a form where they cannot be separated. This fight against exploitation must also be a fight against state repression against minorities. Community organizing complements that of the workplace.

Immigrant workers have revitalized the labor movement, waking it up from its bureaucratic slumber with a fresh militancy. Los Angeles was rocked by grassroots struggles rooted in the Latino, heavily immigrant, working class. The famous "Justice for Janitors" movement, which organized the heavily immigrant janitorial profession in LA, was one of the most spectacular campaigns of the contemporary labor movement.

On May Day 2006, "A Day without Immigrants" shut down many of the industries dependent on immigrant workers in Los Angeles. This day long strike was backed by unions and demonstrated the durability of the labor's alliance with the Latino community.

In southwest Florida, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, a worker's center of immigrant farm laborers, fought to improve conditions in agricultural enterprises. Not formally a union,

community solidarity was very important for the CIW. The Immokalee Workers targeted fast food chains who bought from their employers. They built an alliance with student social justice groups, organizing boycotts of major brands. This culminated in several agreements where the restaurant chains agreed to only buy produce from farms with better conditions and pay. The CIW won by taking its fight to the broader process of production and distribution. It didn't just challenge a particular workplace regime, but the larger structure of the food industry.

In New York, taxi and "black car" workers have been organizing since the late 90s. The predominantly South Asian and Middle Eastern composition of unions like the New York Taxi Workers Alliance meant these struggles were always interconnected with the fight against national prejudice that emerged after 9/11. When nationalist hostility reached its fever pitch in the "Muslim Ban" of the Trump administration, taxi workers went on strike and joined protests at JFK.

Immigrants today are the vanguard of the American working class. They should inspire socialists. They teach us valuable lessons about organization, about strategy, and about struggle. They show us where our strength lies: in working class solidarity. They are the seeds of the world we want to build.

The labor movement and the socialist parties of the past often failed to live up to their mission. But, unlike Nagle, we cannot delude ourselves into thinking that these failings were somehow virtues. On contrary, we must be willing to go forward with the patient labor of building a socialist movement true to its purpose. There is no better place to begin than in building solidarity with the struggles of immigrants.

Cyryl Ryzak is a member of Solidarity.

[Against the Current](#)

The Protests against Russia's Pension Reform and the Reasons for Their Defeat

7 February 2019, by **Ilya Budraitskis**

The Russian authorities' actions in as they were preparing to raise the retirement age in summer 2018 involved both a thought-out strategy and a relatively weak propaganda component. Analyzing this combination will help us to assess both the potential for a mass movement against raising the retirement age and the reasons it remained unrealized.

In their attempt to ensure mass support for the pension reform, bureaucrats, government experts, and loyalist media outlets tended to use three basic arguments that can be categorized as "necessity," "rational advantageousness," and "an active long life." According to the first of these, the necessity of the reform was determined exclusively by the aging of the population and the decrease in the working-age population. The country's pay-as-you-go pension system meant that there was no way out of this situation other than raising the retirement age. The second argument was that carrying out the reform would allow a meaningful increase in the real size of pensions, and the third was essentially that raising the retirement age would allow people to lengthen the active phase of their life and create new possibilities for self-realization. It is hard not to notice that the last two arguments contradict the first as far as the government's assumed motive for the reform goes, which seriously undermined the trust of the audience to which these arguments were presented. Nonetheless, the arguments had in common the aim of casting doubt on the idea that different generations have common interests and undermining solidarity between them: those who had already reached the retirement age must have won out at the cost of those who were about to retire, while the youth, in turn, was

assumed to be interested in lessening the burden of supporting the growing number of retirees.

This approach of stimulating competition between individuals and generations was clearly based on the existing atomization of Russian society and the younger generation's relative openness to neoliberal rationality and suspicion towards all forms of income redistribution (Yudin, 2018). Nonetheless, the level of support for the reform turned out to be low among all age groups (Goncharov, 2018), which reflected both a general distrust of government welfare policy and a deep-rooted conception of pensions as "compensation for labor that people expended for the good of the state and society and for the creation of common goods" (Goncharov, 2018). In other words, as with the monetization of benefits in its time, the pension reform was perceived not only in the context of material losses, but also as an attack on the principles of justice and the dignity of the majority. In the end, this unconvincing propaganda only served to underline the existence of an endangered common interest and create additional grounds for articulating the majority, the "us" opposed to the government that was necessary for a potential social movement.

At the same time, the strategy of passing the pension reform was well-prepared: Prime Minister Medvedev's announcement and the bill's hearings in the State Duma came during summer vacation and also coincided with the FIFA World Cup, which was presumably intended to crowd it out of the media agenda. In addition, the World Cup essentially allowed for a temporary ban on all public street protests in all the cities where games were held (including Moscow and St. Petersburg). It is important that the

plan for the pension reform was presented as an initiative of the government, supported by the ruling United Russia party, while President Putin consistently refrained from voicing explicit support for the project. In this way, the parameters of the reform announced by the government could be framed as the basis for a "dialogue," to which all "constructive" players (the parliamentary opposition and unions) were invited, and from which were cut off anyone who "politicized" the problem of raising the retirement age, i. e. used it in their own political interests separate from the interests of the majority. This distinction marked the basis for the subsequent lack of unity in action by those opposed to the reform, which in many ways was a defining cause of the fact that mass hopes for the appearance of a civil society protest movement went unfulfilled.

I propose that such a movement could have arisen as the result of one of two scenarios: 1) had there arisen a "united front" that, by instituting a public campaign against the pension reform, bringing together all the political forces and civil society organizations that opposed it, was able to initiate and organize nationwide protests, or 2) had there been a "spontaneous" wave of protests, i.e. one that more or less repeated the situation in 2005, when local demonstrations in "typical" Russian cities were able to create an image of "worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment" (Tilly, 2004, p. 3) that then spread throughout the country.

It is hard to summarize all the reasons why the "spontaneous" scenario failed to emerge, but one of them may be the non-existence of the "typical" Russian region or city that such a symbolically

important action would have needed to take place in. Although the consequences of the pension reform affected the interests of the majority of citizens, it was a sensitive issue for different sectors of the population in different parts of the country. Thus, while the regions of European Russia are distinguished by a higher proportion of residents of retirement and pre-retirement age, the largest amounts of economically vulnerable residents (for whom pensions and welfare payments are more significant as a source of income) are concentrated in the North Caucasus, Far East, and Siberia (Petrov, Kynev, and Titkov, 2018). Nonetheless, a mass protest in one of these potentially protest-inclined regions could certainly have created an image of a mass movement through which representatives of a wide variety of social and age groups could have expressed themselves. Another potential definitive reason was the phased implementation of the increase in the retirement age, which precluded the shock effect of a one-time, simultaneous loss that determined the character of the protests against the monetization of benefits in the Moscow Region in winter 2005.

In this situation, the realization of the first scenario—a public campaign uniting all opponents of the reform—turned out to be the only chance for a movement capable of articulating the general mood of protest against the breaking of the “social contract on old age” (Gaaze, 2018) and government austerity policies to appear. To found such a campaign, it was necessary firstly to create a relatively neutral space for collaboration between political groups that had earlier distanced themselves from the possibility of any coordinated action on principle, and, secondly, to create an atmosphere of pressure from below that would make refusing to collaborate a real risk of loss of support and marginalization for each of these political groups. Thus, the establishment of such a public campaign in the current Russian context would have required a reevaluation of the location of the “para-state parties” (March, 2009, p. 505) [the KPRF (Communist Party of the Russian Federation), LDPR

(Liberal Democratic Party of Russia), and A Just Russia] in the system of “electoral authoritarianism,” as well as the official unions (FNPR), which are integrated into this system. At the same time, it would have demanded a strategic change of course on the part of the movement of Alexei Navalny supporters, the personalistic character of which has always been tied to a refusal to enter any coalitions or make political decisions collectively. In other words, the possibility of creating such a united front against raising the retirement age could have not only changed the government’s plans in this area, but would have also meant a serious challenge to the existing political system capable of leading to changes within the established “hegemonic bloc” (March, 2009, p. 510). It is clear that such a public campaign could only have appeared through overcoming the resistance of practically all potential participants, who were distinctly not open to rethinking their current position in the existing political order. Thus, the problem of the pension reform and the mass expectations for a social movement surrounding it turned out to be inescapably connected to the defining characteristics of the political composition of the Russian regime and the place that both “para-state parties” and independent opposition forces occupy in it. To support this thesis, we will attempt to briefly review the key developments in protest actions that took place in summer and fall 2018, as well as the roles that various political forces played in them.

Soon after Prime Minister Medvedev’s introduction of the pension reform bill, a petition in protest was published on the site change.org; in a week, it gathered more than a million signatures (and by the end of July the number of signatories had already exceeded 3 million) [KTR Petition, 2018]. This petition was created by the Russian Confederation of Labor (KTR, Konfederatsiya Truda Rossii), a coalition of labor unions that ideologically and organizationally positions itself in opposition to the official unions (FNPR, the Federation of Independent Unions of Russia/Federatsiya Nezavisimyykh Profsoyuzov Rossii). Having inherited the late tradition of the “free unions”

of the late 80s and early 90s, the KTR has spent the last decade supporting unionization drives in cases of labor disputes in both corporate firms and the public sector. The Confederation of Labor has also always distanced itself from direct political affiliation, although it has declared the necessity of independent “political representation of the unions” (KTR Declaration, 2011) and regularly worked with various extra-parliamentary left groups. At the same time, this union coalition can’t be said to be entirely excluded from the existing political system: Boris Kravchenko, the President of the KTR, is a member of the Presidential Council on Human Rights and represents the unions on the Russian Trilateral Commission, while Vice President Oleg Shein is a State Duma deputy affiliated with the party A Just Russia.

At the end of June, KTR declared its readiness to create an organizing committee for unified action, which representatives of the parliamentary opposition, extra-parliamentary left-wing groups and public organizations were invited to join (Kudyukin, 2018). According to KTR’s plan, this was not just about coordinating efforts, but about a uniform public campaign that could attract ordinary activists, who did not belong to any of the participating organizations. The campaign, called “The People Are Against Raising the Retirement Age,” could have given the protests against pension reform a symbolic coherence and united them around common demands. The initial success of the petition on change.org, largely due to its non-partisan character, showed the potential of such a campaign. At the same time, it is important that the petition contained not only criticism of the government’s plans but also offered an alternative for scrapping the chronic deficit of the Pension Fund: fighting against work in the shadow economy and the subsequent “legislative powerlessness of workers, which does not allow them to effectively fight for their labor rights” (KTR petition, 2018). Thus, the alleged general demands of the “The People Are Against” campaign linked protest against pension reform with a change in the balance of labor market forces in favor of workers, the

implementation of the principles of the “welfare state” declared in the Constitution and the strengthening of the role of trade unions in Russian society.

The organizational model and nature of the demands of the “The People Are Against” campaign, as will be shown below, largely used the experience of movements against “austerity” policies and neoliberal reforms in the EU and Latin America. The main difference—and the main weakness of this campaign—was the inability to create a network of unaffiliated activists on the ground, who could put enough pressure on political parties and force them to act together. The second significant factor in the failure of the “People Are Against” campaign was that its leaders quickly lost the initiative to represent the protest against pension reform, which they obtained for a short time after the success of the online petition.

Parliamentary and extra-parliamentary political forces, particularly the Communist Party and Alexei Navalny, also immediately indicated their disagreement with the pension reform plan and called for protests (Resolution V of the Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, 2018; Efimova, 2018). However, these appeals suggested autonomous campaign management; they were not associated with the need for unified action, and most importantly, they were not focused on creating an inclusive social movement with its own identity.

On July 1, a first wave of protest rallies, in which tens of thousands took part, swept across the country. Most of these protests had permits from local authorities and did not provoke strong opposition. At the same time, restrictions related to the football world cup did not allow for any public actions in Moscow, St. Petersburg and a number of other major cities. However, tens of thousands of people took part in them; the largest were the rallies in Omsk (4.5 thousand participants), Chelyabinsk, Tomsk and Komsomolsk-on-Amur. In different regions, they were organized by supporters of Navalny, local organizations of the

Communist Party, the FNPR, and the “The People Are Against” campaign. Despite this effective unity of action, the protests against reform did not have the character of a mass social movement with which millions of passive opponents of raising the retirement age could have associated themselves.

On July 18, the first rally in Moscow was held, gathering about 3,000 participants. Such a modest figure was largely related to the maneuvers of the local Moscow government, which only at the last moment agreed on the site for holding it (in the Sokolniki Park, which is remote from the center). However, based on the author’s personal observations, most of the participants in this rally did not belong to political parties and rather represented the category of “concerned citizens,” which is of fundamental importance for the representation of a potentially massive social movement. On this day, an action was also held in St. Petersburg, organized by a coalition of local opposition groups (mostly left-oriented) as part of the “People Are Against” campaign. By early August, the geography of the protests already covered more than 280 cities, and about 225,000 took part in rallies across the country (KTR rally map, 2018). However, by the end of July, the rallies became increasingly politically divided in character.

The decisive blow to the apparent unity of action against reform was given by holding two competing rallies in the center of Moscow on July 28 and 29. The first one, gathering more than 10 thousand participants, was held at the call of the Communist Party and in general corresponded to the established political and organizational practice characteristic of this party. Most of the speakers were party functionaries (including the long-term party leader Gennady Zyuganov), who not only criticized the increase in the retirement age but also called for supporting party candidates in the upcoming regional elections in September. The organizers of the rally not only made no effort to create a new identity for the movement against the reform but also emphasized its continuity with their own regular practices of “protest actions.” In

accordance with the organizational tradition of the KPRF, the initiator of such actions is always a “broad coalition” that actually represents a set of groups affiliated with the party that have no political agency of their own. Thus, on the eve of the rally, asked whether the party is ready to come out in a united front with other forces opposing pension reform, Zyuganov answered as follows: “We had 53 organizations during the discussion at the protest headquarters, including various unions—women, students, veterans, military-patriotic groups, writers’ organization, and so on. Anyone who wants to participate can do so, and we invite everyone” (Zyuganov, 2018).

The rally held the next day (July 29) was organized by the Libertarian Party and publicly supported by Alexei Navalny (who, however, refrained from speaking at the event). It gathered fewer participants, most of whom, however, for ideological reasons, were not ready to take part in the Communist Party rally held a day earlier. Holding different politically-engaged actions at the end of July was an important argument for the government media, which portrayed their organizers as politicians using the issue of pension reform in their own interests. This premise, confirmed by the fact that the opponents of reform publicly lacked unity, seriously disoriented many potential participants in protest rallies, who were now afraid to be held hostage by alien political ambitions.

Subsequent protests, planned by various political forces at the beginning of September, could no longer attract a significant number of participants who were not also part of the established support groups for the Communist Party or Alexei Navalny. An additional factor of disappointment in the protest was the effect of President Putin’s address on August 29, which we already mentioned above.

So, on September 2, two simultaneous (!) rallies were held against the reform in different parts of Moscow, one of which was organized by the Communist Party, and the second, by the parties “Fair Russia” and “Yabloko” and the “The People Are

Against" campaign. Both meetings together could not reach even the numerical indicators of the Communist Party's July action. Tellingly, these events were almost not covered by pro-government media (Gavalova, Obukhov, 2018). On September 9, protests called by Alexei Navalny took place in a number of cities, most of them without permits from the local authorities. These rallies, met with active police opposition and mass arrests, were largely identical, both symbolically and in terms of the composition of participants, to the anti-corruption actions organized by Navalny's supporters in 2017 and early 2018. Despite the fact that, starting in late June 2018, Alexei Navalny himself placed criticism of pension reform at the center of his agenda, his audience remained largely unchanged. According to sociologists, "the politician is supported primarily by young, wealthy, educated residents of Moscow and major Russian cities", for whom "in general, issues of social justice and pension reform are not very clear" (Volkov, 2018b). Protests by Navalny's supporters, which are generally much more vibrant in character than the rallies of the Communist Party, also alienated a significant number of opponents of the pension reform (especially those of pre-retirement age) who were not ready to accept their confrontational character. Indeed, the results of the actions on September 9 fully confirmed the well-established link between Navalny's calls to protest and the risk of arrest or beatings of ordinary protesters by the police. It was on this day that the authorities, to the greatest extent since the beginning of the movement against pension reform, discovered their characteristic "selective intolerance" (Sakwa, 2013, p. 220), rejecting in most regions permit requests for protests (OVDInfo, 2018) and conducting preventive detentions of their organizers (Voronin, 2018). A particularly high-conflict situation occurred in St. Petersburg, where the city government at the last moment changed its own decision and (probably under pressure from the Presidential Administration [Karpenko, 2018]) cancelled an earlier permit for a rally. As a result, about

600 people were detained following the rally, all of whom were subjected to administrative detention. Smaller in scale but still quite massive arrests occurred in Moscow and other cities.

An autonomous campaign against the pension reform organized in August by Sergey Kurginyan's loyal patriarchal movement, Essence of Time, can be offered as an example of a curiosity typical of Russian "electoral authoritarianism" that starkly reflects protest management practices. Following their conspiracy theory, according to which Vladimir Putin is a hostage in the hands of hostile clandestine elites, Essence of Time activists on the streets of large cities gathered around a million signature for their appeal to the president asking to halt raising retirement age (Novaya Gazeta, 2018). The result of this campaign was an even greater disorientation of the passive supporters of the reform, who struggled to understand the connection between their support of this appeal and the necessity of participating in public protest rallies.

On September 27th, the pension reform bill, including amendments proposed by Putin, was passed after a third hearing by the State Duma. Within the next few days, it was passed by the Federal Council and then signed by the president. By that time, practically all political forces had ceased to conduct public campaigns against the pension reform.

The events of summer and early fall 2018 surrounding the pension reform bill allow us to evaluate the position of each major political force that made a call for protest rallies. None of them was substantially interested in unity of action or in seriously expanding its audience beyond its current support group. According to Grigoriy Golosov, this "diversified strategy" is typical of the KPRF. The strategy is conditioned by this "para-state" party's place within the current system of electoral authoritarianism and includes constant maneuvering in order "not to cause too much irritation to the Kremlin, on the one hand, and on the other, to strengthen its own electoral base" (Polovinko, 2018). The last task is fully consistent with the Communists' call to hold a referendum

on the issue of pension reform, towards which all the main forces of party activists were mobilized. This initiative, which was predictably rejected by the Central Election Commission (Hamraev, 2018), helped to set the dynamics of party activities against the reform and coincided with KPRF's campaign objectives in the light of upcoming regional elections. At the same time, collecting signatures in support of the referendum set an alternative goal in relation to the need to influence voting results for reform in the Parliament, using street mobilization as an aid. These characteristics of KPRF's political behavior were one of the main obstacles to a potential broad, non-partisan social movement against the pension reform. They also correspond to both the party's specific position within an "electoral authoritarian" system and to the general features of this kind of system.

British scientist Luke Marsh defines "electoral authoritarianism" as a "system of hegemonic parties," analogous to the recent political history of Mexico or Taiwan. Within this system, opposition constitutes itself as "para-state parties acting within a framework of limited competition with the ruling party." It is fundamental to acknowledge that "para-state parties" are not a pure fiction, but play an important institutional role with more or less relative autonomy. For example, they directly address society, representing an alternative point of view; and they are recruiting elements of the elites, thus providing "social elevators" outside the boundaries of the leading party. Generally, they stabilize the regime (March, 2009, p. 505) by acting as an organizer of political or social protests, on one hand, and by helping to "manage" those protests, on the other (Robertson, 2011, p. 5). This position assumes mobility on behalf of the para-state parties, with a limited right to a voice (Gvozdev, 2002, p. 493) that is predefined by its dependence on the regime. However, this role also grants parties some autonomy and makes them sensitive to any pressure from below. In other words, this is an element of hegemony that potentially could play a part in its destruction as well. In actual KPRF practice, this institutional

contradiction is expressed in a combination of radical rhetoric and conservative practical methods. Thus, from the KPRF's point of view, the pension reform corresponds to the interests of "big capital," which is protected by the government (Postanovlenie Plenuma TsK KPRF, 2018). General party rhetoric includes an unwavering commitment to socialism, leaving political scientists no other choice but to classify the KPRF as a far-left party (March, 2012, p. 316). At the same time, the party explicitly considers electoral campaigns the main focus of its work, thus diligently preventing street protests from escalating. It is also worth noting that in their speeches against raising the retirement age, party leaders avoided directly criticizing the president, putting the responsibility on Prime Minister Medvedev and "liberal forces" in the government instead (Zyuganov, 2018).

Within the framework of Russian "electoral authoritarianism," the KPRF has traditionally represented those who not only will suffer the most from the pension reform but also are most likely to actually express their protest (primarily in the electoral arena). As sociologist Denis Volkov asserted, "the voters are very sensitive to excessive caution and palliative measures, and for this reason many people may not believe in the Communists' sincere desire to defend their rights to the very end" (Volkov, 2018b). We can assume that, in a situation where there is significant pressure from below, the KPRF would have to change their usual practices and join the process they would be unable to control. Examples of this kind of developments can be found in the events of 2005, when, in order not to lose the initiative and its traditional supporters' trust, local KPRF organizations had to actively support or even spearhead mass protests against the monetization of benefits, occasionally distinguishing itself by its radical methods. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that the KPRF's structural place as a para-state party prevented it from participating actively in the creation of a broad public campaign against raising the retirement age, the principles and self-presentation of which would have directly contradict the party's established practices and

claims to a monopoly on social protest movements.

Alexey Navalny's organization, on the other hand, is not a part of the system "electoral authoritarianism" in any way, and the peculiar properties of its role in the pension reform protests were mainly determined by its direct confrontation with the government, as well as by its individual nature and hierarchic structure. Throughout the summer and fall of 2018, Navalny kept repeating that he and his proponents represent the sole consistent opposition to the pension reform while the KPRF and other opponents of the reform were only imitating resistance in order to please the authorities. This line is quite consistent with the political culture of Navalny's organization, which is founded on a deep skepticism towards any coalitions or forms of collective decision making. In accordance with the well-known definition of populist politics (Laclau, 2005), Navalny has always acted as a figure that "constitutes" "the people" in its non-identity with the government "as regular people," opposed to thieves and corrupt officials. The task of resistance to the pension reform plans required revision of his ideological image and its related organizational practices, which tend to exclude working in coalition. In other words, this would demand from Navalny's followers a more defined program, focusing on social justice, demands for income redistribution, and opposition to austerity policies, as well as being open to dialogue with independent trade unions, the radical Left, and social movements. Even a purely rhetorical call by Navalny for unity of action addressed to the parliamentary opposition could have significantly expanded his audience of supporters; it could have also encouraged the beginning of the public debate on a necessity for a joint campaign against the pension reform. Nevertheless, motions like this would have required Navalny to substantially amend his previous strategy, and he proved to be unprepared for this.

In sum, both KPRF's and Navalny's organization did not contribute to the creation of a potential social movement against pension reforms for different reasons. The "The People Are

Against" campaign, which was founded by independent trade unions, was obviously conceived as a prototype of such a movement. However, it could not create a common identity for all actions against the reform, nor did it manage to build an effective network of local activist groups that would be able to influence political leaders from below.

Notwithstanding the combined political and social circumstances that impeded an appearance of large-scale movements against the pension reform and the government's austerity policies, the absence of this movement in the summer and fall of 2018 was by no means preordained. Not only would such a movement have conveyed a preparedness to protest on behalf of a substantial part of the population, it would also have been fully in line with the global trend of mass protests against neoliberal reforms in labor and welfare policy.

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The general inspiration for my book lies in a question: what does fascism mean in the twenty-first century?

Should we consider the rise of the new right on a global scale as a return to the classical fascism of the 1930s, or rather as a completely new phenomenon? How to define and how to contrast it?

NAMC: Based on its title, one might think that the book is about “neofascism.” Instead, you claim that the rightward drift in European politics is a “post-fascist” phenomenon, tied to classical fascism but also distant from it. Can you briefly explain why the difference matters?

ET: Neofascism, the movements that claim to be affiliated with classical fascism, is a marginal phenomenon. One of the keys to the new radical right's success lies in their depiction of themselves as something new. Either they do not have fascist origins (Trump or Salvini), or they broke significantly with their own past (Marine Le Pen, who banned her father from the National Front). [80]

The new right is nationalist, racist, and xenophobic. In most Western European countries, at least those where the radical right is in power or has grown significantly stronger, it adopts a democratic and republican rhetoric. It has changed its language, its ideology, and its style.

In other words, it has abandoned its old fascist habits, but it has not become a completely different thing yet. It is not yet a normal component of our political systems.

On the one hand, the new far right is no longer fascist; on the other hand, we cannot define it without comparing it with fascism. The new right is a hybrid thing that might return to fascism, or it could turn into a new form of conservative, authoritarian, populist democracy. The concept of post-fascism tries to capture this.

It is impossible today to predict its future evolution. On this point, the comparison with the twentieth-century interwar period is important: in both cases, there is a lack of international order. The chaos after the Great War was the result of a breakdown in the so-called “Concert of Europe” — nineteenth-century classical liberalism

— and today it is a consequence of the end of the Cold War. Fascism and post-fascism have been born from this chaotic and fluctuating situation.

NAMC : You offer France's National Front as the textbook example of post-fascism. Does the ascent of Vox in Spain or Salvini's Italy encourage you to nuance any aspects of the basic working definition of post-fascism, or do you see them as confirming your broad conceptual outline?

ET: The success of the far right in France, Italy, Hungary, Austria, Poland, and more recently in both Spain and Germany, two countries that were usually considered as exceptions, reinforces a general tendency. The French National Front was a forerunner. Obviously, this opens a dramatic question about the future of the European Union. I don't think that the EU can survive if these post-fascist movements in both Western and Central European countries are victorious in the next spring EU elections. It probably would not disappear overnight, but the collapse of the EU would become inevitable in the medium-term.

The rise of these reactionary and nationalistic “Europhobic” movements, however, is a product of the policies implemented over twenty years by the EU Commission itself. The EU has become a tool of financial capitalism that has imposed its rules onto all its governments through a compulsory legal structure, made of a complex system of laws sometimes inscribed into constitutions.

The most spectacular achievement of neoliberal elites has been to transform their own social bankruptcy — in 2008, they were saved by the states — into a financial crisis of the states themselves, who have supposedly been spending money beyond their means and should now transform themselves into profitable and competitive institutions. After two Commission presidents like Barroso (today a Goldman Sachs advisor) and Junker (the former leader of a fiscal paradise like Luxemburg); after the Greek crisis and ten years of austerity policies on a continental scale, the rise of right-wing populist leaders like Matteo Salvini and Viktor Orbán is not

striking at all: “The sleep of reason engenders monsters.”

We cannot struggle effectively against post-fascism by defending the EU. It is by changing the EU that we can defeat nationalism and right-wing populism.

NAMC: Much of your analysis centers on France. There, it almost seems like the new far-right is actually better understood as a return of the repressed: that the mainstreaming of the National Front is a process of making explicit the authoritarian, colonial history at the root of the Fifth Republic. Is this correct? If so, could it extend to other countries struggling with far-right tendencies?

ET: In Europe, a xenophobic and racist wave directed against Asian and African immigrants inevitably has a neocolonial flavor. Muslim immigrants and refugees, who are its targets, come from former European colonies. This is a “return of the repressed” that impressively reveals the persistence of a European colonial unconscious. But the old colonial and racist rhetoric has been abandoned.

The National Front is no longer a movement of nostalgic harbingers of French Algeria; it now depicts itself as a defender of French national identity threatened by globalization, mass immigration, and Islamic fundamentalism. This neocolonial posture can include republican and “progressive” habits: on the one hand, they wish to preserve the Christian roots of France and Europe against the Islamic “invasion”; on the other, they pretend to defend human rights (sometimes even of women and gays) against Islamic obscurantism.

These arguments are very popular in the French media, far beyond the ranks of the National Front: many public intellectuals who do not want to be confused with Marine Le Pen have become her most effective allies, such as Alain Finkielkraut, who recently joined the Académie française. After the terrorist attacks of 2015, François Hollande and his prime minister Manuel Valls adopted policies suggested by the National Front: state of exception, curfew, mass expulsion

of undocumented immigrants. They even tried to adopt the principle of depriving citizenship for binational terrorists (i.e., French citizens with North African origins).

NAMC : Do you give any credence at all to terms like “micro-fascism” or other concepts that see fascism as a transhistorical dynamic within capitalism?

ET: “Micro-fascism” seems an inappropriate definition since we are faced with a global phenomenon. Since an authentic democracy requires social equality, we can say that, especially in the neoliberal age, capitalism consists in “undoing” democracy, as Wendy Brown has explained so well. This is a general tendency of capitalism itself, not one of its pathologies or degenerated forms.

Since the first half of the nineteenth century, a classical liberal thinker like Tocqueville understood that the development of capitalism threatened what he considered the “elective affinity” between market society and democracy. This vision of an identity between capitalism and democracy became a myth in the second half of the twentieth century, in the age of the welfare state.

In fact, this “humanization” of capitalism was a consequence of the October Revolution. After the collapse of real socialism and the end of decolonization, capitalism rediscovered its “savage” nature. Social inequalities exploded on a global scale and democracy began to be emptied of its content.

Fascism certainly has a “transhistorical” character — think of the military dictatorships in Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s — and cannot be disconnected from capitalism, which was one of its premises. But viewing fascism as a result of the global crisis of capitalism does not mean considering it as its inevitable outcome.

In the United States, the outcome of the crisis of capitalism was not fascism. It was the New Deal. Fascism belongs to a historical time — the twentieth century — in which it

destroyed democracy. Today, post-fascism has lost the subversive dimension of its ancestors: it does not wish to suppress parliamentarism or individual rights; it rather tries to destroy democracy from the inside.

NAMC: You write about the contemporary “breaking of the taboo” around open assertions of fascist or ultraright political identities. You acknowledge that the European far right has achieved some legitimacy by filling the vacancy left by retreating social-democratic parties, yet you seem to be making a deeper point that touches on the idea of what you call a “regime of historicity.” Can you expand on the connection you draw between our “amnesiac democracies” and the rise of the far right?

ET: Post-fascism is a global phenomenon that does not have monolithic or even homogeneous features. Its explosive cocktail of nationalism, xenophobia, racism, charismatic leadership, reactionary “identitarianism,” and regressive anti-globalization politics can take different forms.

For instance, the radical form of neoliberalism endorsed by Bolsonaro is unknown in Europe, where post-fascism is fueled by anger and discontent with the neoliberal policies of the EU. From this point of view, it seems to me that a fundamental premise for the rise of post-fascism lies in the lack of a left-wing alternative to neoliberalism.

Both communism and social democracy, the hegemonic models of the Left in the twentieth century, have failed: real socialism collapsed, paralyzed by its own contradictions, and social democracy — the tool for the humanization of capitalism during the Cold War — exhausted its historical function when capitalism became neoliberal. Socialism has to be reinvented.

However, in the competition between the Left and the Right to reinvent itself, post-fascism is one length ahead. But differently from its ancestors, which were supported by the ruling classes of continental

Europe in the 1930s, post-fascism has not yet become the main option of the neoliberal elites. It could become the main option following a general crisis of capitalism, or a sudden collapse of the EU. The fear of Bolshevism, the main source of fascism in the years between the two world wars, no longer exists.

In my book, I speak of a neoliberal “regime of historicity” whose horizons are constrained by the present. This is a handicap for both right and left movements. Post-fascism does not have the utopian horizon of its ancestors. It does not try to conquer the collective imagination with the myth of a “New Man,” the “Millenary Reich,” and a new civilization. The logic of post-fascism is rather that of “cultural pessimism”: defense of traditional values and “threatened” national identities; claims for national sovereignty against globalization, and the search for a scapegoat in immigrants, refugees, and Muslims.

NAMC: The book is primarily concerned with Europe. Even your brief discussions of American politics are mostly to refute the idea that Trump can be understood through a fascist optics. Do you see any broader applicability for the general “regime of historicity” you’re describing? Doesn’t Bolsonaro’s victory in Brazil invite us to consider the global scale of the post-fascist phenomenon

ET: As many observers pointed out, Trump exhibits typical fascist features: authoritarian and charismatic leadership, hatred of democracy, contempt for law, exhibitions of force, scorn for human rights, open racism, misogyny, homophobia. But there is no fascist movement behind him. He was elected as the candidate of the Republican Party, which is a pillar of the American political establishment. This paradoxical situation cannot become permanent without putting into question the democratic framework of the United States.

A similar dilemma, in an even more dramatic and striking form, is at stake in Brazil after the election of Bolsonaro. He is more radical than his

American or European counterparts: whereas Marine Le Pen broke with her father's antisemitism and adopted a democratic rhetoric, Bolsonaro is an apologist of torture and military dictatorship. Whereas Marine Le Pen and Salvini wish to reinstate protectionist policies, Bolsonaro is a fanatical neoliberal.

However, Petrobras, the pillar of Brazilian capitalism, is not behind him. As many Brazilian analysts have pointed out, behind Bolsonaro there are three powerful conservative forces: "balas, bois, e biblia" – the army, landowners, and Evangelical fundamentalism.

NAMC: In other words, a true classical fascist movement would combine those two things that Trump and Bolsonaro are lacking: mass mobilization and the unified support of the elites. Is that correct?

ET: Yes, I think this is a major difference that distinguishes them from classical fascism, even if the ruling classes can perfectly accommodate both of them, especially in the absence of any effective alternative. In the EU countries, however, this option is not on their agenda. The militarized mass movements of classical fascism were a consequence of the brutalization of politics produced by the Great War. Today, this has occurred in Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Yemen, but not in the EU countries, the United States, or Brazil. This is why the forerunner of Trump and Bolsonaro is neither Mussolini nor Hitler, but Berlusconi. [81] But a new, global crisis could change the profile of the far right in many countries.

NAMC: One of the more interesting sections of your new book involves a discussion of the European school of "anti-fascist" historians and their purportedly "politically neutral" revision of history. Why do you see them as so dangerous and why would it be important to reassert the importance of an antifascist historiography?

ET: The dividing line between fascism and democracy is both moral and political. In continental Europe and, in more recent years, in Latin America,

democracy was born from the Resistance and from antifascism. Wherever these struggles have brought forth democracy, an "anti-fascist" democracy would only be fragile, amnesic, and unfaithful to its own history.

The Left should remember this genetic link between antifascism and democracy. Democracy cannot be reduced to a juridical and political dispositive, to "the rules of the game." Nor is democracy a simple corollary of market society; it is a historical conquest of political revolutions and antifascist struggle. Breaking or denying this historical link is the most direct way of "undoing the demos."

NAMC: You've described the recent "square movements" like Occupy Wall Street and the Spanish Indignados as an attempt to invent a "new communism." At the same time, you seem to suggest that without critically revisiting "old communism" and discovering some usable aspects of that legacy, the global left will remain rudderless. Where are some of those usable aspects of the communist legacy?

ET: Occupy Wall Street and Spain's Indignados have expressed a desire for an alternative, as has Syriza in Greece before its political shift in the summer 2015. Today, Bernie Sanders, Jeremy Corbyn, and Podemos prove that the Left is looking for new ideas, new paths, and new hopes. Sanders embodies a shift in the history of the American left, after the New Deal in the 1930s and the New Left in the 1960s. He gives a new legitimacy to the idea of socialism in a country where it was never hegemonic. In the UK and Spain, Corbyn and Podemos symbolize a radical break with the long sequence of social-liberalism.

These experiences are steps towards inventing a new model for a global left. The old paradigms failed but have not been replaced yet. A new model should combine a critical interpretation of the world and a project for its revolutionary transformation, as Marx suggested in his famous "eleventh thesis." [82]

Communism embodied this

combination and established the utopian horizon for the twentieth century. My only certainty is that a new, alternative left for the twenty-first century will be anticapitalist, but I do not know whether it will call itself "communist." It will probably invent new concepts and images – like socialism and communism did in the past two centuries. But a new global left will not be invented *tabula rasa*. Saying that a historical break took place with past models does not mean that a global left would not need memory and a historical consciousness.

A critical understanding of past defeats is unavoidable. What helped the Left to overcome its defeats, from the Paris Commune to the 1973 Chilean coup, was the conviction that the future belonged to socialism, and even the most tragic failures were only lost battles. This belief in a historical goal was burdened by a teleological dimension, but it also gave the Left an extraordinary strength, which today no longer exists.

The Left has been "orphaned." It can neither claim nor forget the past – it has to overcome it.

NAMC: You seem skeptical of populism's political use for the Left. Since it's a word often used at cross-purposes – to lump together disparate phenomenon like La France Insoumise and the National Front – you suggest that populism ends up blurring the lines between the Left and the Right. That certain left intellectuals and political parties have embraced the tag "left-populism," attempting to chart a course between "the square" and the "polls", doesn't seem to enter into your considerations. Do you think there is any place for a left-populism in the fight against post-fascism?

ET: In my view, populism is a political style that can be shared by leaders of different and even opposing orientations on both the Right and Left of the political spectrum. But a style and rhetoric where virtue is embodied by the "people" opposed to the corrupted elites simply define the form, not the content of a political

force. In Latin America, left-wing populism used demagoguery and often took on authoritarian features, but its goal was to include the lower classes into the social and political system. In Western Europe, right-wing populism is xenophobic, racist, and claims policies of exclusion.

As Marco D'Eramo has stressed, in most cases, stigmatizing "populism" reveals an aristocratic and elitist contempt for the "people." If populism means that Corbyn, Sanders, and Podemos are interchangeable with Salvini, Orban, Trump, and Bolsonaro, it is a completely useless or even dangerous concept.

I know that some radical thinkers think of populism as an alternative to a supposedly obsolete cleavage

between left and right, and often they put forward valuable arguments. Under certain circumstances this use of populism can work, but in a global context of rising post-fascist movements, it risks generating dangerous misunderstandings.

NAMC: In closing, we wanted to ask you about the recent controversy surrounding the so-called "left case for closed borders," which has raised a number of questions about sovereignty and its political use as a concept for the Left. Do you have any thoughts on the matter?

ET: Claiming "closed borders" in the age of "walled states" and militarized frontiers against immigrants and refugees seems extremely dangerous to me. It ultimately legitimizes

xenophobia, reactionary defenses of "national identity," and a return to national sovereignty – the refrain of post-fascism. Thinking that capitalist globalization could be counteracted by reestablishing national borders is a regressive idea, insofar as all the crucial issues of the twenty-first century, from ecology to social inequalities and demographic transfers, require a global solution.

Since its origins, internationalism belongs to the Left, and I do not think that we could easily abandon or reject universalism. In a global age, socialism should rediscover the original meaning of borders as meeting points rather than lines of separation.

[Jacobin](#)

Emmanuel Macron, Pedro Sanchez, Angela Merkel and Theresa May Have No Right to Issue an Ultimatum to Venezuela

5 February 2019, by **Éric Toussaint, Joaldo Dominguez**

The day following this ultimatum, French President Macron began a three-day official visit to Egypt in order to reaffirm his support for Marshal Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, who is at the head of a dictatorial regime similar to, if not worse than, the Hosni Mubarak regime, which was overthrown by Egypt's people in February 2011. Marshal el-Sisi, a favoured client of the French President, took power in 2013 in a coup, hijacking and strangling the hopes of the people who had risen up en masse to overthrow Mohamed Morsi.

Sisi is responsible for a massive and brutal repression. Tens of thousands of political prisoners languish in Egypt's prisons; hundreds of members of the opposition have been sentenced to the death penalty by military courts; human-rights defence

organisations denounce the massive persecution and the hundreds of extrajudicial executions of labour-union militants and other activists, as well as of journalists independent of the regime. The Sisi regime is literally conducting a reign of terror in Egypt and Macron visits him, supports him and sells him weapons. The British, Spanish and German governments also sell weapons to Sisi and support him.

As for the Spanish regime, remember that José María Aznar, head of Spain's government from 1996 to 2004, supported the coup against Hugo Chávez in April 2002. Pedro Sánchez is humiliating the Spanish people by following Aznar's example in threatening the elected president, Nicolás Maduro, and recognising the self-styled "president" Guaidó, who is directly supported by Washington and

the most reactionary governments in Latin America.

None of these four European governments are denouncing the systematic murder of social leaders and violations of the peace agreement in Colombia.

The Left has many reasons to express very strong criticisms of the government of Nicolás Maduro. Among the criticisms that need to be expressed are his continuing to repay external debt instead of declaring a moratorium and using the financial resources that would thus be freed up to do more to relieve the humanitarian crisis the Venezuelan people are now suffering. In 2016 the CADTM had called on the Venezuelan government to conduct an audit of the debt with citizen participation [1]. Other critiques of the Maduro government's

policies coming from the Left are also justified: its failure to combat the capital flight organised with the complicity of the highest authorities of the administration and the government; the continuance of the extractivist exportation model, encouraging exhaustion of the country's natural resources; the repression against trade unionists and other activists; the development of

policies of clientelism and a Constituent Assembly whose actual operation does not live up to the hopes its election had raised.

But as militants of the Left who uphold the right of peoples to self-determination, under no circumstances can we accept an ultimatum of the kind issued by

Macron, Sánchez, Merkel and May, and we call on everyone to oppose the policy of Washington and the Lima Group which it controls with all possible vehemence. The coup attempt by the "self-styled president" Guaidó must be denounced.

28 January

[Cadtm](#)

Our children on strike for the climate! What about us? What do we do?

4 February 2019, by Daniel Tanuro

Our children on strike for the climate! What about us? What do we do?

"What's the point of going to school if tomorrow our world is destroyed," these young people ask. It's common sense itself! These young people are not exaggerating. The situation is indeed very serious. The average global temperature has only increased by one degree since 1800, and the result is already worrying: heat waves, cold waves, more severe droughts, melting glaciers and ice caps, more violent cyclones, huge forest fires...

At two degrees, the impacts will be catastrophic. From that point we risk experiencing a snowball effect of global warming. The Earth would become a "drying planet", the temperature could rise very quickly by 4°C. Entire regions would become uninhabitable, hundreds of millions of people would become climate refugees, biodiversity would collapse and sea levels would eventually rise by three to four metres. It would no longer be a disaster, but a cataclysm!

The unavoidable conclusion is that everything must be done to ensure that the 1.5°C threshold for global warming decided at COP21 in Paris is not exceeded. But governments are not doing this. On the basis of their "climate plans", specialists project a warming of between 2.7 and 3.7°C...

At the very least, because more and more leaders are tempted to deny reality, like Donald Trump and the Brazilian fascist Bolsonaro!

In Europe, the Belgian government is one of the most hypocritical: on 2 December 2018, it congratulated the 75,000 demonstrators marching over climate, the next day it refused to support two European climate directives! Shame on those Tartufes! But the people are fed up with false promises and recuperation: there were even more demonstrators in Brussels on January 27.

Capital destroys our lives and the planet

Scientists have been ringing the bell for over 25 years. Why do emissions continue to increase? Why do governments do (almost) nothing? Because they are at the service of capitalism, because capitalism's sole purpose is profit, because profit requires growth and because this growth is historically based on fossil fuel energy (oil, coal and natural gas).

Renewables? They are produced for profit, not for ecology. If we produced less and shared more, they would be

enough to satisfy the real needs of humanity. But multinationals refuse to give up their fossil energy stocks and equipment, banks refuse to give up their capital invested in these stocks and equipment and bosses in all sectors have only one idea in mind: to exploit ever more labour and nature in order to produce ever more and make more profit than their competitors...

We are told that growth is the condition for everything: our jobs, our wages, our social security, our public services, our standard of living. Thus, our lives apparently depend on our exploitation and that of nature. In reality, this productivist system destroys both our lives and nature.

Today, we are on the brink of the abyss

Today, we are on the brink of collapse. To have a 50/50 chance of not exceeding 1.5°C of global warming, global net CO₂ emissions must decrease by 58% between 2020 and 2030. Then they must be reduced to zero in 2050, after which it will be necessary to ensure that the Earth absorbs more CO₂ than it emits.

Otherwise, it will be necessary either to resign ourselves to a planet that has become unusable, or to use technologies to artificially remove carbon from the atmosphere

("negative emission technologies") or to return part of the solar radiation to space ("geoengineering"). Warning: there is no guarantee that these witchcraft apprentice technologies will work. It will have to be experienced directly on a life-size scale, on the Earth and the living things that inhabit it....

Faced with a deadly danger, the instinct for self-preservation is a thousand times legitimate. The high school students are therefore a thousand times right to go on strike. Let us not stand idly by. Let us support them in the face of attacks from the pro-Trump right and attempts at recovery, wherever they come from. And let us follow their example!

Social and ecological issues: a single struggle!

The main victims of global warming are those who are constantly attacked by governments and employers: workers, peasants, children, women, pensioners, the sick... and migrants!

The rich tell themselves that they will always get by, even if it means living on artificial islands reserved for billionaires. To save their privileges and destroy our social and democratic achievements, they are increasingly tempted by the extreme right-wing who are racist, sexist and climate deniers. It is therefore clear that social and ecological issues are two sides of the same great democratic struggle.

This fight has only just begun. The world of work must take place there. From yellow vests to youth, it is high time to bring together struggles and demands. Today, our children are on the streets and on strike to defend

their right to exist and that of their children on this planet. What about us adults? What do we do? We must be behind them! It is our duty and responsibility.

Let us mobilize, by all means. Let's go on strike, too. Not a strike in slippers: an active strike. To discuss thoroughly all the injustices, all the destruction and ways to put an end to the current mess, both socially and environmentally.

For an ecosocialist emergency plan

Is it still possible to avoid climate disaster? The effort required is enormous. It can only succeed by combining the social and the ecological, in democracy and justice. An ecosocialist transition is essential. This requires an emergency plan. Here is a ten-point draft:

1. Eliminate unnecessary and dangerous production (starting with weapons!) and unnecessary transport of goods, locate production to the maximum, fight against programmed obsolescence.
2. Create public companies to insulate and renovate all buildings (at no extra cost to the inhabitants).
3. Invest massively in public transport, discourage the use of private cars. Rationalising air travel.
4. Leave fossil fuels in the ground. Expropriate and socialize the energy and finance sectors to organize a rapid transition to an economy based 100% on renewables (without nuclear!).
5. Redistribute wealth, restore equality in terms of taxation and the

progressiveness of taxation on globalised incomes. Refinance the public sector, education and the care sector.

6. Respect climate justice. Transfer to the South the technologies and financial resources necessary for sustainable development for all.

7. Breaking with agribusiness. Promote ecological agriculture that does what it takes to sequester as much carbon as possible in the soil.

8. Share the necessary work among all, without loss of pay. Reconvert workers in the sectors to be eliminated (with income maintenance and social achievements) into new activities.

9. Getting out of the market: free education, transport, health care. Free consumption of water and electricity corresponding to basic needs, rapidly progressive pricing above this level.

10. Develop a culture of "caring", transparency and accountability. Strengthen and socialize care activities for people and ecosystems. Grant the right to vote to all. Recognise the rights of citizen and popular control and initiative, including the revocability of elected representatives

Utopian? Between 1940 and 1944, the United States government implemented an emergency plan. Military production has increased from 4% to 40% of GDP and all kinds of restrictions were imposed. What was done to defeat Nazism and ensure the global supremacy of US multinationals can be done to save the climate with social justice. It is a matter of political will. It is up to us to impose it.

Against the Repression in Greece

3 February 2019, by Costas Lapavitsas, Stathis

One of the myths spread by the Greek government and its supporters abroad is that, unlike its predecessors, it does not resort to repression in the face of opposition and resistance to its policies. It is true that the Syriza government has never had to deal with mass mobilizations comparable in scale and duration to those that marked the country from 2010 to 2012.

Yet though social resistance to bailout policies has been considerably weakened by the loss of morale after Alexis Tsipras's capitulation to the troika of European institutions in the summer of 2015, it certainly has not disappeared. Particularly important has been the resistance against the auction sales of foreclosed homes. These auctions are a very sensitive issue for Greek society, but also a crucial demand by the banks that have imposed their priorities on successive governments. [83]

Resistance against the auctions policy has faced increasing repression from the Greek state and public authorities. At present dozens of people across the country are facing prosecution for actions they have taken against auction sales. Their numbers have increased significantly since December 2017, when the government passed a law specifically targeting these actions.

The escalation of repression became blatant in September 2018, when five well-known activists in the anti-auction movement were summoned by a special section of the security services, the so-called Department for the Protection of the State and Democratic Polity. The activists summoned included Panagiotis Lafazanis, the secretary of the left-wing Popular Unity party and former minister of energy in the first Syriza government, as well as Leonidas and Elias Papadopoulos, spokespersons of the I Won't Pay network.

Despite hypocritical statements issued by government and Syriza officials expressing concern over the

persecution of Lafazanis, this was an obvious display of authoritarianism. Moreover, it was far from an isolated event. Only a few days ago, in early December, three more members of the anti-auction movement, including the well-known activists Thanasis Gounaris, and Avgi Voutsina, received summons to appear in front of the same department of the security services.

This repressive spiral must necessarily raise concerns about the fate of democratic rights and civil liberties in Greece – concerns today spreading among wide circles of the European and international left as well as in social movements and among left-wing intellectuals. This concern is reflected in the following open letter, which has been published in international media. The signatories include Jean-Luc Mélenchon and the entire parliamentary group of La France Insoumise: MPs and MEPs from Spain's Podemos; Germany's Left Party and Portugal's Left Bloc. Signatories also include emblematic personalities of the international left, such as Noam Chomsky, Tariq Ali, Alain Badiou, and Frédéric Lordon.

Their protest is important in helping the European and international left come to terms with the real character of Alexis Tsipras's government.

The Greek crisis is no longer headline news, but the Greek people continue to suffer from the relentless austerity imposed for more than eight years. Those who oppose bailout policies are facing escalating repression. Actions opposing the foreclosure of properties are especially targeted. During the last two years, the Syriza government, complying with the dictates of the lenders to Greece, have intensified tremendously the pressure on home owners to help private banks collect on loans. Special legislation was adopted in December 2017 potentially imposing penalties of up to six months of prison for those opposing foreclosures. Furthermore, the government has moved auction procedures away from courtrooms to

an electronic platform activated by solicitors within the closed doors of their offices.

Since the start of the year dozens of activists across the country have faced charges and several trials are already in progress. Among them, Panagiotis Lafazanis, former minister of energy in the first Syriza government and now secretary of the political party Popular Unity; as well as Elias and Leonidas Papadopoulos, both of whom are founding figures of the I Won't Pay campaign and Elias Smilios, municipal councilor in the region of Thessaloniki.

It is the first time since the fall of the dictatorship that the leader of a democratic political party has faced persecution for political activities. Moreover, the charges against these activists have been initiated by a special branch of the security services, the Department for the Protection of the State and of the Democratic Polity, which has no record of action against the fascist Golden Dawn or other far-right activists. These activists face potential prison sentences up to eight and half years.

This is a critical moment for democracy and civil liberties in Greece. We demand that the charges against all the activists of the movement against auction sales be dropped. We express our solidarity to all those in Greece who face repression for their action in defense of social rights.

Organizations, Trade Unions and Associations

CUP (Popular Unity Candidacy), Catalonia

Co.Bas Trade Union, Spain

The parliamentary group of France Insoumise

Habita Association for the Right to

Housing and to the City, Portugal	Stathis Kouvelakis, King's College London	S��verine Chauvel, University of Paris-Cr��teil
Observatory on Debt in Globalization, Spain	Costas Lapavitsas, SOAS University of London	Alexis Corbieres, MP, France Insoumise
Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca (PAH); Proc��s Constituent, Catalonia	Fr��d��ric Lordon, CNRS research director, France	Pablo Cotarelo, economist, EReNSEP, Barcelona
Sindicat de Llogaters i Llogateres (Union for the Defense of Tenants), Spain	Francisco Lou��a, professor, University of Lisbon, Portugal	Sergi Cutillas, economist, Podemos, Barcelona
Witten Tenants Association, Germany	Micha��l L��wy, CNRS emeritus research director, France	Alexis Cukier, University of Poitiers
First signatories	Jean-Luc M��lenchon, president of the parliamentary group of France Insoumise	Laura D��az, MP in the Autonomous Community of Madrid for Podemos
Gilbert Achcar, SOAS, University of London	Manolo Monereo, MP, Podemos, Spain	Klaus Draeger, former staff coordinator of GUE/NGL group in European Parliament on Employment and Social Affairs, Germany
Tariq Ali, writer, London	Eric Toussaint, CADTM, Belgium	C��dric Durand, University Paris 13
Cinzia Arruzza, New School, New York	Miguel Urban, MEP Podemos, Spain	Steve Edwards, Prof. Birkbeck, University of London
Robert Brenner, Professor, UCLA	Eleni Varikas, professor emeritus, University of Paris	David Faroult, Ecole Nationale Sup��rieure Louis Lumi��re, Paris
Alain Badiou, philosopher, Paris	General signatories	Caroline Fiat, MP, France Insoumise
Ludivine Bantigny, University of Caen	Alejandro Andreassi, Autonomous University of Barcelona	Carme Font, Podemos, Catalonia
Diego Borja, former economy and finance minister of Ecuador	Cl��mentine Autain, MP, France Insoumise	Iolanda Fresnillo, Ekona, Catalonia
Noam Chomsky, professor emeritus, MIT	Trond Andresen, Norwegian University of Science and Technology	Isabelle Garo, philosopher, Paris
Jorge Costa, MP, Left Bloc, Portugal	Josep Maria Antentas, Autonomous University of Barcelona	Franck Gaudichaud, University of Grenoble
Sevim Dagdelen, MP, Die Linke, Germany	Emmanuel Barot, Universit�� de Toulouse	Kenneth Haar, Corporate Europe Observatory
Jodi Dean, Hobart and William Smith Colleges, Geneva, New York	Tithi Bhattacharya, Purdue University	Peter Hallward, professor, Kingston University
Fabio De Masi, MP, Die Linke, Germany	Josep Bel, Co.Bas and Proc��s Constituent, Spain	Eric Hazan, writer and publisher, Paris
Zillah Eisenstein, professor emeritus, Ithaca New York	Ugo Bernalicis, MP, France Insoumise	Michel Husson, economist, France
Irene Escorihuela, president of Observatori DESC, Spain	Hugo Blanco, former MP FOCEP, Peru	Scott Ferguson, University of South Florida, USA
Stefano Fassina, MP Liberi e Uguali, former vice-minister of finance, Italy	Laura Camargo, Podemos MP in the Autonomous Community of Balearic Islands	Claudio Katz, UBA-Conicet, Argentina
S��nia Farr�� Fidalgo, MP for En Com��n Podem, Spain	Ra��l Camargo, Podemos MP in the Autonomous Community of Madrid	Razmig Keucheyan, Prof. University of Bordeaux 3
Teresa Forcades, Proc��s Constituent, Catalonia	Rosa Ca��ladell, Podemos, Spain	Thierry Labica, University of Paris Nanterre
Heike H��nsel, MP, Die Linke	Josep Manel Busqueta, economist, Catalonia	Wilhelm Langthaler, author and activist, Committee Euroexit, Vienna, Austria
Pierre Khalfa, Fondation Copernic, France		

Olivier Lecour-Grandmaison, Prof. University of Evry-Val d'Essone	Younous Omarjee, MEP, France Insoumise	Community of Madrid
Bastien Lachaud, MP, France Insoumise	Mathilde Panot, MP, France Insoumise	Carlos Sánchez Mato, coordinator of Economy in Izquierda Unida, Spain
Michel Larive, MP, France Insoumise	Moreno Pasquinelli, Spokesperson of MPL- Programma 101, Italy	Sol Sánchez, Izquierda Unida, Spain
Isidro López, MP in the Autonomous Community of Madrid for Podemos	Jaime Pastor, Editor of Viento Sur, Spain	Carmen San José, MP in the Autonomous Community of Madrid for Podemos
Ramon Luque, Secretary for International relations of EUiA (Izquierda Unida in Catalonia)	Loïc Prud'homme, MP, France Insoumise	Andy Storey, University College Dublin, Ireland
Stuart Medina, economist, President of MMT Spain	Adrien Quatennens, MP, France Insoumise	G.M. Tamás, Central European University, Budapest
Bill Mitchell, Newcastle University, Australia	Alfredo Saad-Filho, SOAS University of London	Bénédicte Taurine, MP, France Insoumise
Eva Nanopoulos, Queen Mary University of London	Jean-Hugues Ratenon, MP, France Insoumise	Alberto Toscano, Goldsmiths University of London
Olivier Neveux, Ecole Normale Supérieure, Lyon	Eulàlia Reguant, former MP for CUP, Catalonia	Willy Pelletier, University of Picardie, Fondation Copernic
Paul O'Connell, SOAS University of London	Muriel Ressiguier, MP, France Insoumise	Ricard Ustrell, Journalist, Catalonia
Danièle Obono, MP, France Insoumise	Sabine Rubin, MP, France Insoumise François Ruffin, MP France Insoumise	Luc Vincenti, Prof. University of Montpellier
Arcadi Oliveres, Procés Constituent, Catalonia	Lorena Ruiz-Huerta, former speaker of Podemos group in the Autonomous	<i>11 December 2018</i> Jacobin

The Domestic Consequences of China's 'One Belt One Road Initiative'

2 February 2019, by **Qian Benli**

Currently, the prospects of China's 'One Belt One Road Initiative' (hereinafter referred to as OBOR) are dim. An article published in the Financial Times in July 2018 pointed out that 234 out of 1,674 Chinese-invested infrastructure projects announced in 66 Belt and Road countries since 2013 have encountered difficulties. [84]

The most recent and striking problem occurred in Malaysia—newly elected prime minister Mahathir Mohamad canceled the US\$20 billion East Coast Rail Link project right after his official visit to Beijing. [85]

Although it is very likely that Mahathir Mohamad's primary aim is to force China to make more concessions rather than to withdraw from OBOR, his talk about 'a new version of colonialism' [86] does echo the concerns of ordinary people in the Belt and Road countries—huge debt, unregulated multinational corporations, backdoor deals, exploitation of resources and the environment, displacement of local communities, etc. These issues have been criticized by progressive forces around the world. The People's Forum on OBOR and BRICS held in Hong

Kong last year discussed many of them. [87] However, criticisms about OBOR often focus on the adverse effects it has created in foreign countries and neglect its domestic consequences—corruption, domestic financial deficiency, the rise of xenophobia, etc.

Unlike the previous colonialist or imperialist countries, it seems as though the ordinary people of China generally do not benefit from the expansionist strategy of the state; moreover, some of them are also the victims of the Chinese ruling class' global ambition. But first, let's discuss

the Communist Party of China (CPC)'s motives for OBOR.

The Unavoidable Route of Chinese Capitalism

Capital must generate profits. This is the golden rule of capitalism. After three decades of high-speed economic growth in China, both state and the private capitalists have accumulated incredible amounts of capital. For example, China's foreign exchange reserves were only US\$2,262 million in December 1980, but in June 2014 they had reached an all-time high of US\$3,993,212.72 million. [88]



At the approach of the new millennium, the limited size of its domestic market, profit rate, and other factors (such as securing energy and resources supplies) started pushing China to invest its capital globally. In 1999, the government initiated the 'Go-out Policy' (also referred to as the 'Going Global Strategy') to promote Chinese investments abroad. The effort was remarkable. According to statistics [89] published by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), mainland China's outbound foreign direct investment (OFDI) in 2000 was only US\$915.8 million; but in 2013, the year when China announced OBOR, this figure had increased dramatically to reach US\$107,843.7 million; and last year's figure was US\$124,630 million. These figures do not include financial investments. It is worth mentioning that Hong Kong, where the OFDI is counted separately from mainland China, also serves as a tunnel for Chinese investments and its OFDI had unprecedentedly reached US\$124,092.5 million in 2014.

In his classical work *Imperialism and World Economy*, Nikolai Bukharin argues that capitalism has two tendencies. First, it produces a tendency toward internationalization that drives capital to seek new investments, markets, resources, and

cheap labor throughout the world. Second, it produces a tendency toward statification—capital seeks help and protection from home states in global competition and even to become state-capitalist firms. [90] Until recently, the majority of OFDI was from the state-owned enterprises (SOEs)—in 2012, the share of OFDI from China's private firms only accounted for 9.5% [91]. Thus a state-led strategy to integrate China's huge amount of OFDI was inevitable.

Officially China claims that OBOR has five major goals—policy coordination, facilities connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration and people to people bonds. Straightforwardly speaking, China wants to sign economic agreements with the Belt and Road countries to access new markets; to promote Chinese investment; to secure its supplies of food, resources and energy; to export Chinese products and services; to enhance the yuan's role as a global currency; and to increase its soft power. [92] Such goals are not unreasonable ambitions—all the big nations in the world strive to achieve them. However, as I will show later in this article, the methods used to achieve them result in unwanted consequences.

A Mutated Agenda

Nevertheless, the launch of OBOR was a hasty and reckless move. In 2013, the two OBOR initiatives were first mentioned by Xi Jinping during his visits to Kazakhstan in September (the Silk Road Economic Belt) and Indonesia in October (the 21st-century Maritime Silk Road). Then a month later, OBOR was officially announced as a national strategy during a CPC central committee plenary session. It's doubtful that this significant strategy could have been widely discussed within the party and government during such a short time, let alone for meticulous studies to have been conducted about its negative impacts on ordinary people in the Belt and Road countries and potential resistance.

Before becoming General Secretary in November 2012, Xi was quite a

mediocre figure in the party, and this probably was one of the reasons that induced the party elders to pick him. [93] Thus Xi and his followers needed sound political and economic accomplishments to consolidate their power. Actually, some of the major projects of OBOR had been negotiated or started before its announcement in 2013. For instance, planning for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor started during Musharraf's regime [94]; the agreement on the construction of Gwadar Port was signed as early as 2001 by then Premier Zhu Rongji and phase one of construction was completed in 2006 [95]. Packaging all the existing overseas projects into a shiny new box under Xi's name was a quick way to gain credit.

With the expansion of Xi's power and authority, OBOR has absorbed more and more resources. The China Development Bank and the Export-Import Bank of China are major sources of money. Last year the former promised that it would grant a special OBOR loan of 250 billion yuan in three years; and the latter's OBOR-related outstanding loans had reached 830 billion yuan by the end of the first quarter of 2018. There are also other sources. In December 2014, the Chinese government pledged US\$40 billion for the creation of the state-owned Silk Road Fund to provide investment to OBOR projects; in May 2017, Xi pledged an additional US\$14.5 billion [96] into it. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) is also expected to provide funds for OBOR as well. Its articles of agreement were signed in 2014 (and went into force in December 2015) and the bank started out with an initial capital of US\$100 billion. [97] The Bank of China has also issued four rounds of international bonds for OBOR with a total value of more than US\$10 billion.

One cannot help but doubt the profitability and effectiveness of China's fast-growing overseas investment. In fact, in 2017 the government had to take a series of measures to enhance regulation. An improved and more rigorous system was introduced for auditing overseas investment by SOEs [98], and the finance ministry issued guidelines on

the overseas investment of SOEs, amid a campaign to tighten controls on outbound investment and financial risks [99].

An important cause of this dilemma is that, just like the other “great plans” proposed during the last six years—the Chinese Dream, Millennium Strategy of Xiong’an and Made in China 2025—OBOR has been closely integrated with Xi’s personal accomplishments. In 2017, the CPC even incorporated OBOR into its Constitution during its 19th National Congress. [100] Actually, during the first few years of OBOR, there were still critical voices and warnings from scholars within the system, such as Huang Yiping from the China Center for Economic Research of Peking University and Zhang Yunling from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. While a cult of personality around Xi has been constructed by his followers, doubts and challenges against OBOR have become taboos and OBOR projects have easily been given the greenlight from financial and government institutions.

A Hotbed of Corruption

The corruption scandals of OBOR projects have been exposed in a range of countries such as Malaysia and Kyrgyzstan. At home, the easily obtained greenlight and huge amount of money give the Chinese officials great opportunities to enrich themselves. According to a website run by the Supreme People’s Procuratorate of China, corruption occurs in the processes of decision making, examination and approval, land acquisition, and material procurement of the OBOR projects.

In 2017, an official announcement declared that the former director of the Fourth Bureau of the International Liaison Department of the CPC Cao Baiyu had been expelled from the party and was investigated by the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection. Cao had participated in China’s agricultural cooperation with African countries, which was later integrated into OBOR, and played an

important role of contacting high-rank officials of the relevant governments. The announcement stated that he had participated in for-profit activities related to his position and earned remuneration, but did not give details.

There is also a rumor saying that Sun Zhengcai, who was a former member of the Political Bureau and Party Committee Secretary of the Chongqing Municipal, transferred 1 billion yuan from the OBOR funds to his mistress’s shell company in Hong Kong, which became one of the accusations his political enemies in the party used to down him.

Due to the untransparent nature of China’s anti-corruption campaign and the authority’s efforts to protect the image of OBOR, it is very hard to acquire the details of OBOR-related corruption or prove rumors. However, 170 senior executives of China’s state-owned enterprises (SOEs) have been prosecuted by the authorities since 2013 and many of these SOEs have been involved in OBOR projects. An article published by Foreign Policy describes how corruption is conducted within China’s SOEs:

... After terms are reached with a host country, funds are transferred directly into the Beijing-based bank accounts of China’s state-owned enterprises, which build the project often with Chinese materials. This is a model Beijing has employed extensively in Africa. Once Beijing’s political blessing for a project is communicated via funding from its policy banks, China’s national- or provincial-level state-owned enterprises build it, often with little or no political or financial risk assessment or market research.

...

Although most of the cash will never leave China, the sheer quantity of equipment and materials, such as steel, concrete, and timber, needed to produce so many projects will provide ample opportunity for pilferage and other types of on-site malfeasance. Indeed, Chinese firms operating in systemically corrupt business and regulatory environments may find it impossible to gain the necessary local support without greasing palms. Corruption could also come via

kickbacks or bribes to loan officers from self-interested firms or officials, padding purchase orders, or cut-rate building materials... [101]

Inadequacy at Home

Even if individual corruption is not considered, so far OBOR is making the state lose money rather than bringing back profits. This is understandable because most infrastructure projects are long-term investments. Although steel, concrete and machinery made in China are now sold to OBOR countries, they are paid for with loans provided by China. Moreover, in some cases the CPC would rather gain the control of the roads, railways or ports China builds in the OBOR countries than get the money and interest back—Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka is a perfect example [102].

Some political dissidents also argue that members of the Chinese ruling class are using OBOR as a mean of money laundering or even to secretly transfer national wealth overseas in preparation for their lives after the collapse of the CPC regime.

Again, there is no concrete evidence to prove these conspiracy theories. However, the Chinese government did censure some private companies that were taking the opportunity to transfer assets abroad.

The most notable example is Wanda Group, which was established by the former richest man in China, Wang Jianlin. During the last several years, Wang sold 80% of Wanda’s domestic assets and spent more than 250 billion yuan buying overseas assets. This strategy eventually irritated the Chinese government. In 2017, Wang had to make the decision to “put the main investment in China” and by the beginning of 2018 Wanda had sold 200 billion yuan worth of overseas assets.

Anyhow, investing too heavily overseas would inevitably exacerbate inadequacy at home. In the first week of September this year, a protest organized by parents of primary school students in an inland city called

Leiyang broke out and the heartbreaking video of a little girl crying for her arrested father quickly shocked China's social media.

The direct trigger of this protest was the provincial order to cut class sizes. However, due to the lack of resources in Leiyang's public schools, the local government had to transfer around 10,000 pupils to a private school with much more expensive fees and problematic dormitories. [103]

This incident is a miniature of China's domestic economic hardship. According to a recent Wall Street Journal article, Leiyang had racked up 2.464 billion yuan of outstanding debt at the end of 2017, or 111% of revenue. [104] Government spending on areas such as education, medical care and social welfare were inevitably affected. Another article pointed out in June that the city's educational resources were insufficient, and the phenomenon of oversized classes was worsening.

The incident in Leiyang is just the tip of the iceberg. The pension insurance deficit in Heilongjiang Province and the PLA veterans' dissatisfaction with their scanty allowances from government reflect China's domestic financial deficiency as well.

Besides, in order to contain the social unrest caused by these dissatisfactions, Beijing has to spend more and more on internal security—in 2017, it accounted for 6.1% of government spending, which translates into US\$196 billion. [105] Obviously, protests like the one in Leiyang will not happen in the first place if Beijing had used some of the money invested overseas for building public schools and hiring teachers; it would also save money from paying cops to repress the protesters.

Military Build-up and “Wolf Warriors”

The mega construction and infrastructure projects China invests in overseas require the Chinese state

to make considerable efforts to protect its assets and personnel from various direct threats such as pirates, local warlords and China's rivals. In order to contain China, the Obama administration planned the so-called “pivot to Asia” strategy as early as in 2012, which included redeploying 60 percent of the US Navy to the region. Thus military build-up, especially for a modernized blue-water navy, has become necessary for China's capitalist development.

The result is the second largest navy (in terms of tonnage) in the world. China has built more than 100 warships and submarines in the last decade, which means it now has a total of 317 warships and submarines in active service, outnumbering the 283 of the U.S. navy. [106] And this is an on-going trend. At least two aircraft carriers and eight Type 055 “super destroyers”—which are as big as the cruisers of the U.S. navy, were under construction at the time of writing this article.

Although the over-all technology level and combat experience of the PLAN are still behind the U.S. navy, its stupendous size still gives Beijing confidence to act in a high-profile way in the disputed waters. One example is the construction of artificial islands in the South China Sea and the relevant naval frictions around them. [107]

China's military build-up and aggressiveness has inevitably exacerbated the arms race in this region. In 2017, South Korea increased its defense spending by 4%, hitting a record of US\$36.5 billion. Japan also signed an unprecedented defense budget of US\$43.6 billion, while Prime Minister Abe has set a 2020 deadline for revising Article 9 of the Constitution. [108] The other regional players who are vigorously sharpening their gears include India, Taiwan, Australia and Vietnam. [109]

Nevertheless, the strongest response comes from the United States. In May 2018, America renamed the U.S. Pacific Command as the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, something which has been interpreted by analysts as a change to counter China's influence in this region. Now nearly 60 per cent of the US surface ships and over 60 per

cent of US submarines have been deployed in this region. [110]

As the biggest imperialist power in this region and in the world, America must be the first to be blamed for this round of arms race. However, we also have to recognize that China's enthusiastic military expansion for challenging and even replacing the former's dominance has increased the risk of war.

If Beijing continues the expansionist strategy, it would have to spend more on the military build-up to protect its overseas interests, especially after the recent unyielding speech given by US Vice President Mike Pence [111]. However, in the current economic situation, further increasing military spending means cuts to education, social welfare or other public spending, which will eventually cause more mass incidents like the one in Leiyang.



On the other hand, China's overseas expansion is a crucial part of the propaganda that is boosting the party's authority and popularity. Two recent popular movies, *Wolf Warrior 2* (2017) and *Operation Red Sea* (2018), both tell stories of Chinese soldiers safeguarding China's national interests in Africa. *Wolf Warrior 2* includes a scene where in order to protect its citizens, a destroyer of the Chinese navy fires cruise missiles to attack targets located in the territory of a sovereign state that is not at war with China. In the other movie, a special force squad of the Chinese navy is sent into a country where a coup d'état is occurring.

The official newspaper of the CPC, the *People's Daily*, praised *Wolf Warrior 2* for showing “Chinese-style superhero to the world” and for how it “arouses the patriotic enthusiasm of many people”. Companies, government departments and even schools organized for their employees or students to watch this movie; in some cases attendance was even compulsory. The result was that this movie was the seventh highest-grossing film of 2017 at US\$874 million. [112]

As an internet phenomenon in China, people who dislike nationalist fanaticism also call the pro-government nationalists “wolf warriors” in an ironic way. The reporter from China Central Television, who interrupted a critic of the Chinese government at the British Conservative Party’s annual conference and slapped a volunteer, for instance, was satirized by some Chinese netizens as a “wolf warrior-type journalist”.

However, some online speeches by unofficial “wolf warriors” are very extreme (such as advocating a nuclear attack against Japan) and contrary to the peaceful image of OBOR that the CPC is trying to create. Besides, if Xi’s government could not adhere to the nationalistic and tough stance he has promised, the anger of “wolf warriors” might backfire on their masters.

The rise of xenophobia reflects this dilemma faced by the party. In order to achieve the soft power building goal of OBOR, China now hosts a large number of international students from OBOR countries—“in 2017, they numbered 317.2 thousand, or 64.85% of the overall international students in China. They enjoy much better government benefits than China’s domestic students, such as higher scholarships, better dorm rooms and more studying resources. The inadequacy at home and of the way that this seems to oppose “China First” has made “wolf warriors” become xenophobic against people from OBOR countries. For example, a lot of online speeches blame international students from Africa for having caused a large increase in AIDS cases in China.

Purge Instead of Prosperity

As the frontier and hub of the Silk Road Economic Belt (One Belt), Beijing has promised to bring prosperity and stability to Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR). [113] In some ways this is being achieved. XUAR’s average annual GDP growth from 2012 to 2016 was 9.3 percent, higher than the national level. [114] In 2017,

investment in fixed assets in XUAR was the highest in China and more than 50,000 companies had been established or had branches set up there. [115]

However, for the national minorities in this region, the story is quite different. Recently, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) examined a report about XUAR submitted by human rights organizations, and accused China of holding as many as a million Muslims in concentration camps. [116] According to this report:

...The government has implemented militarized security measures, invasive policing, and community surveillance, including through “big data analytics”; forced hundreds of thousands of people into “re-education” camps; and drastically restricted ethnic language, culture, and religion...

These discriminatory security measures in Xinjiang are dictated from the top: Chinese Communist Party (CCP) General Secretary and the Chinese President Xi Jinping declared in May 2014 that the government would embark on a nationwide counter-terrorism campaign, but largely focused on China’s western regions. Xi Jinping stated that China must “construct walls built with copper and iron, knit nets reaching the heavens and earth” by “strongly boosting police readiness through mass surveillance and mass management” in order to “harshly battle against violent terrorist activities.” Regional stability and State control in Xinjiang is critically important for the success of Xi’s “Belt Road Initiative,” for which the XUAR is the primary land route for trade and investment in Central and South Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. Construction of a pervasive security infrastructure in Xinjiang, which began as early as 2009, has greatly accelerated since 2016, after Xi appointed Chen Quanguo as the new Communist Party Secretary for the region. [117]

In response to this report and the consecutive international criticism, the CPC launched a PR campaign to whitewash the re-education camps. In September, the Chinese Foreign

Minister Wang Yi said in New York that the 20 million people in XUAR “support the measures taken by their government because they now feel safe and secure, and they can have a good sleep at night”. Hu Xijin, who is the chief editor of the Global Times and infamous for his servile speeches, also posted the “happy life” of a Uighur woman in one of the re-education camps on his social media account. Another article of the Global Times describes more benefits of the camp life: jobs, decent income, poverty alleviation, tidy accommodation, etc. However, Chinese netizens ironically connect this story to the well-known slogan on the entrance of Auschwitz—“Arbeit macht frei”, which means “work sets you free” in English.

It’s true that incidents of violence and terrorism have increased in XUAR in recent years, but they are largely caused by the displacement of Muslim communities and the “aggressive attempts to assimilate Uyghurs into Han culture through targeted educational and work programs that incentivize the learning of Mandarin and integration into the Chinese state’s vision of modernization” [118]

Just like the resistances against land grabbing and forced demolitions carried out by ordinary Han Chinese in other parts of China, national minorities in XUAR also fight back to defend their home, and often in more intense and determined manners. So Beijing has to repress them more brutally. However, XUAR is also the experimental field of China’s 21st century authoritarianism. Many of the security measures that have been used there first—“big data, facial recognition, iris recognition and mobile phone checking machines”—have also been implemented in other parts of China. Thus, it won’t be a surprise if “re-education” camps are constructed in other provinces in the future.

XUAR’s story shows that in the eyes of the rulers of China, ordinary people are sacrificable for the “great goals” of OBOR. Any person with conscience must admit that no economic achievement or national ambition can justify these atrocities.

Conclusion

Last year, the Xinhua News Agency said that OBOR has already made 76 major achievements and had more than 270 specific results, which included all sorts of international treaties, cooperation, projects, funds and aids. This year is the fifth anniversary of OBOR and the

propaganda machine of the CPC has produced a lot of articles to praise its greatness. However, they hardly ever mention any benefit brought back to the Chinese people. No figure about any relevant increases in terms of jobs, foreign exchange reserves or domestic living standards has been found. Maybe it's too slapdash to conclude that there are no significant

positive domestic consequences, but the reality in today's Chinaâ€”â€”economic slowdown, social instability and intensified repression, shows that OBOR has not been able to push the country in a bright direction.

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[Globalization Monitor](#)

Life in the Century's Midnight

1 February 2019, by **Marcus Barnett**

In summer 1944, Antonia Lehr and two of her friends were deported from Vienna to the Auschwitz concentration camp. Posing as a foreign worker recently married to an Austrian, Lehr was in reality a Viennese Jew and a Communist militant, specialising in dangerous propaganda work among German soldiers in Paris. Her two companions were also Communist underground activists. They had collectively received the death sentence for organising Austrian antifascists and, as national traitors, they considered themselves finished.

But when the trio was later moved to Ravensbrück â€” a women's camp with a high proportion of condemned political inmates â€” communication from the Auschwitz resistance organisation informed the local cell of their special status as seditious Jewish Communists. False identities were created for them and they were successfully "vanished" from the camp.

Antonia Lehr and her comrades were saved not by chance but as a result of the highly-organised underground resistance developed from the camp's beginning. This experience, unusual within a general context of the Holocaust, was not so within the history of the antifascist movement operating behind the wire.

Seeds of Organisation

Little initially differentiated Auschwitz, situated between Krakow

and Katowice, from other concentration camps established during the war. On June 14, 1940, the day Paris fell, the first 728 inmates arrived, all of whom were Polish political prisoners. Housed in a nearby tobacco factory until the buildings and infrastructure were ready to absorb them, the camp was initially manned by thirty German criminal inmates imported from Sachsenhausen.

Within ten months, 10,900 were imprisoned, and from October 1941 onwards a second complex was built to ease the congestion an anticipated influx of Red Army prisoners in Auschwitz I would cause. Auschwitz II-Birkenau absorbed the 10,000 Soviet prisoners that arrived in late 1941, with all but 945 perishing by early 1942.

By this point, the Nazi leadership had already decided to eliminate the Jewish population of Europe. Nazi architect Karl Bischoff accordingly planned and realised Birkenau's four crematoria, a new reception building, intentionally-overcrowded barracks, and a complex shower system to be built for the destruction and disposal of prisoners. As inmates of other camps arrived, the disarray and mass murder of the â€”new camp' was striking to them, as was the atomisation and hopelessness of the terrified inmates.

The first underground organisation began with the first Polish inmates, a

core of military figures hoping to organise a structure from within. The Polish cavalryman Witold Pilecki arranged to be intentionally arrested in September 1940 with the intention of developing this military cadre in Auschwitz. The group's objectives were the dissemination of news from beyond the camp, procuring extra food, and creating other Polish military cells.

However, the politics of this initial group could not be considered unambiguously antifascist. Polish historian Józef Garliński belonged to this milieu, and while he wrote of how his experience in Auschwitz "cured" him of any prejudice towards Jews, there is little doubt his seminal work *Fighting Auschwitz* significantly minimises the antisemitic outlook of many of his comrades and the indifference with which they treated other prisoners. Among their ranks was the notorious Alfred Stossel, who undertook an SS role of killing the infirm and unwell (as well as healthy Jewish prisoners) by injecting poison into their hearts.

Spanish Republicans mirrored the Poles as a sizeable and distinct national grouping in the camps, though unlike the Poles the *rouge Espagnol* had clearly defined antifascist politics. The attack on the Soviet Union on June 21, 1941 motivated the creation of their resistance and solidarity organisation. While declaring similar aims to the

Poles, the Spanish group was more clearly political: emphasising the importance of democracy and the antifascist struggle.

Their fellow stateless subjects, the imprisoned members of the German Communist Party (KPD), were also encouraged into activity by the invasion. A subcultural milieu in German society detained en masse, Communist militants had spent the years before 1941 engaged in a war of position against the "Greens," criminal prisoners given positions of control by the authorities.

Upholding the Comintern's Popular Front strategy in Auschwitz, they reached out to previously-chastised Social Democratic Party (SPD) members, accumulating further influence in a camp where terror loomed large and politically principled elements were thin. A huge organisational coup came with the arrival of Józef Cyrankiewicz, a Krakow social-democratic leader sympathetic to the Communists, as well as Austrian social democrats far to the left of their sister organizations in Germany and elsewhere.

It was in this context that, in early 1943, several representatives of different leftist resistance formations established Kampfgruppe Auschwitz (Combat Group Auschwitz, KGA) in Block IV of Auschwitz I.

Political Roots

Johann Hirschtritt, a Jewish Communist once active in the Rote Sprachrohr (Red Megaphone) theater troupe and imprisoned since 1936, described the organisational form of the KGA: it consisted of a "solidly-organised core" and "a more nebulous periphery of men who could be asked to perform certain tasks or join in certain collective actions." The first KGA leadership was restricted to four; two Social Democrats and two Communists, reflecting the participation of the two workers' parties, although in fidelity to Popular Front tactics of incorporating "all progressive bourgeois forces," several Christian Democrats were also involved. Resistance groups were organised in small cells totally detached from each other, with militants receiving orders and

directives only through intermediary contacts.

International fraternity was crucial for the KGA, rejecting Nazi-imposed national divisions and transcending organisational sectarianism. "Only solidarity, international cooperation, and the fight for freedom give us the right to regard ourselves as fellow fighters against the misfortune that Hitler's Fascism has brought all over the world," declared one statement in summer 1944. Quickly, the camp committee absorbed the national groups of the Spanish, Yugoslavs, French, Czechs, Romanians and Germans, including many individual Jewish socialists and communists.

This stance was a principled opposition to the workings of the Polish resistance movement, which was "nationally-conscious" and broadly suspicious of Jews, Spaniards, and Russians. Cyrankiewicz, the social democrat and KGA leader is credited consistently in testimony by resistance fighters for his active intervention against Polish chauvinism. He used his authority among resistance fighters at liberty in Krakow to politically isolate fellow inmates demanding amenities from outside sources for Polish use only. German KGA militants in positions of responsibility also made the point of going an extra mile for Russian prisoners, ruefully aware of anti-German suspicions Russians who had faced the Nazis would harbour.

While Auschwitz was partially a labour camp for German industry, those with employment were consistently reminded of their expendability by arbitrary murder and the regular arrival of replacements. It was clear to the KGA that a fundamental task was to tackle the atmosphere of defeatism "although due to high levels of repression it could only meaningfully achieve this within its own ranks.

Above any other strategic concern the *raison d'être* of the resistance was survival "the KGA provided a psychological and social anchor that bolstered individuals against accepting their fate. The clarity of a political line to navigate the horrors they were witnessing, a greater chance of good rations and increased work protection, the self-esteem and

dignity received by resisting injustice and being coherently organised "none of these aspects can be underestimated when considering the spiritual resources of survival among political prisoners in Auschwitz.

Education was as important to leftist groups inside the camps as it was in civilian conditions, with resistance methods justified by socialist and humanist reasoning, and Marxist discussion circles reading copies of smuggled literature.

The KGA took advantage of ideological-economic friction within the Nazi bureaucracy over how much camp labour should be maintained. As Auschwitz expanded, the camp authorities increasingly relied on prisoner authorities' wisdom, broadly unaware of the influence of organised resistance.

Resources of Resistance

In camp hospitals and labour assignments, where KGA militants attempted to place their comrades, prisoners employed in clerical duties saved lives by altering lists for particular labour details, prisoner transfers, and so on, while KGA hospital orderlies could persuade certain camp administrators and SS doctors to limit the killings or prevent excessive murder. This particular effort produced some success "by July 1943, the mortality rate at Auschwitz (not including those exterminated upon arrival) fell to 3.5 percent from over 20 percent in the winter of 1942-43.

The KGA also excelled at accumulating facts and figures of Nazi atrocities. Their logic for this particularly risky activity was that, at some future time, there might be political justice. Cyrankiewicz's former resistance group in Krakow preserved 350 pieces of correspondence from the KGA, which make for compelling reading. Reports then reached London with surprising ease, containing statistics and information about camp developments, mass executions, and the nature of its industry.

This work deeply worried the Nazi administration; a KGA communiqué broadcast on the BBC directly threatening the Auschwitz SS was met

with alarm, resulting in several name changes and widespread fear. The KGA even arranged cameras and film to be smuggled into Auschwitz. Greek partisan Alberto Errera and International Brigadier David Szmulewski worked together to take clandestine photographs through holes in a pocket showing bodies being burned next to a crematorium, some of the only images of the camps created by prisoners themselves.

The KGA planned to escalate from survival to armed revolt only at the point that weapons had been acquired and extermination of all prisoners was the policy of camp authorities. Outside of these conditions being in place, the idea received scant enthusiasm for fear of immediate collective reprisal. Although they were unable to prevent the mass extermination of Jews in Auschwitz, maintaining an organised resistance, let alone a kind of counter-government, counted as a success.

The general Jewish population did not have this option and several isolated acts of armed resistance occurred. A group of Sonderkommando¹ those tasked with disposing of dead bodies from the gas chambers² plotted revolt in summer 1944. Having been approached as a "Jewish political" of serious standing by an eager Sonderkommando, David Szmulewski put them in touch with the KGA leadership. They were deeply skeptical, believing that the Sonderkommando was a desperate force of broken men. But Szmulewski held that there was "another side to the coin," that "there were also those who did not rest, but from the first day began to organise an insurrectionist movement."

Hashomer Hatzair activists Israel Gutman and Joshua Lejfer, who worked at the Krupp factory in Auschwitz, were entrusted with supplying explosives and powder for a future action, alongside their comrade Roza Robota. While still wary, the KGA informed the Sonderkommando that their work group was to be murdered

on October 7, 1944. On that day, SS members were attacked with machine guns, knives, and grenades created by Soviet Jewish prisoners from the aforementioned explosives. Three SS were killed and several seriously injured; one Nazi was even cremated. In response, 451 Sonderkommando were executed.

“The Only Thing to do was Try’
In total, fewer than thirty Sonderkommando survived the Holocaust, with “generations’ of workers routinely executed in order to remove living proof of Nazi crimes. The objective of survival was meaningless for those who attacked the Nazis on October 7.

However, the moral question of death and decision-making in the resistance was raised again following the onset of the Cold War. A debate on the role of the Left in concentration camps emerged, with many finding it easy to criticise the resistance’s morality, its involvement (or the loaded term “collaboration”) with camp administration and their mutual aid which ensured the survival of political allies above other prisoners.

“By what right did the Communists abrogate to themselves the power of life and death? Was it morally permissible for them to assist the SS in their running of the camp? Did they not become tarred with the same brush?” a New York Times journalist wondered in 1947.

Such judgments were easily rendered by those who did not experience life in the camps. “Against such incredible atrocity, what moral stand could be offered but total, and suicidal, resistance?” This was a perspective which some found appealing.

But not so Eugen Kogon, Holocaust survivor and Christian antifascist, whose writings on the camps sought to place morality in the context of the agency of prisoners and their capacity for determination:

[the] SS principle of mixing categories, fostering national differences, and creating artificial ones had to be thwarted and rendered ineffective . . . The only group that ever made an attempt to gain control of the internal leadership of the maps were the political prisoners and the [criminals].

What was the greater morality: for “politicals” to attempt to use the mechanisms of the camp apparatus, or to cede the terrain and face for themselves and others criminals operating with predatory logic utilising that same apparatus against them?

Simone de Beauvoir furthered this logic in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* arguing that, once one is placed in an utterly inescapable situation of grave atrocity, “the only thing to do was to try, as far as possible, to rationalise it.” Spurning the possibilities of formal influence would have been a true affirmation of hopelessness and futility, a liquidation of the politics the Third Reich tried to wipe out and a greater victory still for Nazism.

Against perspectives that deride collective organisation among inmates under the weight of the indescribable event that, as Elie Wiesel said, “lies outside, if not beyond, history,” it is worth finishing with the defence of resistance made by Hermann Langbein, of the KGA leadership.

The KGA did not, he acknowledged, destroy Auschwitz, or save so many Jews from extermination, but it did have the ability to alter the immediate destiny of the camp. In organising for survival, passing information to comrades on the outside, and saving vulnerable comrades within, in plotting for insurrection and for justice in postwar Europe, they were, he said, not merely objects in the cruel narrative of National Socialism but fighters for life in the century’s midnight.

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