



IV530 - March 2019

Bhagat Singh

30 March 2019, by **Lal Khan**

This generalised narrative is far from the truth. In reality the movement had a clear class differentiation. Had the bourgeois leaders not been facilitated and propelled by the Raj and mainstream media as the central leadership at the helm of the anti-colonial struggle, the liberation movement would not have stopped at the stage of “national liberation.” Likewise, had the Communist Party of India played a revolutionary role to overthrow the Raj, there would have been a different outcome at the departure of the British.

It is important to remember that the workers, youth, personnel of the armed forces and the peasants were active in the movement. One of the most significant names that symbolises this revolutionary current of the liberation struggle was Bhagat Singh.

Eighty-eight years ago this renowned revolutionary icon of the mass revolt was assassinated, along with his two comrades, through the gallows at Lahore’s Central Jail by the British imperialists. He was only twenty-three-years old. “Legally” the executions were to be carried out on 24 March 1931, but such was the fear of a mass insurrection amongst the imperialist masters that the three prisoners were hanged a day earlier, March 23, in the evening at 7.30 pm.

Bhagat Singh along with his comrades

in arms Sukhdev and Raj Guru were not just hanged but their bodies were mutilated and later burnt in the wee hours of that tragic March eve. This was a cowardly act of vengeance by the mightiest imperial power of its time. The Central Jail Lahore was later demolished and no memorial or commemorative plaques of these valiant revolutionaries exists at the site, now known as Shadman Chowk. Despite these acts of erasing the memory of these revolutionaries to quell the inspiration of their struggle, their revolutionary legacy lives on and continues to motivate the vanguard of the new generations in this subcontinent.

A few months before his hanging on the gallows, Bhagat Singh had written in a pamphlet titled ‘Why I am an atheist’: “I know the moment the rope is fitted round my neck and rafters removed from under my feet, that will be the final moment.... With no selfish motive, or desire to be awarded here or hereafter [in after-life], quite disinterestedly have I devoted my life to the cause of independence, because I could not do otherwise. The day we find a great number of men and women with this psychology who cannot devote themselves to anything else than the service of mankind and emancipation of the suffering humanity, that day shall inaugurate the era of liberty.”

Bhagat Singh’s legacy is tarnished and

distorted on both sides of the Radcliff Line by the reactionary politicians and elite’s intelligentsia. This attempt to mould the history is aimed at distracting the toiling classes from treading the path of Bhagat Singh’s revolutionary legacy.

In India the portrayal of Bhagat Singh is no less incongruous. The Sikh fundamentalists have turned him in to turban wearing devout Sikh while Sangh Parivar exploit his iconic figure to justify their nationalist chauvinism. Irony in the case of fundamentalists is: a devoted Marxist, Bhagat Singh struggled irreconcilably for a socialist revolution as the only real road to liberation of Indian subcontinent.

At his death anniversary last year, on 23 March 2018, Narendra Modi stated, “The martyrdom of Bhagat Singh, Rajguru & Sukhdev was a watershed moment in our history. Every Indian is proud that these three great men belong to our land.” This deceitful admiration for Bhagat Singh by Modi is an insult upon injury inflicted upon the ideology and legacy of Bhagat Singh that started with the tragedy of bloodied partition.

Bhagat Singh developed a Marxist approach in the white heat of the struggle and his intense study of the great Marxist teachers during his incarceration. On February 2, 1931 Bhagat Singh wrote, “Revolution means the complete overthrow of the

existing social order and its replacement with the socialist order... the state, the government machinery is just a weapon in the hands of the ruling class to further and safeguard its interest. We want to snatch and handle it to utilise it for the consummation of our ideal, i.e., socialist reconstruction on a Marxist, basis."

Already by 1928, Bhagat Singh had become a steadfast fighter for revolutionary socialism. He played a decisive role in changing the name of the party from the Hindustan Revolutionary Army (HRA) to Hindustan Socialist Revolutionary Army (HSRA). In Raj Kumar Santoshi's well-researched film, *The Legend of Bhagat Singh* (2002) Bhagat in a speech on the outskirts of Delhi says: "We don't want independence! We don't want independence where the English rulers are replaced by the local 'brown' elites. We don't want freedom where this wretched system of exploitation and slavery continues to torment the toiling classes. We are striving for an independence that would transform this cruel system through a socialist revolution."

The Bhagat Singh archives contain a newspaper report: "On January 21, 1930, the accused in the Lahore Conspiracy Case appeared in the court wearing red scarves. As soon as the magistrate took his chair they raised slogans 'Long Live Communist International', 'Lenin's name will never die' and 'Down with imperialism'. Bhagat Singh then read

the text of the telegram in the court and asked the magistrate to send it to the Third International."

During the national liberation movement Bhagat Singh's revolutionary struggle had threatened the stranglehold of the native bourgeois leaders at the helm of the engineered political spectrum. The orders of his execution by the Viceroy of India at the time, Lord Irving had a tacit approval of Gandhi.

In Pakistan the Islamicist fundamentalists and conservative right condemn Bhagat Singh as a kaafir (infidel) and a terrorist. His Sikh ancestry is abused and ideological convictions deprecated to undermine his inspirational struggle for successive generations. The accusations of him being a terrorist do not stand up to the facts of history.

From the prison Bhagat Singh wrote in, *An Autobiographical Discourse*, "The romance of the violent methods alone which was so prominent among our predecessors was replaced by serious ideas. No more mysticism, no more blind faith. At times of terrible necessity, we can resort to extreme methods, but violence produces opposite results in mass movements."

In the present epoch the South Asian subcontinent's more than a billion and a half inhabitants are suffering from immense misery, poverty, unemployment, disease and an excruciating deprivation. The

capitalist democracy and its socioeconomic systems have devastated society and pulverised the masses. There is a seething revolt in the wombs of these societies despite the reaction that dominates the region at the present time. The youth from the toiling classes are yearning for a way-out from this agony and destitution.

From reformism to religious bigotry, every turn and twist in politics have only made the situation worse for the ordinary people. No less than a revolution can resolve even the basic of the issues. Sooner rather than later the youth will spearhead a movement that will inspire hundreds of millions of the workers and the oppressed masses into a revolutionary class struggle. For the young revolutionaries Bhagat Singh's message given to the youth of his day resonates in its truthfulness today:

In a letter "To the young political workers" Bhagat Singh wrote in February 1931, "Leave sentimentalism aside. Be prepared to face the facts. Revolution is a very difficult task. It is beyond the power of any man to make a revolution. Neither can it be brought about on any appointed date. Special environments, social and economic, bring it about. The function of an organised party is to utilise such an opportunity offered by these circumstances. [To] prepare the masses and organise the forces for the revolution is a very difficult task. And that requires a very great sacrifice on the part of the revolutionary workers."

"Maduro is undemocratic and Guaidó is a usurper"

29 March 2019, by Dani Dominquez, Gonzalo Gómez Freire

"The people no longer want Maduro and no one has elected Guaidó ". This is the slogan of Marea's Socialista, confronted with the crisis in

Venezuela. This political movement of Chavist origin argues for popular sovereignty against the total political polarization of the country between

the "authoritarian" government of Maduro and the "puppet" presidency of Guaidó . We talk to Gonzalo Gómez Freire, a spokesman for Marea

Socialista and co-founder of the independent media *Aporrea*.

Dani DomÁnguez: As socialists, you criticize both the government of Nicolás g Maduro and his opponent Juan Guaidó . What do you blame each one of them for?

Gonzalo Gómez Freire: The Maduro government has destroyed the rights of the working class. It is very authoritarian, undemocratic. It is excessively corrupt. It compromises social and oil sovereignty and, despite an anti-imperialist discourse, what it seeks is to integrate into the world economy as a neo-bourgeoisie, by submitting to emerging imperialisms. It seriously violates the Constitution and has dismantled all that remained of the Bolivarian Revolution as a real process, of which it has kept only a manipulative language devoid of real content.

Guaidó is also a usurper, but he managed to manoeuvre by surfing on the immense malaise and genuine protest of the people. He proclaimed himself president, without respecting the Constitution, without being elected by anyone. He has managed to canalise huge mass mobilizations that are fed up with the Maduro government and want it to change, but the source of his project is in Washington and his decisions are not his own. He is at the service of a foreign interventionist operation of recolonization. Basically, it is a repetition of many elements of Carmona's coup against Chavez, but he has real popular support and seeks military support that has not yet appeared, although he is supported by the military and economic power of the United States. We reject Guaidó's "puppet presidency", but at the same time we say that Maduro cannot continue to rule against the people. We appeal to popular sovereignty.

Dani DomÁnguez: The media speak of a total polarization of Venezuelan society. Is this the case or are there intermediate positions?

Gonzalo Gómez Freire: The polarization of political actors and social organizations seems to be almost total and that is how it looks.

But the fact that the people are protesting against Maduro does not mean that they trust Guaidó. The people are waiting. I belong to a sector that does not submit to this polarization and that encourages the political and class autonomy of the workers and the people's movement to distance themselves from corrupt bureaucracy and exploiting capital. For example, within the Intersectorial de Trabajadores de Venezuela (ITV) - an articulating organ of the struggles of the working class, politically plural - we launched the battle (as Marea socialista, with other forces of the class struggle left) for ITV not to be officially involved in the march called by Guaidó on January 23rd. We proposed that ITV launch its own call on its own programme to help build the autonomy of the working class as an actor with its own voice, demanding popular sovereignty. We insisted that ITV remain committed to the programme of struggle that we had approved in the meetings. But a large part of the trade union leadership went to the march and very few stood out from the unilateral and unconstitutional actions of Guaidó. I am referring to the union leaders who protest and demand along with the workers, because those who are close to the Maduro government are essentially just one more apparatus of the state bureaucracy.

The media, both private and public, are not interested in presenting options for breaking with polarization because they are on one side or the other. Unlike *Aporrea*, for example, which is an alternative and popular means of communication.

Dani DomÁnguez : What does this intermediate position propose?

Gonzalo Gómez Freire: I do not agree with describing it as "intermediary", it's just another position. And, on the other hand, in the spectrum that is not aligned with the polarization there is not just one attitude. Marea Socialista , together with the Civic Platform for the Defence of the Constitution, in which several of Chavez's ministers who have broken with the Maduro government-army-PSUV participate, advocates the exercise of popular sovereignty through a constitutional democratic solution with the mobilized

people. We say: "the people do not want Maduro anymore and nobody elected Guaidó". We propose the re-legitimization of all powers and the holding of general elections; for this we call for an advisory referendum, provided for in Article 71 of the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, so that the people can express themselves and decide, freely and sovereignly, on important issues for the country. It is necessary for 10 per cent of voters to ask for it. And whoever calls himself "president" cannot ignore this right because sovereignty belongs to the people and not to the president. There

Dani DomÁnguez : Is this crisis different from the others and does it impose change in Venezuela?

Gonzalo Gómez Freire: It's the crisis of a betrayed revolution. With Chávez, there was a democratic process, progressive, and transformative, which accumulated many conquests for the people, despite the fact that many problems had begun to take shape during his term. Now we have a sad reality: imperialism and the traditional bourgeoisie are coming to collect the result of work done by a corrupt bureaucracy, a sort of "neo-lumpen-bourgeoisie" which wanted to appropriate the wealth of a country instead of continuing the revolutionary potential initiated with Chavez. We cannot compare the change that would come from the interventionist hands of the United States and the traditional capitalist sectors, with what was experienced in the best years of the Bolivarian revolution. We believe that, in order to hope for a favourable change for the people, an autonomous movement of the working class and popular sectors is indispensable. Obviously, the change represented by Guaidó and Trump is not favourable to us, nor is what Maduro represents. In order to contribute to a change in favour of the people, we call for the establishment of an autonomous force, by building an organization like Marea Socialista, as well as alliances that must be forged. We do not see magic solutions if there is no political actor who really identifies with the workers and the people.

Dani DomÁnguez: What is the best

possible scenario, and the worst?

Gonzalo Gómez Freire: The best possible scenario is that the mobilized people claim their sovereign status and impose a consultation or new democratic elections with better guarantees. That the conflicting factors seek a negotiated solution, but not a compromise between the summits, before the people. Everything is better than a civil war or an invasion. But the price of peace cannot be to continue in misery, without democracy and without national sovereignty.

Dani DomÍnguez : If new elections are called, would their results change from previous ones? Would the losing option accept the result?

Gonzalo Gómez Freire: The previous elections, although we called for a vote, were unfair and lacked guarantees and transparency. The National Electoral Council must be renewed, not in the form of a division

of positions between the political parties and the powers that are fighting each other, but with the open participation of citizens, in a form that should be debated. Neither the Maduro bureaucracy nor the Guaidó-Trump binomial can guarantee this. A democratic election would be preferable and probably acceptable, even though the configuration expressing the interests of the working class and popular sectors will not necessarily be built, because our organizations have been degraded, subjected, have become clientelist ... and it will require a reconstruction of our social and political subject.

Dani DomÍnguez : How do you assess the position of the European Union?

Gonzalo Gómez Freire: Generally, I think it ends up being useful for Trump's plans. I saw a statement by the Spanish government in which it declared that if Maduro did not organize new democratic elections, it could recognize Guaidó; and I do not

think that is a democratic option, because it's our people who have to rule directly. I think that the European Union cannot take this responsibility, because Guaidó seeks to impose himself by unconstitutional means; no one elected him and he declared himself self-proclaimed during a demonstration, without prior decision of the National Assembly of which he had just taken over the presidency, even though this Assembly was declared "disobedient" by the Supreme Court of Justice.

I believe that, as governments, they must remain within the framework of the principle of non-intervention and respect for the sovereignty of peoples. We believe in international solidarity with the people of Venezuela, who resist and carry on their shoulders the shock of the crisis, which requires food aid and not the xenophobia of other countries, which seeks an echo denouncing the repression and which has the right to take part, without cheating, in the democratic decision concerning its destiny.

Solidarity with the Algerian people in their struggle for popular sovereignty! Renaissance of the Algerian revolution!

28 March 2019, by Fourth International Bureau

The trigger for this powerful popular anger was the obstinacy of the government in keeping Abdelaziz Bouteflika as President of the country for a fifth term - when he has already spent 20 years in office - by expanding his powers through successive amendments to the Constitution. The government's desire to impose a very sick old man as nominal president is strongly felt as contempt for the people, and in effect as a transfer of his prerogatives to a behind-the-scenes faction. This contempt has unleashed decades of pent-up anger against the policy of looting national wealth, dismantling the public sector,

increasing domestic public debt, and further repression of democratic freedoms.

The popular struggle is growing and attracting new layers of demonstrators united by the goal of ousting Abdelaziz Bouteflika from power as soon as his term ends on 28 April 2019 and refusing to allow his defenders and all government members to be involved in determining the country's future.

The ruling clique has so far tried to be unwavering faced with this popular uprising and manoeuvring to gain time to avoid its fall. After being convinced

to hold elections to impose the sitting president's candidacy, it decided to cancel the presidential elections and extend Bouteflika's term in a way that violates the Constitution, which it amended at will in the hope of deceiving the demonstrators. It has even begun to implement its plan presented as a roadmap for a "new republic" built by the outgoing president.

The popular response was expressed on 16 March 2019 at the largest demonstration of millions of Algerians throughout the country, calling for the rejection both of President Bouteflika's continuation in office

after the end of his term and of the clique behind him

This faction of the ruling regime will oppose attempts to overthrow it and will try by all possible means to escape the people's verdict using one of the following ways:

- temporarily withdrawing in order to then regain control over the Algerian people;
- concluding an agreement with the liberal opposition parties to include them in the government in exchange for guaranteeing the interests of this corrupt clique;
- direct intervention by the army, which would be justified by the dangers threatening the country, or by the legal vacuum left by the end of Bouteflika's mandate if elections are not held;
- inviting a personality with a little credit to play the role of appeasing popular anger in the meantime.

All these options constitute a major betrayal of the popular demands.

Abdelaziz Bouteflika's fourth presidential term is drawing to a close leaving Algeria on the brink of an economic crisis. Monetary reserves are declining at a record pace and may run out in the coming years. The budget deficit is growing significantly and the excessive printing of money will create inflation and a currency collapse that will lead to a sharp drop in purchasing power. The government wants to keep its material base by leaving the economy focused solely on specializing in the export of hydrocarbons and derived products, importing its main capital and consumer goods. It continues to benefit from oil rents, widespread

corruption, and the monopoly of import and investment permits.

The imperialist institutions will use their influence to take advantage of the current situation and force Algeria to implement quickly and fully neoliberal measures such as the opening of the market to imperialist capital, the privatization of the public sector, the liberalization of the energy sector, the abolition of public subsidies for mass consumption, and cuts in public sector jobs. This neoliberal doctrine converges with the project of the liberal bourgeoisie, which also opposes Bouteflika's clique in power on the pace of this liberalization. The implementation of these neoliberal policies will constitute a profound regression for Algerian working and popular classes and a theft of their sacrifices. Hence the responsibility of socialist activists to join forces on the basis of a programme of demands with a perspective of class independence that will accompany the mobilization and organization of the working class, youth and women for a sovereign constituent assembly that will ensure a radical democratic regime and an independent economy to meet the basic needs of the population, based on collective ownership and grassroots control.

Young people and the popular classes have played an important role in the ongoing popular struggle, as have workers, particularly public service workers. However, the intervention of workers with an independent class perspective and decisive economic strength requires the support and mobilization of workers in strategic sectors, such as petrochemicals, ports, banks, transport and logistics. This would profoundly change the balance of power and stifle the ruling clique and, more importantly, it would

guarantee that the Algerian people decide the political and economic future of the country.

The Fourth International expresses its full solidarity with the struggles of the Algerian people to bring down a regime, of dictatorship, corruption and dependence, and supports its right to popular sovereignty through a sovereign Constituent Assembly.

We condemn the support of the imperialist governments for the ruling regime and their intervention in a matter that concerns the Algerian people exclusively. We hope that the dynamics of the struggles that are emerging in Morocco and Tunisia, which are also experiencing a political and social crisis, will mark the beginning of a victory of the popular revolutions that will revive the glory of the national liberation revolutions, of which the Algerian revolution was one of the symbols in the struggle against imperialism on an international scale.

We call on all socialists and democrats in the world to support the Algerian people in their struggle and to prepare themselves for the duty of international solidarity in the face of the evolution of a great struggle that is still in its infancy.

Long live the struggle of the Algerian people for their popular sovereignty!

Down with the dictatorship of corruption and archaic dependence, for a sovereign Constituent Assembly!

For international solidarity with the struggle of the Algerian people!

Executive Bureau of the Fourth International

27 March 2019

The Decline of the Low Countries

26 March 2019, by **Alex de Jong**

The big winner of the Dutch regional elections on March 20 was the far-right Forum voor Democratie (FvD). [1] This was first time the FvD participated in these elections, which also decide the composition of the country's senate. With almost 15 percent of the vote, it immediately became one of the biggest factions in the upper house, in a fresh step forward for the far right in the Netherlands.

Having emerged out of a campaign against the European Union's trade association with Ukraine, the FvD became a political party only in 2016, winning two seats in parliament the following year. [2] Since then, the FvD, and especially its leader Thierry Baudet, have been permanent fixtures in the media. Baudet and the FvD follow in the footsteps of the far right in the Netherlands, which shot to prominence at the turn of the millennium, under the leadership of Pim Fortuyn. [3]

For the last few years, its main representative was Geert Wilders and his Partij voor de Vrijheid (Party for Freedom, PVV), but he is now being overshadowed by Baudet. Although Wilders and his Islamophobic movement in many ways laid the groundwork for the success of the FvD, this new party is different – and more radical. [4]

A Reactionary Creed

One difference is that the FvD openly presents itself as ideologically driven. As its program declares, in an implicit swipe at Geert Wilders, “we are rational, cultured, serious and focused on matters of substance.” FvD is sometimes labeled a “populist” force, but it is the most self-consciously elitist party in the Dutch political landscape. Baudet, who wrote a book on classical music, famously started his maiden speech in parliament by paraphrasing (in Latin) Cicero. [5] Meanwhile, the FvD candidate list is made up of lawyers, surgeons, corporate managers, businessmen, retired military officers.... And most of all the FvD's programmatic statements promise class war from

above on all fronts.

Baudet and the people around him are working on a project for an authoritarian, nationalist transformation of Dutch society. As part of this, it is building a party organization (with 30,000 members, it already surpassed several of the established centrist parties) with local chapters and a rapidly growing youth wing as well as ideological training. In contrast, the PVV is, legally speaking, a closed association with only one member: Wilders himself. Whereas the PVV completely revolves around Wilders and his Twitter account, the FvD is creating a movement as part of its long-term strategy to remodel the Netherlands.

The ideology guiding their project is more coherent than that of the PVV. Wilders started out on the right wing of the free market, secular liberal VVD. Yet with Islamophobia as his central priority, he abandoned his initial radical neoliberal positions to embrace a kind of “welfare-chauvinism.” Wilders thus instead postured as a defender of the welfare state, claiming the real threat to it was immigration and that immigrants' access to social security needed to be restricted further. Conversely, the FvD election manifesto calls for destroying laws that protect workers against dismissal and in case of illness, for selling off social housing, and abolishing inheritance taxes as well as subsidies for tenancy and health care costs. Adopting social-Darwinist terms, social protection has, the FvD national election manifesto proclaimed, turned people into “herd animals” and made society “indolent” (the Dutch term used was just as archaic). Instead, the FvD wants to see “dynamism” and turn the Netherlands into “the Silicon Valley of Europe.”

To oversee this project, the FvD wants a strong executive branch. As the party euphemistically puts it, it wants to “increase the distance between the government and the parliament.” In the Dutch system, governments consist of coalitions of different parties, and traditionally the prime minister is a representative of the largest party in this coalition. The FvD wants to restrict this coalition process

and concentrate more power in the hands of the premier. They propose that the prime minister should be directly elected, and be given the authority to appoint, dismiss, or overrule members of the cabinet.

While increasing the power of the executive, the party wants to limit that of the independent judiciary (supposedly “dominated by leftists”) and gut the mechanisms that provide state support for civil society, public broadcasting, and political parties. Instead of “endless compromises,” the FvD desires “more decisive governance,” commanding a strengthened military and police, and ruling over a disempowered population, and especially a precarious and weakened working class.

In addition, the FvD wants to introduce a system of referendums through which citizens can launch proposals and introduce new bills. This proposal is a centerpiece of the FvD's ideology and why the party calls itself a supporter of “direct democracy.” But in a society where workers' rights have been destroyed, and mechanisms of public debate gutted, those with wealth and connections will be even more advantaged, and referendums another way to implement their wishes. For Baudet, this is not a problem, of course – he waves this objection aside by writing that the economically powerful getting their way is hardly unique to referendums: “After all, are parliaments not also susceptible to powerful lobbies of multinationals and other wealthy corporations?” The ideological glue holding together the FvD's atomized society would consist of nationalism and white supremacy. In the paranoid worldview of the FvD, “in the past decades there has been an attempt to alienate the Dutch from their history and separate them from their culture.” The FvD is a strong supporter of the far-right myths of the “great replacement”; a supposed conspiracy by leftists to replace the white European population through immigration, and “cultural Marxism.” [6] [7]

To counteract these plots, the FvD calls for “teaching, disseminating, and promoting” all “the beautiful things

the West has produced,” while closing the borders (apart from for “those who we need”), and purging left-wing influences from academia. The FvD wants “to encourage remigration” when “assimilation has been unsuccessful,” deport immigrants whose political views “do not fit our Western civilization,” and restrict immigrants’ access to social security.

For an example of what kind of society the FvD wants, one can look at Hungary: in an interview with a Hungarian magazine, Baudet called its prime minister Viktor Orbán a “hero of the Western world,” and especially praised his anti-Soros campaign. [8]

Baudet developed his ideas on national sovereignty and democracy in his PhD dissertation, published as a book in Dutch and English (*The Significance of Borders*). For Baudet, “democracy” is the sovereign exercise of legitimate power in the name of a nation. This legitimacy is not the result of the mutual recognition of rights and democratic organization — it is a cultural construction. When rulers and ruled are part of the same national culture, Baudet argues, the ruled will recognize themselves in their rulers, and accept their power as legitimate. It follows for him that nations need to be homogeneous to enable the required recognition. States should not only uphold the law, but actively mold the “norms of values” of its society to preserve (or rather: create) its homogeneity. Baudet has a history of sliding between defining this homogeneity in cultural terms, or in ethnic ones, as when he said that that he wants to keep Europe predominately white, or when he voiced his fear of the “dilution” of the Dutch people through mixing with others.

Baudet’s concept of democracy logically leads him to reject human rights. Baudet considers a nation sovereign when the state acting on its behalf is not limited in the exercise of its power. Since rights are given and decided upon by the sovereign power, people have only such rights as are granted to them as part of the nation. But human rights bodies put limits on what a sovereign nation-state can do, and this is why Baudet considers such institutions, as well as any other

international structure, as “anti-democratic.” The FvD’s opposition to human rights treaties is not only a matter of tactics, based on how these treaties hinder the implementation of closed borders — it is a matter of principle.

The F-Word

Baudet repeatedly refers to fascists for inspiration. In a piece for the French right-wing magazine *Valeurs Actuelles* in December 2015, discussing the terrorist attacks in France, he compared the jihadist terrorists with Gilles, the main character of the 1939 autobiographical novel of the same name by the French fascist Pierre Drieu de la Rochelle. For him, each of these figures are attracted by the “erotic effect of violence,” a view with which he himself evidently sympathizes; “Everything in life is achieved through combat. He who does not fight dies. And we would like our society to wish for — ‘peace’ at all costs?”

Society is, Baudet writes, approaching the point of no return at which it will be forced to face the need for such combat, just like Gilles did.

Another French writer promoted by Baudet is Dominique Venner. [9] Venner spent time in prison in the early 1960s because of his involvement with the right-wing terrorist *Organisation Armée Secrète*, and was later an associate of Alain de Benoist and other figures in the French Nouvelle Droite. [10] Central to their project was a reformulation of the ideas of the far-right in terms of the supposed “essential differences” — and hence impossibility of mixing or combination — between nations.

In the words of De Benoist: “The true wealth of the world is first and foremost the diversity of its cultures and peoples. The West’s conversion to universalism has been the main cause of its subsequent attempt to convert the rest of the world ... the Westernization of the planet has represented an imperialist movement fed by the desire to erase all otherness.”

This kind of reasoning justifies anti-immigrant policies, but in the name of preserving “difference between nations” instead of a supposedly superior “race.” It can also be seen in Baudet’s calls for a “sovereign cosmopolitanism” to protect each nation’s unique identity (while removing all difference inside the nation, in order to preserve this identity).

But the right-wing thinker that Thierry Baudet resembles most is Oswald Spengler, author of *The Decline of the West*. [11] According to Spengler, humanity consists of essentially different peoples (“Volker” in the original German) that are fated to be in eternal struggle. Each people is determined by its “blood” — a word that Spengler uses in a very vague way, but indicates a kind of eternal, metaphysical essence. The continuous struggle between “peoples” (at other times called “nations” or “civilizations”) is cyclical, each going through rise and decline. According to Spengler “western civilization” was nearing its end in the twenties. The task was to courageously face the inevitable — like the Roman soldier who remained at his post when Mount Vesuvius erupted, his remains to be discovered centuries later.

Baudet considers Spengler a “great philosopher” and echoes his rhetoric of decline, the need for essential differences, and for eternal struggle. Disconnected from its national essence, a society will lose its life-giving culture, instead only producing “formless, modernist buildings” while “abstract, meaningless — ‘art’ destroys people’s sense of home,” dooming them to a future of “spiritual homelessness and political dispossession.” “Society has lost its organic unity” and “modernity has gone too far,” making us forget that “life means struggle.” Denial of this eternal struggle makes a society decadent, and attempts to protect people against its effects turns them into the “indolent herd-animals” the FvD election program denounces.

But Baudet also has a difference with the Spengler of *The Decline of the West* — perhaps also the reason why he says he is no longer an “acolyte” of his. For Baudet believes the decline

can be reversed.

This was also the theme of his victory speech, a piece of oratory that was flowery even for Baudet's standards, and packed with references to far-right themes. Claiming to be "standing among the ruins" of the "greatest and most beautiful civilization the world has ever known," a "boreal civilization," under attack from the inside by journalists, artists, and left-wing teachers, and from the outside by migration, Baudet described his movement as "a new political theology," the carrier of an "unique force that can never be taken away," a movement that will bring about a "rebirth" by reconnecting the country to its "ancient roots and make it blossom again."

The clear influences on Baudet of European far-right figures from the 1920s and 1930s, his nationalism and racism, his misogynist statements and desire for authoritarian leadership inevitably raise the question of what makes him and his party different from fascism. The FvD does not have the kind of militant street presence associated with classical fascism, and neither does it want to abolish multi-party democracy. When needed, Baudet can still shift to a milder register, and in the last campaign the FvD skillfully avoided discussing the full implications of its program. Internationally, its contacts vary between the French Rassemblement National (the former National Front) and the right wing of the British Tories.

In general, the FvD's worldview fits very well with the description of what the Italian historian Enzo Traverso has called "post-fascism," in his book *The New Faces of Fascism*: "Its recipes are politically reactionary and socially regressive: they involve the restoration of national sovereignty, the adoption of forms of economic protectionism [the FvD wants to use the state to support 'national industries'], and the defense of endangered 'national identity', it 'upholds a plebiscitary model of democracy that destroys any process of collective deliberation in favor of a relationship that merges people and leader, the nation and its leader.'" [12]

Who Supports These Policies?

When the FvD first started to rise in the polls, there was some expectation the party would mainly appeal to supporters of Wilders. As politics becomes more and more indistinguishable from the entertainment industry, part of the appeal of Baudet is simply the fact he is new. The appeal of Wilders's image of permanent outrage and folksy sayings has started to wear off. Baudet offers something new and different; he is younger, handsome, well-dressed, and tweets about how listening even to the "second-rate" nineteenth-century composers makes him realize how much better things were back then. He explains the need to study how to smoke cigars properly, and considers himself "the most important intellectual in the country."

But while Wilders's party lost significantly in the regional elections, and polls predict it will also lose support in the next national elections as well, its loss is less than the FvD's (expected) gain. The FvD's "classy" self-presentation appeals to right-wingers who rejected Wilders because of his vulgarity and the plebeian character of his movement.

The FvD is also quite popular among ambitious university students who see themselves as the upcoming elite. They have grown up in a society that has become increasingly nationalist and right-wing over the last two decades, and the FvD is the most coherent expression of this. [13] And it promises them a chance at shining careers: its program opens by declaring the country is an "existential crisis" but solutions to it are blocked by a "cartel" of political parties who monopolize positions of power. The FvD promises to sweep aside this "outdated, suffocating" establishment to make way for the "new generation" so that it can arrive at their "proper positions."

Two years ago, the Dutch social-democratic party, the PvdA, imploded in the heaviest election defeat in Dutch political history. Many of its voters moved rightwards, to parties of

the mainstream right, but a large part opted instead for the left-liberal Green party, GroenLinks. The latest regional elections confirm this picture; with some important exceptions, the support for the far right does not come from voters leaving parties of the center en masse, but from right-wing voters moving further right. Although the governing right-wing coalition lost its majority in the senate, the Right as a whole did not grow much. Instead, the Dutch right wing has recomposed and further radicalized.

From the 1970s to the late 1990s, a kind of progressive liberalism was hegemonic in Dutch society. The thin wedge that opened a breach in this hegemony was Islamophobia. The new Dutch right adopted elements of liberal hegemony to turn them against the Muslim and immigrant other, by claiming sexism and homophobia are products of "non-western cultures," and that the defense of women's and gay rights necessitate anti-immigrant policies. [14] The FvD continues to make homo- and femo-nationalist statements "but in a much weaker vein. Baudet is known for making sexist remarks. He claims that women do not want their partners to respect them when they do not consent to sex, and secretly desire to have it forced upon them. One of his first public acts was when he defended "pick-up artist" Julien Blanc (who advised men that in order to "seduce" a Japanese woman, a guy should "just grab her ... to take the pressure off, yell Pikachu or Pokemon or Tamagotchi or something"). Movements and parties the FvD consider allies, such as Pegida, or the Belgian group Schild en Vrienden, are rife with homophobia and sexism.

For two decades, the traditional parties of the Right have also become more right-wing, simultaneously posing as the reasonable alternative to the far right while taking over its ideas and making them "respectable." This was the dynamic with Pim Fortuyn, with Geert Wilders, and it now seems to be happening with Baudet as the "center right" rushes to congratulate him and declare their willingness to work together. Each time, Dutch politics as a whole has become more reactionary and

nationalist. No left-wing force in Dutch politics matches the radicalism of Baudet, or before him that of Wilders.

The Green party has recently prospered because it positions itself as a progressive alternative that stands opposite to the far right on issues that have become central to public debate, like racism and, with the recent protests, climate change. It doubled its Senate representation in the last elections, growing to over 10 percent of the vote. However, after the current right-wing coalition lost its majority in the upper house, Groenlinks “which has in the past helped to abolish the system of public study grants and implement other cuts” indicated it is willing to make deals with such forces. This would likely demotivate many of its voters.

The other main left-wing force, the Socialist Party (SP), has been unable to find its way in this context, although on socioeconomic issues it is significantly more left-wing than the Greens. The SP’s recent course has been a mixture of accepting parts of the Netherlands’ right-wing drift, including on immigration and refugees, while simultaneously trying to change the conversation by focusing on issues it is stronger on, such as health care. [15] This approach has not been a success “the party has been losing in elections for almost ten years straight, and in the last elections, its vote almost halved, to less than 6 percent. Its membership figure is the lowest it has been in fifteen years. The outbreak of the crisis in 2008, when the time for its ideas seemed to have come, was instead the end of the SP’s upward trajectory.

The greatest threat to “occidental civilization,” Spengler wrote in his last book, is the coming together of class struggle from below with the struggles of oppressed peoples in a “colored world revolution.” An obvious lesson for the Left is that issues of racism and immigration are not somehow secondary matters but indeed need to be combined with other emancipation struggles. The Netherlands has recently gone through a period of increasing strike activity and recently saw large protests around women’s day and climate change. Instead of trying to be a partner for the Right, the Left can learn one thing from the approach of Wilders and Baudet: consistent opposition and ideological struggle can change what is considered possible in politics.

[Jacobin](#)

Worrying About Huawei: Is China Winning the G5 Race?

25 March 2019, by **Richard Falk**

It is, at best, unusual for an American Secretary of State to warn foreign governments in a public speech about a specific foreign company.

Sputnik: US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo warned European countries on Monday that using technology from Huawei could hurt their relationship with the United States. Speaking in Hungary, the first stop in a five-nation European tour, Pompeo said the United States has an obligation to alert other governments to the risks of building networks with equipment from the Chinese telecommunications giant.

What is your response such statements? Do you consider such steps diplomatically appropriate?

We cannot take Mr. Pompeo’s

statements at face value, and must consider several lines of possible explanation.

First of all, what is the basic motivation for such warnings to European countries with respect to Huawei? Is it primarily economic or political? If economic, it is a matter of gaining leverage for American and maybe European competitors of Huawei. It should be realized in this connection that Huawei mobile phones have been almost totally excluded from the American market on the basis of what is probably a specious argument, namely, that it gives China a backdoor entry to private communications among Americans. In this sense, the issue is really about economic competition with regard to the lucrative 5G network being currently constructed on a country by country basis, with the American complaint being disguised as one of

security. Highly relevant is the fact that U.S. companies are reported to be one or two years behind Huawei’s 5G technological capabilities.

Even if it is political, in part, endangering privacy, encroaching on national sovereignty, and giving China some potential geopolitical advantages, the argument is slanted and disingenuous.

Even if it is political, in part, endangering privacy, encroaching on national sovereignty, and giving China some potential geopolitical advantages, the strong impression is that Pompeo is worried about China gaining influence in Europe at the expense of the United States. Pompeo’s argument is, at best, slanted and disingenuous.

The US, as the Snowden disclosures showed several years ago, is engaged

in by far the largest mega-data collection operation going on in the world, and there is no reason to think that it has abandoned such efforts to control global surveillance capabilities.

I believe Pompeo's warning that if Hungary and other governments in Europe do business with Huawei on the 5G network it would become "more difficult for us to partner with you" is both a political and economic attempt to discourage normal dealing with this Chinese company. It also tells the peoples and governments of Europe that are better off being vulnerable to American 5G penetration than to Chinese penetration.

This kind of threat diplomacy is rather normal in international relations, at least behind closed doors, although it is not consistent with seeking friendly overall international relations. During the Trump presidency what has usually been discussed discreetly and non-provocatively in the past is now shouted from the rooftops. Such a crude diplomacy naturally raises global tensions, and gives rise to retaliatory threats and countermeasures. It is not surprising, then, to learn that there are rumors of Chinese responses, threatening the operations of American companies doing business in China.

As for the alleged American concerns about the privacy rights of Europeans and the sanctity of national sovereignty, an element of hypocrisy is present. Surely, the United States has for decades engaged in extensive surveillance operations globally that pose grave threats to privacy and sovereign rights of all countries, including its friends and allies. To complain about China is to give the false impression that other political

actors in the West have not pushed the boundaries of technology precisely to gain intelligence advantages and possible leverage for intervention in the internal affairs of other countries to the extent that they possess the technological capacity to do so. As with recent complaints about influencing foreign elections, the U.S. Government objects to practices that it has long and extensively relied upon to spread its influence in violation of the sovereign rights of foreign nations. Such habitual practice does not make it justifiable, but it does undercut a posture of outrage and innocence.

These considerations should be understood in any adequate evaluation of Pompeo's warning about Huawei.

How are the EU states likely to react? Will they shun away from using Huawei technology?

It is very difficult to anticipate how the states in Europe will react, and whether this reaction will be a unified EU response or depend on economic and political assessments made by each European government. There are current indications, for instance, of an internal conflict in the Czech Republic as between its intelligence agency that has conveyed warnings similar to those of Pompeo and with the Czech president, Milos Zeman, who seeks to avoid trouble with China over such concerns because he fears it might spoil present positive commercial and diplomatic relations.

On a geopolitical plane, especially in an EU or NATO context, this competitive view of 5G as between China and the United States, creates a situation of fundamental choice for Europe. In view of Trump's rather dismissive approach to the traditional core alliance relations, the EU and the

main governments in Europe are given an opportunity to send Washington two crucial messages: first, "the Cold War is over, we will seek greater national and regional independence in pursuing our interests;" secondly, "don't take our friendship and solidarity for granted any longer or we will go elsewhere, and there are places to go."

There is finally the underlying question of technology. Is Huawei ahead of the game, and likely to stay there, making it advantageous for Europe to be linked with this Chinese company rather than waiting around for an uncertain equivalent development by American companies? Are there European potential competitors for the supply of this technology that would be more reliable and beneficial with respect to maximizing Europe's future private and public sector interests. Such European capabilities with regard to 5G network, repairs, and supplies might also give the EU and its members an option of equidistance diplomacy, being neither dependent upon or vulnerable to pressure exerted by either Beijing or Washington.

In effect, there are many issues that remain to be interpreted and commented upon in relation to Pompeo's rather unusual statements in Hungary. His remarks need also to be connected with the recent detention of Chief Financial Officer of Huawei and daughter of the CEO, Meng Wanzhou, in Canada on several charges, including stealing trade secrets from U.S. companies leading to an American formal request for extradition.

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The UTLA Victory in Context

24 March 2019, by Robert Bartlett

Before that pivotal strike, teachers and their unions, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA), had become stuck in a spiral of concessions, as corporate privatizers “supported by both Democrats like Barack Obama and Republicans” expanded the growth of charter schools in major cities across the country.

Cities have the following percentages of students in charter schools: post-Katrina New Orleans 92%, Detroit 53%, the District of Columbia 43%, Philadelphia 32% and Los Angeles has 20%. As the number of charter school students increased, resources devoted to public schools declined and loss of students led to loss of programs “and in the worst case a closure of public schools like the 48 schools closed in Chicago a year after the 2012 strike.

In the two years between the Caucus of Rank-and-File Educators (CORE) winning control of the CTU and going on strike in 2012, the union worked relentlessly to change the CTU’s culture from a service model union into an organizing model under the slogan “The Schools Chicago Students Deserve.” This led to the stunning CTU strike victory, much to the surprise of Mayor Rahm Emanuel and union leaders like Randi Weingarten of the AFT.

Teachers throughout the country then realized it was possible to fight the privatizers and gain public support. The St. Paul Federation of Teachers published their own version of “The Schools St. Paul Students Deserve.” Caucuses in major cities, like Los Angeles, won control of their union and began the preparation to unite their members and build ties with the community needed to win a struggle against formidable foes.

Fruits of Organizing

As one of a dozen or so members of the “UTLA Solidarity Squad,” organized by Labor Notes and the United Caucuses of Rank-and-File Educators (UCORE), I was able to

compare the level of organization in Los Angeles compared to that of the 2012 Chicago strike.

While in both cities the union members were united and energized by the strike, the level of internal organizing appeared better in LA. Despite its geographical sprawl, there was the eye-popping 80% level of support of LA teachers compared to “only” 67% during the Chicago strike. UTLA clearly did their homework!

UCLA education professor John Rogers commented to the Los Angeles Times that what surprised him was not just how strongly the union message came across, but how ineffective the school district management was in trying to persuade the public that it just didn’t have the money to fix the schools. He noted that “It’s breathtaking how different this conversation is than a decade ago during the recession, when the conversations were so focused on bad teachers.”

The Union Power leadership of UTLA is the result of a decade-long effort of rank and file UTLA members. In 2006 the Progressive Educators for Action (PEAC), a social justice caucus originally founded in the 1990s, formed an alliance with A. J. Duffy; the unified slate won office. But as a leadership it wasn’t unified and four years later it was defeated by a slate focused on “bread and butter” issues.

Led by Warren Fletcher, that slate hired a “professional” bargainer and organized a single-focused “Rally for a Raise.” Meanwhile PEAC organized a contingent calling for programs that would facilitate a system of quality schools.

The current Union Power leadership, which comes out of the PEAC current, won office in 2014. Its president, Alex Caputo-Pearl, has worked to develop a team committed to internal organizing and linking it to a social justice orientation with strong parent and community alliances.

This, in turn, has transformed the union from bottom to top. The caucus built a union infrastructure in each of 900 schools “even when some schools were quite small. The goal was

to establish Contract Action Teams at every school with a ratio of one CAT leader per 10 teachers at each job site.

This very ambitious goal was probably achieved in many, but not all schools. It was the basis on which to establish intermediary leadership structures that could sustain a working coalition, Reclaim Our Schools LA, which over 250 community organizations signed onto.

After almost three years of organizing, 98% of UTLA members voted to strike. A public opinion poll carried out by Loyola Marymount during the strike that showed 81% supported the UTLA. The infrastructure was solid.

Strike Power

The strike was initially called for January 10th but was delayed four days due to the union’s decision to postpone it in order to forestall the legal roadblocks.

Mornings there was picketing at every school site. For three days during the week all teachers were urged to join a massive downtown rally, after which teachers would return to schools for afternoon picketing.

This schedule enabled teachers, parents and students to be in the neighborhood but also come together for massive rallies. These rallies grew during the six-day strike from 45,000 to 60,000.

Logistical problems didn’t deter people from attending, nor did four days of rain in a normally drought-stricken city. Given that there are only about 33,000 LA teachers, a considerable portion of the crowds were made up of parents and students.

Based in the West Valley, I found the most interesting of the six days were when local actions took place in eight of the city’s regions. On Wednesday we were to hold a rally at a regional school board headquarters. I arrived an hour early to find the police had blocked off the main street where we were planning on stretching out with a half-a-mile “billboard” of teachers with

their signs. Hundreds had already arrived, clogging up the area.

The crowd of 3000 “ with more constantly arriving ” spontaneously marched toward each end of the street, waving signs, banging on drums and chanting. Having established a major presence on a major thoroughfare, we eventually pulled everyone back to a central point prior to going back to afternoon picketing.

On Thursday there was both a community meeting and another rally at an intersection. This time, with about 500 assembled, about 100-150 would assemble on each corner. Half waited to get for the light and then march to the other side. They continued in a clockwise pattern that allowed traffic on one street while being visible with picket signs, and loudly drumming and chanting.

People danced at each corner to improvised sound systems. The spirit and spontaneity was inspiring and completely self-generated. Throughout motorists honked their support, and so the action continued for a couple of hours.

The day the settlement was announced, the final rally in downtown LA became a victory celebration. Police estimated that 60,000 attended. It was a memorable event soon followed by a rushed ratification process forced on UTLA by LA mayor Eric Garcetti, who wanted students back in class the next day. The agreement was ratified by 81% voting in favor.

What Was Won, What Remains

Although the settlement was a victory, and despite the unprecedented unity of teachers and the support of the community, many of the 19% voting against the agreement probably felt that they should have gotten more.

Over the course of the contract, class size would drop by one during the first two years, and by two for the final year. This is movement in the right direction, but not sufficient. A number

of teachers, especially in the K-3rd grade levels were bitter that “they didn’t win anything.” (Their class size wouldn’t be reduced, but the elimination of the hated “1.5 Clause” protects them from egregious crowding.)

A magnificent struggle that so fully involved both teachers and parents now comes up against the issue of whence the funding comes. LAUSD had been hoarding a growing pot of money that amounted to almost \$2 billion this year. It is unclear how much they will have to dip into that to fund this agreement, but parts of the agreement are delayed for a year or two because of the cost.

Despite the power that UTLA mobilized, it was unable to force a redistribution of wealth towards public education. That is a struggle that no single union or strike can win. The Los Angeles Times estimates that the district will have to spend \$400 million over the course of the contract, but that might be a low-ball estimate.

Since most funding comes from the state, changes to the way schools are funded mean challenging Prop 13, which gave property tax relief not only to individuals, but to commercial and industrial properties.

Without another source of revenue, schools in LA and across the state will continue to be underfunded. The issue of funding is a fight that teachers face all across the country.

But If we take a slightly longer view “ starting with the CTU strike in 2012 and then considering the 2018 strikes in West Virginia, Oklahoma and Arizona ” we can see similar strengths and limitations.

All those strikes “ whether carried out by a militant union leadership or by rank and file teachers organized outside the traditional and weak union structures in right-to-work states ” ran up against the intransigence of corporate power.

Regardless of how internally organized they were, or how much support they received from the public, only those that had leadership with a radical vision as in Chicago and Los

Angeles were able to push beyond winning more than wage increases for extremely underpaid and exploited teachers and staff.

Both the Chicago and LA examples “ where the leadership used its resources, where rank-and-file teachers set policy and mobilized themselves, where parents, students and the community joined ” provide models of how the struggle can be sustained.

Chicago had a magnificent strike, yet within the year the mayor closed 48 public schools and continued to expand charters. The support that Chicago teachers won by championing the schools that students deserve is still there, but it is a continual struggle to keep the teachers united to be able to fight the next battle “ and there will be another one.

If teachers are unable to remain united and outward looking, they will be vulnerable to the pressure of the corporate powers. All movements are subject to a continual pressure that tries to deflate the movements by making partial concessions with a view to taking them back in the future.

What’s different today is the growing number of teachers and union locals willing to buck the conservative approach that has dominated the labor movement since concessionary attacks on unions increased over 30 years ago. That includes teacher unions aggressively organizing charter school teachers and defusing the threat charter schools pose to public education.

The transformative struggles within the established AFT and NEA local unions to become versions of “the unions our teachers deserve” are ongoing and difficult. But now there are enough examples with Chicago, LA, St Paul, West Virginia, Oklahoma, Arizona and hopefully places like Oakland and Denver, to provide a template of what is needed: a union committed to social justice for its students and community, a leadership (and better still a caucus) that embodies those principles and organizes within the union, and a union that strives to involve its members in community struggles that

build lasting alliances.

We need to trust the creativity of our members and build on translating our growing strength into one that will be

capable of taking on the inequality of our society.

Christchurch terror: How did this happen?

22 March 2019, by Tyler West, Ani White, Byron Clark, Daphne Lawless

In the aftermath, many said “This is not Aotearoa.” However, while the attack may not have represented Aotearoa, it did represent the ugly underbelly of white New Zealand. [16] We cannot simply blame the involvement of an Australian – for one thing, Christchurch has long been the city where the far right is strongest in this country. Although the attack is unprecedented, it did not come out of nowhere.

When T?hoe M?ori activist Tame Iti noted the legacy of colonial violence which this attack echoed, [17] many in comment threads called this ‘segregation’ or ‘divisiveness.’ However, if we don’t identify the roots of racist violence, it will only happen again and again.

We will examine four factors that should be considered in comprehending the incomprehensible;

- 1) The history of far-right groups in Aotearoa/New Zealand,
- 2) The alt-right internet’s incubating role,
- 3) Activist-left complicity in Islamophobia and
- 4) Complicity of the coalition government parties. We must “clean house” if we are to stop this from ever happening again.

**Always present:
NZ’s far right in**

history

The savagery and scale of the attacks in Christchurch are without a doubt unprecedented in recent New Zealand history. Attempts to reach for a comparison must go as far back as the 1943 Featherston POW massacre, the 1918 Surafend massacre, or further still to the 19th century colonial wars. [18] However, whether the motivations and violent nature of these attacks are unprecedented in New Zealand is another matter entirely.

Research on New Zealand’s far right is scarce, but what does exist puts the immediate lie to claims by the likes of Christchurch Mayor Lianne Dalziel and National Party MP Gerry Brownlee that white supremacy has not been a problem in Christchurch (or, by extension, New Zealand). The origins of New Zealand’s far right as an organized force lie with the emergence of racial exclusion leagues over the 1880s to 1920s, and the development of interlocking immigration laws which became known as the White New Zealand Policy.

While the origins of white supremacy lie with the confiscation of M?ori land and the bitter wars of the mid-19th century, its cohesion as a conscious doctrine originates in the fears of immigration eroding said power towards the end of the century. The early exclusionary leagues acted as relatively simple lobbying groups and utilized entirely legal means to further their aims, which in practice acted to reinforce and extend an increasingly whites-only border policy. Through the

1880s to 1900s groups with names like White Race League, Anti-Asiatic League, and Anti-Chinese League began to appear; generally garnering popular support. [19] At the same time, the lattice of immigration law which upheld the White New Zealand Policy started to be enacted.

A non-exhaustive list of that legislation includes:

? Restrictions on non-British gum diggers in 1898, 1908, and 1910; specifically aimed at Dalmatian (sometimes referred to as Croatian, Yugoslav, or just Slav) labourers who had entered the industry.

? Undesirable Hawkers Prevention Bill 1896 which was aimed at Syrian and other Arab immigrants, while acting broadly as a roundabout way to slow immigration by non-white British subjects.

? Undesirable Immigrants Exclusion Act 1919 placing special requirements on immigrants from the former German and Austro-Hungarian Empires.

? Immigration Restriction Act 1899 which acted to impede all non-British immigration.

? Over two dozen pieces of legislation aimed specifically at Chinese migrants. Poll tax increases in 1881, 1888, and 1896; naturalization bans in 1892, and 1908; additional language tests in 1907; and thumb printing in 1908 are among the most notable.

? Immigration Restriction Amendment Act 1920, which acted as the formalization of the White NZ Policy

and functionally ended non-white immigration.

Immigration Restriction Amendment Act 1931, which severely impeded attempts by Jewish refugees from Europe attempting to enter New Zealand. [20]

These racial leagues and the immigration restrictions eventually created the atmosphere that resulted in the infamous murder of Joe Kum Yung, an elderly Chinese miner, on Haining Street in Wellington on 24th September 1905. The killer, Lionel Terry, was a relatively popular racist agitator of a British merchant family and military background who'd been promoting his manifesto/verse booklet *The Shadow* leading up to the murder. The murder shocked the country, but crucially had no effect in blunting the popularity of whites-only immigration to NZ and a great many continued to support him. [21]

This atmosphere also culminated not only in Yung's murder in 1905 and the formalization of the White NZ Policy by the Act passed in 1920, but also in the founding of the most notorious of the racial exclusion leagues, the White New Zealand League. While the politics of this league were functionally little different to earlier leagues, it was the most explicit about ensuring New Zealand be a white state. With the common belief that Māori were either a 'dying race' or destined to be assimilated into white NZ, this meant that like previous groups the White NZ League focused near exclusively on Asian immigration. [22] As a marker of the League's incredible popularity, through the mid-1920s it sent requests to 200 local bodies around NZ asking them to pass resolutions supporting the aims of the League. They received positive replies from 160 of these local bodies, representing some 670,000 people (about 47% of the population at the time). [23]

Anti-Semitism, while rarer than anti-Asian sentiment, was far from unheard of either. Within the Social Credit movement in particular, which had strong support especially from the 'old petty-bourgeois' (rural small-landowners, typically farmers), anti-Semitism was rife in the 1930s. A

survey of Social Credit publications from the 1930s-1980s by sociologist Paul Spoonley reveals a persistent slew of anti-Semitic content, even after the Social Credit Political League itself expelled its extreme right-wing in 1972. [24] Social Credit acted as a harbour for anti-Semitism until the post-war period from the 1950s onward, when the far right began to fully develop and new organisations appear.

A full chronology of all the organisations of the far right in New Zealand established since the 1950s would be fruitless. Suffice to say that from 1954 with the formation of a NZ wing of the British League of Empire Loyalists (primarily based in Auckland and Christchurch) through to his writing in 1987, Paul Spoonley recorded the formation of nearly 100 far right organisations in a 33-year period. [25] Plainly, many more have formed in the interim 32 years.

While none of these groups have managed to become a mass movement or electorally successful party, some have attained significant support. Organisations expressing solidarity with white rule in Southern Africa, particularly South Africa and Rhodesia, began to appear in the 1960s and grew rapidly over the coming years. [26] Meanwhile the League of Rights, cousin to the Australian group of the same name and a home for the extreme right exiled from the mainstream Social Credit party, garnered surprising success in spite of their notoriety as an anti-Semitic and virulently racist organization. After its 1971 formation the League had a stable membership and support base of around 200 people for the duration of the decade, which soared to at least 1000 in the early 1980s as a result of the 1981 Springbok Tour and the rapid social changes of the time. The League further established numerous front-groups and operated in coalition with more mainstream conservatives over issues like abortion and homosexual law reform, giving them access to the political mainstream and some hard-line MPs. Estimated yearly expenditure for the 1980s, primarily funded by large volumes of book & paper sales, was as high as \$50,000; a figure packed up by the publication of

massive numbers of pamphlets, such as 250,000 copies of one titled *New Zealand First* in 1981. [27]

From the 1960s onward an openly fascist wing of New Zealand's far right began to operate, sometimes trailing into violence (National Socialist Party founder Colin King-Ansell was convicted of firebombing a synagogue in 1967). This fed in later years into the rise of often violent white power gangs in the 1990s which declined but persisted into the 2000s. [28] Arguably the most notorious, the Fourth Reich gang attracted national horror when a number of partially-ideologically motivated murders occurred after its expansion from a prison gang into a number of South Island centres in the late 1990s. Members were responsible for the murders of Hemi Hutley, James Bambrough, and Jae Hyeon Kim (and possibly more) in and around Westport from 1997-2003; Hutley and Kim for their race, and Bambrough for his sexuality. [29]

Kyle Chapman, arguably New Zealand's most notorious contemporary neo-Nazi, confessed to numerous race-related attacks on Māori people including firebombing a marae in Invercargill in the early 1990s. After confessing and 'leaving' the scene in the mid-1990s Chapman led a trust in Christchurch where he was tasked with steering skinhead youth away from the white power movement, which ended when he was discovered to be using his position to distribute neo-fascist material to his wards. [30]

Chapman would go on to lead the National Front in the 2000s at a time when their supporters vandalized Jewish graves and attacked immigrants in Wellington, and later founded Right Wing Resistance which operated in Christchurch in the early years of this decade. Other stalwarts of the movement like Colin King-Ansell and Kerry Bolton (who was a member of the National Socialist Party in his teenage years, going on to be a leader in numerous neo-fascist organisations) are still active today, like the rump of the white power scene in the 1990s.

Though only a few instances of fascist terror have been elaborated here,

historically New Zealand has had a demonstrably active far right subculture which has always bubbled not too far below the surface. And while it has never managed to attain mainstream success or political power in New Zealand, it has often hovered alarmingly close to that political mainstream or launched sporadic and opportunistic acts of violence from the fringe.

Internet's incubating role: The writing on the guns, and New Zealand's alt-right

Before he began his shooting spree, the Christchurch terrorist shared photos of his weapons on his (now deleted) Twitter account. On the guns used in the massacre he had written the names of other mass shooters, as well the phrase "14 words" a reference to the fourteen-word slogan "We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children," a statement attributed to American David Lane, founder of the white supremacist terrorist organisation The Order.

On another gun he had written "here's your migration compact!" a reference to the UN Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. This compact is a non-binding agreement around migration that was developed in the aftermath of the 2015 refugee crisis following the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, which was unanimously supported by all UN member states in September 2016.

The compact, relatively benign as well as non-binding, would likely have also been supported by all member states, if not for what happened next.

Beginning in September 2018, the far-right began to spread distorted information, conspiracy theories and outright falsehoods about the pact. According to Laurens Cerulus and Eline Schaart, writing for Politico (see "How the UN Migration pact got trolled"): [31]

The burst of activity, including tweets, videos and online petitions, prompted politicians in several countries to take notice of the previously uncontroversial pact and revise their views. In Belgium, the controversy led to the collapse of the government.

The rapid move from online activity to political reality is an example of how a process can be hijacked by what researchers describe as a global network of nationalist, far-right activists. In this case the efforts were spearheaded by popular YouTubers and political "influencers" such as Austrian far-right activist Martin Sellner, then coordinated via chat groups and hyper-partisan websites."

The Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD), which monitors extremism, analysed the 100 most popular YouTube videos about the migration pact and found that 75 were created by people that they had classified as right populist, anti-migration campaigners, far-right extremists or conspiracy theorists. This online network of hard-right content creators, along with far-right members of parliaments were able to sway several European countries to vote against approving the compact, along with the US, Israel and Australia.

New Zealand was not left out from the global right-wing backlash against the compact. While her own YouTube video, entitled "WAKE UP NEW ZEALAND' BY Carol Sakey -MUSLIM WORLD, NZ'S OPEN BORDERS. [32]" was nowhere near popular enough to be among the sample analysed by ISD, the parliamentary petition Carol Sakey started did gain some traction. The petition was shared by local right wing Facebook pages such as South Island Independence Movement, run by Timaru based Solomon Tors-Kilsen, who self-identified as alt-right when questioned by the New Zealand Herald's Kirsty Johnson for her July 2017 investigative report on New Zealand's far right [33] and One Nation NZ, the party founded by former New Zealand First candidate Kym Koloni to contest the Northcote parliamentary by-election in 2018.

In the hours following the shooting in Christchurch, the One Nation NZ Facebook page disappeared. It's

unclear whether it was removed by Facebook or whether it was preemptively taken down by Koloni (or someone else in the organisation). The page frequently shared articles fear mongering about Islam and immigration.

A bigger player in New Zealand's far right social media ecosystem, however, is the larger and -relatively speaking- more moderate New Conservative party. The New Conservatives, who trace their origins to the Conservative Party founded by disgraced millionaire Colin Craig, have rebuilt the party as a less Christianity orientated but more conservative organisation. They are a registered party, meaning they will be on the ballot at the 2020 election, and occasionally show up in polls at around 1% of the vote.

The party has been able punch above its weight, Deputy Leader Elliot Ikilei has been a semi-frequent guest on TVNZ's Breakfast programme as well as the Radio Live and Newstalk ZB talk-radio networks. In a video about the UN Compact on Migration posted to his Facebook page on November 25th 2018 [34] Ikilei tells his audience:

Almost every sentence can be found in almost any or every sci-fi dystopia type thriller type movie type book. Almost every sentence is an incredibly dangerous clause, wish list, desire, and the fact that our leader, Winston Peters, I mean Jacinda Ardern, is all good to sign it, when other countries are aware of the absolute insidiousness of this document is just incredible.

Ikilei doesn't quote a single word from the document, but claims "this doesn't get any worse actually, this document, this is end game type of stuff...if you care about New Zealand, this document cannot be signed. This is the type of thing that we need to unite against, it is vicious"

He then thanks people who have sent him links and reviews, significantly he says "thank you also to the person who sent me Stefan Molyneux's take on it, I haven't watched it yet...I'm looking forward to watching that as well"

A Facebook follower posts a link to Molyneux's video in the comments, Ikilei and a few others like the comment. Molyneux is a Canadian white supremacist [35] who promotes discredited pseudoscience regarding the link between race and intelligence [36]. He came to New Zealand in 2018 as part of a speaking tour with Lauren Southern, another Canadian far-right activist. [37]

When the pair were barred from speaking at Auckland Council owned venues, Ikilei and the New Conservatives became some of their most vocal supporters. A July 7, 2018 press release [38] reads "New Conservative staunchly supports the free speech that has been occurring year after year after year at our Auckland Council venues, and utterly rejects the flawed attempt to label Lauren Southern and Stefan Molyneux as having views that are 'hate speech'."

Southern, it should be noted, has a small part in the story of the Christchurch shooting as well. In the Anglophone world, she has been one of the biggest proponents of the conspiracy theory known as "The Great Replacement" a term coined by French anti-immigration writer Renaud Camus to describe the "replacement" of Europeans by non-white immigrants.

The Great Replacement narrative influenced protesters at the 2017 "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia who chanted "Jews will not replace us!" and it influenced the Christchurch shooter, who titled his rambling manifesto "The Great Replacement" and wrote that "Millions of people [are] pouring across our borders ... [i]nvited by the state and corporate entities to replace the White people who have failed to reproduce" [39]

In the hours following the shooting, Southern's YouTube video "The Great Replacement" appeared to have been removed from the internet [40], though at the time of writing it is online. [41]

A December 5th, 2018 Facebook post on the New Conservative NZ page promoting a rally against the

Migration Compact states:

We were the first political party to publicly stand staunchly opposed to signing the UN migration pact. We were the first political party to publicly stand against the restrictions on free speech earlier this year, and we were on TV, radio, debates with a consistent and clear message about free speech and sovereignty. [42]

It was through that mix of social and traditional media coverage that New Conservative was able to take the narrative on the Migration Compact that originated on the far-right conspiracy theory parts of YouTube, and inject it into mainstream political discourse.

On December 4th the mainstream conservative National Party announced it would oppose voting for the compact and pull New Zealand out of it if elected in 2020:

The Government appears to be relying on the UN to set its migration policy rather than making its own decisions. While a number of countries are pulling out of the agreement as the extent of its potential impact on the decision-making of individual countries is realised, our Government is refusing to outline its own position. For these reasons, National will not be supporting this agreement and we will reverse the decision if this Government signs up to it. [43]

Gerry Brownlee told Newshub that the migration compact would result in "pretty much open borders". [44] Opposition to the UN pact was no longer confined to fringe far right groups but had become the policy of New Zealand's main opposition party.

As he opened his interview with Foreign Minister Winston Peters on December 20, 2018 Newstalk ZB host Mike Yardley stated "the [legal] advice says that it will not compromise sovereignty nor is it legally binding, but there are still a lot of people worried about implications". [45] Peters, a man who it should be said has built much of his political career on anti-immigration populism, noted that the National Party had supported the compact when in government, and that the

debate around it started "all of a sudden because of the alt-right and a few uniformed people...I can't have you on national radio...repeating this uninformed drivell!"

But by then it was too late, the meme had already spread. It didn't matter that it wasn't true, people believed it was true, or felt they could win the votes of people who believed it was true. The National Party even went so far as to create its own petition, encouraging their supporters to "to stand with National and stop this Govt from signing NZ up to this agreement".

While the Migration Compact was signed in December, National had left the petition up on their website. That is, until they took it down- some time on the afternoon of March 15th. A copy of the page from Google's cache is still accessible, the most recently available snapshot is from the 15th, 1:39pm New Zealand time. Archived just around the time New Zealand was starting to come to terms with the fact that we had just experienced our first alt-right terrorist attack. [46]

Islamophobia and the Left

The mainstream Right in New Zealand bears most of the responsibility for refusing to combat the spread of white-supremacist, Islamophobic, and migrant-baiting ideas, or even exploiting them for electoral advantage. We rightly mock conservative politicians and media figures shedding crocodile tears over 51 dead Muslims. But sadly, these ideas have not been absent from the activist and radical Left in this country either.

A diagram on the first page of the Nazi murderer's manifesto (apparently taken from the defunct US fascist group, the Traditionalist Workers Party) lists "anti-imperialism", "environmentalism" and "workers' rights" among his principles, and the murderer later equivocates on whether he would describe himself as a "socialist". This has been enough to allow some of the more extreme Right US websites to try to categorise him

as actually far-left. [47] But it is in fact just the latest example of the phenomenon of **red-brown politics** - fascism adopting left-wing slogans as "camouflage", which sadly intersects with sections of the activist Left passively or actively going along with conservative-populist ideas. Fightback has previously warned of the massive dangers of an unwitting convergence between "Conservative Leftism" and the Red-Brown movement, allowing fascist ideas to circulate within our own movement. [48]

Martyn Bradbury, proprietor of the prominent centre-left Daily Blog, was quick to come out on social media with "FUCK ISLAMOPHOBIA" after the massacre. This is exactly the same Martyn Bradbury who less than two years ago wrote: "The impact of the Asian-NZ population tripling in the space of 20 years and overtaking M?ori has political, economic and cultural ramifications that haven't been discussed yet it's a debate that is already running." [49]

In New Zealand discourse, "Asian" generally refers to East Asian (mainly ethnically Chinese) people, rather than from the Indian Subcontinent or the Middle East. But Bradbury's fretting about "invasion" and "colonisation" by migrants only differs from the paranoid rambling in the Christchurch Nazi murderer's manifesto by which ethnic group of migrants in particular he is disturbed by. If your only difference from Nazis is in which ethnicity you suspect of being a fifth column stealing the country from within, you should be excluded from the Left. The parallel with European colonisation is also dubious, given that Europeans showed up with guns, continue to own most of the property and now presume to regulate new arrivals.

The fact that Syrian refugees were among the dead adds an extra layer of irony to the participation in the outpouring of grief, rage and activism by some activist Leftists who follow a "campist" politics of identifying the USA and its client states as the main source of wickedness in the world, and apologising for or denying the imperialist ventures of Russia, China and their own client states. [50] All people with basic human decency in

Aotearoa would be disgusted at the gabbling of the US conspiracy theorists who claim that the mosque murders were a "false flag" designed to justify some nefarious State plot. And yet, parts of the activist Left here in New Zealand have resorted to similar "false flag" conspiracy theories when confronted with tragedies with politically inconvenient consequences - for example, in reaction to the Assad regime's chemical attacks in Douma, Syria, in April 2018 which killed at least 70 people. [51]- Willingness to adopt conspiratorial explanations for tragedies, if they challenge our political presuppositions, puts us in danger of a slide into reactionary ideologies. It is worrying that few other activists thought that this was at all a shocking or outrageous thing to say regarding the Douma attacks; many supported the statement.

The genius of both the Russian and Chinese state-backed propaganda networks has been to recycle Western "war on terror" propaganda, demonizing Muslims as terrorists and subversives, into an anti-imperialist framework which makes it acceptable to Left-wing opinion in the West. This propaganda narrative combines Western post-9/11 Islamophobia with the older narrative that Islamist resistance to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan was a creation of/funded by the West, rather than an indigenous movement.

Many Western Leftists have been sucked into repeating poisonous Islamophobia by accepting the story that every resistance movement to Russia, China or their client states which resorts to Islamic imagery are CIA funded terrorists. In this way, the whole Syrian resistance, along with Uighurs in China or the Rohingya people in Myanmar/Burma, can be equated with actual terrorist movements such as ISIS/Da'esh and al-Qaeda. [52] Murderous dictators like Bashar al-Assad or Muammar Qadhafi can be upheld as victims of imperialism and as bulwarks of "secularism" against the jihadi menace.

It must be stated plainly - when New Zealand leftists (for example) refuse to condemn China's "re-education" camps for Uighurs, or repeat smears

that 9-year old Syrian refugee Bana al-Abed's father is an ISIS operative, *they are promoting Islamophobia, whether they realise it or not*. In many parts of the world this kind of "ISIS-jacketing" is a death sentence for those smeared - like "snitch-jacketing" or "cop-jacketing" in the USA. Just like the Christchurch Nazi murderer, the Russian and Chinese states characterise Muslims as tools of a Western imperialist (or "globalist") conspiracy. Most of the New Zealand left has simply refused to debate these issues, characterising those who worry about them as sectarian obsessives. But anyone who rightly cries over 51 murdered in Christchurch while dismissing 70 murdered in Douma as a "false flag" is not showing internationalism. Campism is neither internationalism nor anti-imperialism; and supporting current Russian or Chinese foreign policy means aiding and abetting murderous Islamophobia.

The radical left must promote and listen to the voices of Syrians - as well as Arabs and Muslims generally, facing an international backlash that crosses the lines between geopolitical "camps." Resettled Syrians live in Aotearoa: this is not simply a distant geopolitical issue.

Ruling parties' complicity

To start on a positive note, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern correctly and surprisingly identified the Christchurch attack as 'terrorism.' This is unusual in an international context where white male terrorists are generally depicted as unhinged lone wolves, while Muslims and Arabs are 'terrorists' even before perpetrating any crime. It may be that the coordinated nature of this action made it harder for authorities to pretend it was an act of a lone wolf, but it's a refreshing acknowledgement all the same.

However, the Government and pro-Government parties - Labour, New Zealand First, and the Greens - share varying degrees of complicity with processes that led to this tragedy.

So-called 'anti-terrorism' efforts, under successive Labour-led and National-led governments, focused on seemingly everyone *but* the far right. It's no surprise that the Christchurch terrorists were on "nobody's radar" in Australia or New Zealand, [53] despite the rapid expansion of the surveillance state in the 21st century. In 10 years of Security Intelligence Service (SIS) and Government Communications Security Bureau (GCSB) public documents there was no mention of far-right groups. [54] The list of NZ-designated 'terror' groups includes no far-right groups, and a number of legitimate resistance groups such as the Kurdish PKK. [55]

In 2002, the Labour government passed the 'Terrorism Suppression Act', comparable with the US Patriot Act, which saw state overreach in the wake of 9/11. [56] It's worth noting here that white men are the most common perpetrators of terrorism in the USA despite the outsize focus on Muslims, and there have been no Islamist attacks in Aotearoa at all. [57]

As in so many countries, Muslim and Arab communities experienced profiling. As highlighted by Faisal al-Asaad in a piece for *Overland* entitled "Today we mourn, tomorrow we organise":

I'll never forget the many meetings and roundtables I attended, alongside other Muslim advocates and leaders, where we argued and pleaded, pointlessly it seems, with different government agencies to turn their attention from our communities and mosques to the real threats in this country. I'll never forget the empty reassurances, let alone the smirking faces as someone dismissively joked, in reference to the far right and white supremacists in New Zealand: "It's hard to take these guys seriously..."

Today we need to grieve and mourn, so let's do whatever we can to support each other and, most importantly, the immediate victims of yesterday's atrocity. But tomorrow, we need to ask some hard questions and hold people to account for the sheer horror they enabled. [58]

The state also harassed Māori and left-wing activists. The most well-known

application of the New Zealand state's post-9/11 powers were the 2007 'terror raids', in which anarchist and Māori activists were rounded up across the country. [59] Police shut down the rural, predominantly Māori town of Ruatoki, with armed officers reportedly boarding school buses full of children. [60]

Just this year, a Department of Corrections plan to fight terrorism identified "Māori nationalist groups" as a special threat, earning a rebuke from Māori Labour Party MP Kelvin Davis [61]

In 2004, sources revealed that the SIS were investigating the newly formed Māori Party, a parliamentary party unlikely to be planting any bombs. [62] Meanwhile, the same year saw National Front members knock down Jewish gravestones, [63] and thousands of ordinary people protest against a combined march of the National Front and Destiny Church, including a student strike. [64]

It's been left to small anti-fascist groups, lacking the resources of the surveillance state, to monitor the activities of fascists on a voluntary basis, with occasional outbursts of popular counter-protest against fascist mobilisations.

Ultimately, the complacency of the political class has allowed fascism to fester and turn septic. In the unlikely event they changed course and cracked down on far-right groups, we may not trust the surveillance state, but we certainly would not cry for the fascists.

In addition to their lopsided 'anti-terrorism' letting the far right off the hook, the ruling parties have also engaged in populist migrant-bashing.

New Zealand First, Labour's coalition partner, is particularly infamous for migrant-bashing. We should be wary of simplistically labelling NZF leader Winston Peters 'New Zealand's Trump', as some international commentators have. [65] Rather than a billionaire populist entering politics in a time of crisis, he is a long-term member of the political class who plays to an older conservative audience. Peters is also Māori, and has

a significant rural Māori base, making it difficult to directly map the US situation onto NZ. We have pointed out in the past that Peters emerged from the "Muldoonist" faction of the National Party - anti-neoliberal and socially conservative, in the tradition of 1970s Prime Minister Robert Muldoon - and that a lowest common denominator anti-neoliberalism has led some on the broad left to work with Peters. [66]

However, none of that stops Peters pandering to fascists, or creating an atmosphere conducive to fascism. In 2005, the neo-Nazi National Front endorsed New Zealand First. [67] During the 2017 election, Peters posed with a picture of Pepe (a cartoon frog adopted as an alt-right mascot) at a student event, and defended the "European Students' Association", a front for white nationalists. [68]

Since the formation of NZF in 1993, Peters has pressed anti-migrant buttons too many times to count. In a grimly relevant example, Peters called for New Zealand Muslims to "clean house" and turn in any extremists after the 2007 London terror attacks. [69] We await calls from the ruling coalition for white or Christian communities to "clean house" in response to the events of March 15th.

Labour has also engaged in its own migrant-bashing. In the 2017 election, party leader Andrew Little called for cutting "tens of thousands" of migrants, a position Ardern did not reverse. [70] Infamously in 2015, Labour MP Phil Twyford highlighted the "Chinese surnames" of Auckland home buyers, not distinguishing between international buyers and citizens. [71]

Of all the parties in the ruling coalition, the Greens have by far the best record, for example opposing the abuse of surveillance powers, and introducing New Zealand's first refugee-background MP to parliament. [72] However, even the Greens have engaged in their own migrant-bashing at times: current co-leader James Shaw controversially advocated capping migration at 1% of the population [73], a policy that was based on "statistical nonsense." [74]

Fortunately, James Shaw later retracted this statement and apologised to the Federation of Multicultural Councils, after criticism both inside and outside the party. [75]

We support attempts by Labour and Green members to challenge anti-migrant politics in their parties (although Winston Peters seems singularly unlikely to recant). Unfortunately, many on the broad left look the other way when these parties engage in migrant-bashing, or actively defend them against criticism. In the 2017 General Election, Fightback did not endorse any party, instead helping launch the Migrant and Refugee Rights Campaign (MARRC) to challenge populist migrant-bashing across the political spectrum. [76] MARRC spokesperson Gayaal Iddamalgoda had this to say at the Wellington vigil on March 17th this year, honouring the dead of Christchurch:

I have so many questions, hard questions that I think need to be answered by all of us..

Why was our Secret Service busy

surveilling our innocent Muslim neighbours and not the extremists who sought to victimise them?

Why have the Police in this city spent more than a \$100,000 of taxpayers' money to attack peace activists protesting weapons conferences and arms dealers, while letting racist terrorists acquire semi-automatic weapons?

When will Politicians left and right own up to the fact that they have for years scapegoated and blamed migrants and refugees for social and economic problems that they are not responsible for?

And when will they admit while they have been doing this they have allowed unspeakable hatred to brew under their noses?

I want answers, I want accountability and I want something to change, but right now while I wait for these answers I want to do something to cancel out the hateful paranoid vision of these extremists and offer instead a vision of hope. [77]

Fortunately, hundreds have attended

anti-fascist demonstrations in recent years (since the peak of 2004), and thousands have attended solidarity demonstrations with Christchurch. While we can and should press the ruling parties to do better, we ultimately cannot rely on them, and must mobilise ourselves to stop creeping fascism directly.

In the days following the attack, Milo Yiannopolous was banned from Australia, venues reversed course on hosting a musician with a Nazi past, and Newshub announced they would not tolerate hate speech on their Facebook page. Let's do everything in our power to ensure this state of affairs is permanent, rather than being a passing stage of grief.

Thanks to Cam Walker for help with research on 'anti-terror' policy.

Recommended:

? [Hear their words: Muslim voices on the Christchurch attacks, The Spinoff](#)

? [Victim support official page, givealittle](#)

[Fightback](#)

Christchurch: Mourn for the dead and fight like hell for the living

21 March 2019, by Oula Shihan

As a Muslim woman living in Australia I can tell you that I and any other Muslim could have predicted this. It wasn't a question of whether such an atrocity could occur. It was a question of when.

As politicians denounce this as a freak event or the act of a stupid and deranged individual who just lost his way, it is important to say that it was not.

The attacker is a racist, fascist, white supremacist and deranged individual. But what led to such a massacre was years in the making.

World leaders have lined up to express their "sadness" and - laughably - their "solidarity" with the Muslim community, the same group they have spent years attacking and demonising.

Decades of anti-Muslim racism and the war on terror have led to this. Mainstream political parties repeatedly have made Muslim-bashing a policy platform. Governments have cracked down on civil liberties, some banning Muslim prayer and the burqa. They have spent decades treating Muslims as an enemy and a threat to the "enlightened" West.

So yes, this attack did not come out of nowhere. I lay the blame for it on these politicians.

As Scott Morrison sheds crocodile tears, let's not forget his history of Islamophobia and racism. [78] He was the architect of the "stop the boats" policy. He supported US president Donald Trump's Muslim ban and said in response to it that the world was finally catching up to Australia. His predecessor, Malcolm Turnbull, was one of the first to congratulate Trump on his election victory.

Trump was commended in the killer's

manifesto. The language used in the manifesto – such as “the West is under attack” and “Muslims can’t assimilate” – has been used by mainstream Australian politicians.

We need to remember this as these hypocrites try to remove the blame from themselves. We also should remember this hypocrisy as the Coalition and Labor move to censure senator Fraser Anning for his comments. They paved the way for people such as Anning and brought him into the mainstream.

To those who say this attack is “unAustralian”, I strongly disagree. Racism is woven into the fabric of this country and is supported by both of the major parties.

Our society has become so racist that fascists feel confident to kill Muslims. This is not a question of gun control. Banning assault rifles will not end racism. Neither is looking to

politicians for solutions when they are the ones who laid the foundations for such an attack.

This is also not a question of national security. This terrorist attack is the argument of Fraser Anning put into practice. National security has long been the justification used by governments to demonise Muslims, to crack down on dissent and to blame refugees for the problems in society. It is the argument of governments when they want to win elections.

The way to deal with fascists is not to debate them, meet in them in the middle or try to see the world from their perspective. We know what they stand for. They are fascists, white supremacists and Nazis ready to kill. We need to smash fascism and push these people back into the sewers from which they crawled. We should protest them wherever they rear their heads.

But we also need to challenge those softer racists, the ones that say “maybe immigration is too high” or “Muslims are different”.

We need to fight for a world where our governments cannot use Muslims and migrants for political point scoring.

We need to win a world free from racism.

The only way to do that is to get rid of the capitalist system that uses racism to divide us and distract us from who is really to blame for all of society’s problems. The ruling class and politicians like Scott Morrison are the ones to blame, not refugees fleeing Western bombs.

We should mourn the dead and fight like hell for the living.

18 March 2019

[Red Flag](#)

Stand with Muslims - No to Islamophobia! Down with White Supremacy!

**20 March 2019, by International Socialist
Organisation National Committee in Aotearoa/New
Zealand**

It is almost beyond comprehension. Fifty people are dead. Another 50 are injured. Hundreds, probably thousands, of people face grief, unimaginable loss. This was an attack on Muslims as Muslims, targeted at their holy places, carried out on their holy day. It was an act of terror. Our starting point is solidarity: with those hurt and killed, with their families and loved ones, and with all Muslims and migrants in these islands. This terrorist violence – a race massacre – aimed to divide us. We unite with those hurting.

The barbarity of this act defies belief, but it has a political logic. This was an

act of calculated terrorism, drawing on fascism and Islamophobia. There is no great mystery here, and Muslims leaders have been speaking out for years about the normalisation and mainstreaming of Islamophobic hate. Every politician, every columnist and talkshow host, every intellectual and media celebrity who has played a role in normalising anti-Muslim bigotry bears some responsibility for this tragedy.

Trump’s “Muslim ban” and the War on Terror globally have set the scene, but local figures have contributed their part. Stuff and New Zealand Herald columnists lined up last year to defend

the “rights” of fascists Stefan Molyneux and Lauren Southern. [79] Jordan Peterson, who has called Islamophobia a “propagandistic” word, received widespread coverage earlier this year. [80] At one event, Peterson was seen smiling alongside a fan wearing a “Proud Islamophobe” t-shirt. Simon Bridges, Judith Collins and the National Party have flirted with alt-right and far right rhetoric around the UN. It is socially and politically acceptable in mainstream circles to talk about Islam and Muslims as a problem or an issue to be dealt with.

Hundreds rallied in Auckland last year

against “Sharia law”, and ACT’s Stephen Berry was there to support them. Fascist groups in Christchurch disrupted election meetings in 2011, and Muslims, Jews and other visible minorities have reported graffiti, harassment and abuse at their gathering places across the country for years. All this while most commentators would have us believe that “identity politics” and the decline of free speech are the issues of the day. This is the context that grew fascist violence.

Many of those murdered were refugees and migrants. There is an added cruelty that those who came here fleeing persecution in their old homes should face it in their new, and that too has a political logic. The truth is that every political party in the current parliament has, in some form over the last decade, toyed with and promoted anti-immigrant rhetoric. Winston Peters talked about the “real impact immigration is having on the Kiwi way of life” in 2017. [81] National opposed doubling the refugee quota. Murderous fascism may be extreme, but it cannot exist without the wider anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant political culture promoted by the mainstream.

This is not a mysterious event. It must be understood as an expression of Islamophobia and white supremacist ideology, and countered accordingly.

Racism permeates New Zealand society, nowhere more so than in policing. The Muslim community have known the threats they face for years, and yet nothing was done. Anjum Rahman of the Islamic Women’s Council of New Zealand has written

about how her organisation pleaded and begged with authorities for anti-Muslim threats to be taken seriously. [82]

Millions of dollars have been wasted on persecuting Māori activists on trumped-up “terror” charges, and on surveilling mosques such as Linwood’s. Peace activists were prosecuted and harassed for protesting weapons conferences in Wellington, with more money still wasted on bogus prosecutions. And yet killers were able to organise undetected. Serious questions need to be asked about the priorities, politics and prejudice of the police.

And what has the response of the police been since the tragedy? To discourage Muslims and visible minorities from gathering in public and to try and keep people away from vigils and protests. They are utterly without moral authority.

There is a different path. That is the path of solidarity. Every gathering, every vigil, every protest that stands with Muslims shows the power we can have as a collective. Terrorism tries to isolate and divide us. Mass mobilisations, trusting ourselves as workers, show that we will not let Muslims be isolated and we will not be divided. That can give comfort, and courage, to the oppressed, and it can challenge other workers to show further solidarity.

We need to build solidarity rallies in the coming weeks to hammer this message home: Muslims are welcome, racism is not; down with Islamophobia and white supremacist hatred!

We are united in grief, but this is a political grief. It responds to a fascist hatred. Fascism loathes our freedoms – the religious and civil freedoms of Muslims, the rights of our diversity, workers’ power as collectives – and we must show our rejection of the hatred motivating this race massacre by exercising those freedoms collectively.

Mourning and respect, in this context, mean staying on the streets. Union events must go ahead. Rallies, strikes and stop-work meetings are the engines of class unity and power, the very things the far right hate. They give us a chance to be together in working-class unity, Muslim and non-Muslim, visibly united and fighting. We argue against any calls to postpone or cancel trade union activity.

Fascism is the politics of despair. It hopes to bring despair in others, through bestial acts of cruelty like those in Christchurch. It feeds racism, bigotry, fear and loathing of the other. It grows in hopelessness. Socialism is the politics of hope, of working-class unity, of cooperation from below against white supremacy and the divisions promoted from above. The mass rallies across the country since this atrocity show a way forward: solidarity, hope, defiance. Confronting fascism, and driving anti-Muslim and anti-migrant bigotry out of society, is an urgent task for us all today.

First we mourn, now we organise.

17 March 2019

[International Socialist Organisation](#)
[National Committee in Aotearoa/New Zealand](#)

A radical left in Parliament, a contradiction or a perspective?

19 March 2019, by **Marko KrÅ³an**

However, in some southern European countries they have become an

important factor, without which governments of the liberal left could

not have existed. This is true at least in Portugal [87], the Soviet

nomenklatura was actually the ruling social group, but it was not a new (ruling) class. Unlike the capitalist class, whose vital interests coincide with the reproductive needs of capitalist society (the tendency to increase individual profit is indispensable for the accumulation of capital in general), the intrigue and corruption of the nomenklatura reduce the efficiency of the state-run economy and impede control by workers. This may also be the case for a ruling group of an anti-capitalist party: intrigues for "posts" in the party reduce the number of activists, while the adoption of media jargon and a "realistic" practice lead to the abandonment of its objectives, or even of its programme.

For parties such as Ljevica in Slovenia or the Portuguese anticapitalists, which have a real influence on liberal left-wing governments, this situation can lead to paralysis or even capitulation. The parliamentary support they give to the government (in order to exert influence on it) with the aim of strengthening the anti-capitalist movement, risks becoming the backbone of "political stability", that is, ultimately preserving the power of the bourgeoisie. At least, if their decisions begin to be determined objectively by "governance" ("and if after the fall of the left liberal government, populists came to power?") And by the subjective and personal interests of their nascent bureaucracy ("what will we do if we are outside Parliament?"). If countermeasures are not taken, it is only a matter of time for the party to become part of the political class [88] - or lose its place in Parliament (why would people vote for a left copy rather than for the original?).

What can these countermeasures be? An anti-capitalist movement can only develop by creating autonomy in relation to the system. It must therefore guarantee its autonomy on the ideological-political and material-financial levels as well as its autonomy in action.

Ideological and political autonomy is necessary because the anti-capitalist movement must develop its own analysis of reality. For this it can rely on help from academics and it can

work with NGOs. But such a consciousness cannot be produced in the ideological apparatus of the state, because it produces analyses from the perspective of the dominant ideology and the interests of the ruling class. Without a valid analysis of the situation, political decisions are at best the product of intuition, and their accuracy is the result of coincidences.

Autonomy of action means the ability to work politically, independently of parliament and bourgeois civil society - including the trade unions, because even trade-unionism is embedded in the ideological apparatus of the state.

Material and financial autonomy means the independence of the party from all sources of funding that subordinate the party to the logic of the system, which is often the case for NGOs.

Of course, nobody is saying that this autonomy should be absolute and be built immediately in all three areas. In reality, for example, ideological and political autonomy can compensate for the lack of autonomy of action or material and financial autonomy, because the cadres of the party who are best trained in this sense will be more able to fight against opportunism and will be more inclined to solidarity than to rivalry for obtaining privileges.

From the abstract to the concrete: a transitional programme

I will therefore examine in a little more detail ideological and political autonomy. To begin with, it should be noted that the programmes of today's anti-capitalist parties are less radical than those of the anti-capitalist parties of the past, and even those of the social-democratic parties of the post-war period [89]. This stems in part from the old Marxist principle of how consciousness is determined: since world capitalism and its ideology are stronger today, a less advanced ideological-political platform can nevertheless be described as radical.

The result is another characteristic of these programmes: their contradictions, at least apparent. Certain tax and social policy measures, as well as any more ambitious attempt to transform the economy in the direction of workers' control and planning, are unthinkable in the legal framework of the European Union. However, these parties rarely consider abandoning the European single market or at least the common currency. And even if this reformist position vis-à-vis the European Union is partly a consequence of the effort not to be cut off from the broad masses, these contradictions are also a consequence of the ever-greater integration of society into the world capitalist market. This now affects social life in areas that, in the golden age of European capitalism, did not depend on it. The strengthening of capitalism is of course the product of integration into the global market of all countries and its penetration into all areas of a country's social life. Because of this the paradox is intensifying, which determines the political activity of those who are fighting for socialism: on the one hand, the circumstances require more radical measures for any real change, on the other hand, and for the same reason, it is more difficult to make the broad masses aware of that, not to mention their practice.

How to overcome this paradox? At the conceptual and political level, the main task is to formulate a transitional programme [90]. The transitional programme bridges the gap between the minimum programme, that is, the parliamentary-reformist programme, and the maximum programme, that is to say, socialist-revolutionary. The transitional programme is the means to begin the implementation of the maximum programme, which is in turn a precondition for the development of the anti-capitalist movement itself.

At the moment when the Trotskyists were elaborating the transitional programme, world capitalism was in a serious crisis and the bourgeoisie of the capitalist countries, like France, was powerless to overcome it without falling into fascism.

Nowadays, the starting point of the transitional programme is a crisis of

the forms of integration of the various countries into the world capitalist system, whereas, as I said, anti-capitalist solutions to practical problems seem utopian and anti-capitalist ideas cannot overcome the blockages of the spontaneous ideology of the masses.

However, even though the crisis in the European Union is producing an often racist reaction today, because of this crisis there is also a potential to break the political blockage of the working class. We must not be naive: in this area anti-capitalists will not easily overtake the nationalists, as was shown by the break-up of Yugoslavia. However, unlike the time of the disintegration of Yugoslavia, today the crisis is not one of a social order that is subordinate and, at least in principle, anti-systemic (the "second world" of "real socialism") but that of the dominant capitalist order. In other words, as Althusser would say, the situation is not overdetermined by the crisis of the global anti-systemic movement, but by the crisis of the system itself. Thus, the situation as a whole, and with it the working class, advances a few steps, and the party that fights for socialism can and must become radicalized [91].

I cannot develop here the elements of such a transitional programme, in particular because they depend to a large extent on the concrete situation in each country. However, we must look for them where the policies of the big imperialist structures, such as NATO and the EU, directly affect the social position of the broadest layers of society. One of these issues is the demands of NATO (and also the EU with its military cooperation, so-called permanent structured cooperation or PESCO) for a drastic increase in military spending, particularly for the purchase of weapons, which will further reduce the already very limited capacity for investment in the health and well-being of the

population. These interests of capital (of the military-industrial complex) are directly contradictory to the interests of the working class (peace and well-being). Thus, an abstract objective (anti-imperialism) encounters concrete struggles here (even parliamentary ones) and tangible benefits (the protection of common property and acquired rights), thus enabling the anti-capitalist movement to win a victory [92].

It is precisely through such struggles that the opportunist pressure of parliamentarism can be neutralized. Without this, opportunism blurs the distinction between anti-capitalist, that is to say anti-systemic, parties, and bourgeois parties. The main conflict appears first to be between the left (liberal) and the right (conservative), even though in reality it is a struggle between the working class and capital, along with its representatives in politics.

It is no coincidence that neither Ljevicica nor the Portuguese anticapitalist parties have practically failed to obtain "concessions" in this domain, since the local political classes are subject to other centres of power and their opposition to the interests of their own "people" is stronger in this area. But if it is so strong, then it may be easier to explain it and therefore to mobilize against it.

Of course, such neuralgic points must be found in all areas, for example in tax policy. It is unfortunate that left-wing parties and European trade unions have not been able to mobilize the working class against tax policy, which reduces taxes on capital and high incomes, thereby creating a fiscal deficit making it possible then to "justify" antisocial policies, such as VAT increases and the reduction of social rights. Recent mobilisations in France (11) show that such attacks

against the working class, even under the mask of "ecologism", can be used to radicalize the movement and mobilize huge masses under the slogan: "We will not pay for your crises (ecological, budget, security ...)!"

The transitional programme is obviously not just a piece of paper, it is first and foremost a practice, which is only possible on the condition that the anti-capitalist movement has a certain ideological-political autonomy, an autonomy of action and on the physical and financial level. The development of a transitional programme is therefore not simply an "intellectual act" but an organizational question. According to Lenin [93], the task of socialists is to make agitation and propaganda. Propaganda is an activity in which many ideas are transmitted to a small number of people and agitation is an activity in which a few ideas are addressed to many people. Propaganda is the teaching of the structure of classes and their struggle to members and activists, while agitation is the commitment to "spontaneous" forms of this struggle for better working conditions, for higher wages ... including parliamentary work. The more the understanding of what another world can be like and why the old one is in crisis is developed, the more it can replace the "spontaneous ideologies" that dominate the working class.

For this reason, at least in the ideological and political sense, the quality of parliamentary work depends on the quality of propaganda work. Therefore, the establishment of conditions conducive to propaganda work and the development of all kinds of agitation on this basis, including in parliament, are the indispensable conditions for building the anti-capitalist party and movement.

Ljubljana, December 18, 2018

The Trajectory of India Under Modi

19 March 2019, by Safed Gulab

This has involved assimilating other religions originating in India, like Buddhism and Sikhism, under the umbrella of Hinduism, while excluding Muslims, Christians, and others adhering to what are categorised as foreign ideologies, such as feminism, Marxism and rationalism, who are at best to be tolerated as second-class citizens, at worst exterminated. This political ideology, which they call Hindutva, is distinct from the religion, Hinduism. Followers of this ideology plotted and killed Mahatma Gandhi, a devout Hindu, because he did not want a fascist Hindu state.

The RSS has been an abiding influence on Modi's politics, but it is not the only one. An equally strong influence is his ruthless pursuit of personal power and his irresistible attraction towards the wealthy and powerful (the only time Modi shows any warmth is when he embraces foreign dignitaries, the most recent recipient of his warm embrace being Mohammed bin Salman during his February 2019 visit to India). Most of the time these two influences fit comfortably together, but there are also times when there is tension between them.

Chief Minister of Gujarat

Modi's early period in power illustrates the coincidence of his Hindutva roots and his own ambitions. Faced with likely defeat in Gujarat state assembly elections in 2002, he turned the burning of a coach of the Sabarmati Express filled with Hindutva activists just outside Godhra station into pogroms in which thousands of Muslims were mutilated, raped and killed with unimaginable cruelty. The only forensic investigation done into the burning concludes that the fire started inside the coach, whose doors and windows were tightly shut, and not from outside, where a crowd of local Muslims had gathered, making it extremely unlikely that

Muslims were involved in it. Even if the fire was set by Muslims, there was of course no reason to gang-rape and mutilate hundreds of women and massacre innocents - including infants - who had nothing to do with it. But the Sangh Parivar - the vast family of organisations linked to the RSS - operates on the barbaric principle of collective guilt and collective punishment, whereby an entire community is held responsible for a real or imaginary crime committed by any member of it, and can justifiably be 'punished' for it.

These mass killings and subsequent ones could safely be left to the Sangh Parivar to carry out. But targeted killings designed to help Modi remain in power were organised by his right-hand man Amit Shah, who was appointed BJP president in 2014 and has remained in this office since. One of these killings was of BJP leader Haren Pandya, who was doubly troublesome as a popular figure who might displace Modi and as someone who had given evidence of Modi's role in the 2002 pogroms to a Concerned Citizens Tribunal.

When Pandya was found dead in his car, several Muslims were accused of killing him, but when the case was taken up in the High Court, the court found that the accusations were absurd. Subsequently, a petty criminal Sohrabuddin Sheikh revealed confidentially that Shah had approached him to do the job, and in 2005 he and his wife Kauser Bi were killed by the police claiming he was involved in a plot to assassinate Modi. In 2006 his associate Tulsi Prajapati, who had probably murdered Pandya, was also killed.

Sohrabuddin's brother Rubabuddin took the case to court despite threats to him, which is why some of this evidence came out, and Shah was named prime accused in the killing of Sohrabuddin. However, in December 2014 Brijgopal Harkishen Loya, the judge presiding over the case in a special Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) court in Mumbai,

died under mysterious circumstances in Nagpur after he had reportedly refused various inducements to give a judgement favourable to Shah. After that, perhaps unsurprisingly, Shah was acquitted. But he was also involved in various other 'fake encounter' killings, including the murder of young student Ishrat Jahan, who was also accused of plotting to kill Modi. Her mother too went to court, as a consequence of which a great deal of damning evidence came to light, but Shah was able to manipulate the courts to get away with everything. Modi too was able to cover up his role in the 2002 pogroms, but the case against him by Zakia Jafri, whose husband was mutilated and killed in one of the biggest massacres, is still awaiting a final verdict.

It was during his period as chief minister of Gujarat that Modi began to woo big business assiduously, providing industrialists with land, electricity and credit at throwaway rates, and dispensing with workers' rights and even minimal environmental protection. The wealth of his friend Gautam Adani skyrocketed during this period, while his links to India's wealthiest industrialists Mukesh and Anil Ambani were consolidated. This was a departure from the playbook of the RSS, whose base was more among small traders and the Hindu middle class. But it allowed Modi to pose not only as the preeminent defender of Hindu interests, but also as the sponsor of the 'Gujarat model of development'.

Able promoted by PR company APCO and his own massive publicity machine, he was able to launch a blitzkrieg campaign to become prime minister in 2014, taking advantage of anti-incumbency against the ruling Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) as well as a concerted denigration of the party as irretrievably corrupt. While Hindutva was very much part of his campaign, it played second fiddle to the promise of

development, jobs, and the elimination of corruption.

The war on democracy

Since Modi became prime minister in May 2014, two parallel processes have taken place. One is the massive proliferation of the RSS, whose branches have multiplied many times over, and its infiltration into every nook and cranny of society as well as the state. It had already set up numerous schools, but these increased exponentially. There was a concerted drive to install their ideologues as vice-chancellors in universities and at the head of all academic and research institutions, and pressure from the BJP's student storm-troopers to evict progressive teachers and students and alter the curriculum to include Hindutva myths being taught as history and science.

Perhaps learning from the revulsion that had resulted from the Gujarat carnage, the use of pogroms was dialled down, but in its place came a strategy that was in some ways even more chilling: the targeted arrest and killing of Muslims, especially educated ones, either by calling them terrorists and gunning them down in fake encounters, or by lynch-mobs accusing them of cow slaughter or so-called 'love jihad', an epithet used to characterise any romantic relationship or indeed friendship between a Muslim man and Hindu woman.

Traders transporting cattle could be stopped and lynched, or a mob could invade a family's home and beat its inhabitants to death on the accusation that they had eaten beef. Dalits, as the community charged with clearing away carcasses of cattle and removing their hide for leather products, were also assaulted, and adversely affected by the ban on eating beef. Occasionally Hindus were killed, either mistakenly or because, like police officer Subodh Kumar Singh, they tried to do their job and control the mobs. The majority of police personnel, however, went along with the killers, often arresting and charging survivors of the violence. Even if the killers were arrested, they

were soon released, and in many cases felicitated by BJP MPs and MLAs (Members of state Legislative Assemblies). Muslims in particular have become second-class citizens who can be killed with impunity.

In such cases, Modi simply kept silent and allowed the rampages to continue; if, spurred by public and especially international outrage, he was compelled to speak out, he said something anodyne which had no effect on the violence. He reacted in the same way to shamefully sexist statements by his followers, including MPs. Indeed, how could he condemn others for doing what he had done in Gujarat, especially when he still needed their support? These storm-troopers attempting to realise a Hindu Rashtra and their many overtly respectable middle- and upper-class supporters formed part of his core support base, and he couldn't afford to alienate them. Even when he condemned such acts from platforms, he followed trolls engaged in hate speech and incitement to violence on social media, thus encouraging them; indeed, as former troll Sadhavi Khosla revealed, he actually employs an army of trolls to carry out this work.

The rule of law has been further undermined by the release of criminals who directed or participated in the Gujarat carnage as well as members of Sangh Parivar outfits who carried out a series of gruesome terrorist attacks in locations inhabited mainly by Muslims, like Malegaon in Maharashtra (two blasts), the Mecca Masjid in Hyderabad, the Ajmer dargah, and the Samjhauta Express. The constitutional promise of equality before the law and equal protection of the law has de facto been nullified, and many people apprehend that if Modi comes back to power it will be nullified de jure as well.

In parallel with the Hinduisation of Indian society, Modi moved systematically to centralise power in his own hands. His supporters were installed as governors in every state, with the power to manipulate election results when no party had an absolute majority. For example, when Congress emerged as the largest party in the Goa and Manipur state assembly elections of 2017, contrary to

established procedure, the governors of these two states allowed the BJP to stake its claim first, buying up MLAs of other parties (in one case a party which had campaigned on an anti-BJP platform) to form a post-poll alliance. While the BJP had an absolute majority in the Lok Sabha (lower house) it did not have a majority in the Rajya Sabha (upper house), consisting of representatives of the state assemblies, and it was therefore important for the BJP to get a majority in the Rajya Sabha in order to get its legislation passed.

Early on, Modi declared his intention of creating a 'Congress mukt Bharat' - an India devoid of any opposition to the BJP - and when Congress stubbornly refused to die despite its drubbing in the 2014 elections, he constantly attacked it, as if permanently in election campaign mode. At the same time, dissidence and criticism by journalists, human rights defenders, NGOs, and ordinary citizens was crushed, often by the use of the anti-sedition law and Official Secrets Act - colonial-era laws used against the freedom struggle - which were now interpreted to criminalise any criticism of Modi or his government. A critical tweet or Facebook post could land a person in jail, as surveillance was stepped up. The extraordinary lengths to which the government went to take down Punya Prasun Bajpai's popular Hindi news programme on ABP TV, which did not shy away from criticising the government, sound almost surreal. But Bajpai is still alive. Many other journalists including Gauri Lankesh, posthumous winner of the Anna Politkovskaya award, have not been so lucky.

A veritable round-up of human rights defenders was launched after the Elgaar Parishad on 31 December 2017, in which participants took a solemn vow that they would vote against the BJP, and the Bhima Koregaon commemoration of a battle fought by Dalits on 1 January 2018, at which violence was instigated by the Hindutva right, both in BJP-ruled Maharashtra. The raids and arrests targeted prominent lawyers and activists who had fought for the rights of workers, minorities, Adivasis and Dalits. The prosecution accused them

of forming an anti-fascist front to bring down the government, but perhaps realising that voting against fascism was not a criminal offence in India, then proceeded to accuse them of being ‘urban Naxals’ plotting to assassinate Modi, submitting evidence which every security expert familiar with the Maoists identified as patently fabricated.

What made this crushing of dissent all the more devastating was the parallel process by which Modi installed – or tried to install – people personally loyal to him at the head of every supposedly independent institution. These included the Enforcement Directorate (ED), tasked with eliminating income tax evasion, the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC, looking after economic offences), the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG), the CBI (the federal criminal investigation body), the National Investigation Agency (NIA, dealing with terrorism), the Election Commission (EC), and even the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). An unprecedented press conference by four senior judges of the Supreme Court (SC) in January 2018 protested against executive interference, warning that democracy would be destroyed unless the institution’s integrity was preserved.

Thus the ED goes after Greenpeace and Amnesty India, raiding their offices and freezing their bank accounts, and also, along with the CBI, harasses opposition leaders, whereas economic offenders close to Modi and the BJP who have robbed Indian public sector banks of billions of rupees (Vijay Mallya, Nirav Modi, Mehul Choksi, to name a few) are allowed to flee the country with their ill-gotten gains even after whistle-blowers have warned the government to stop them. Indeed, Former RBI governor Raghuram Rajan had given the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) and Finance Ministry a comprehensive list of these fraudsters, which to this day has been kept under wraps, with attempts even by a parliamentary committee led by a BJP MP to gain access to it failing to do so. The NIA was used to investigate the husband of a 23-year-old Hindu woman who had converted to Islam, changed her name to Hadiya, and married a Muslim man,

despite the fact that she testified in court that both her conversion and her marriage were voluntary, as though this conversion and marriage were somehow evidence of her husband’s involvement in terrorist activities.

Modi’s attempt to put his man at the head of the CBI came to light in 2018 when the existing head, Alok Verma, launched an investigation into allegations of corruption against Rakesh Asthana, who was being positioned to take his place. Asthana lodged counter-allegations based on fabricated evidence against Verma; the CVC, K.V. Chowdhary (also Modi’s man), after asking Verma to withdraw adverse comments against Asthana that would prevent him from being appointed CBI director and failing to get his way, locked Verma out of his office in a midnight raid and appointed Nageshwar Rao – another Modi loyalist – as interim head of the CBI. Rao transferred all the officers working with Verma to the furthest corners of India so that their investigations, including one into corruption allegations against a close colleague of Modi in the PMO, came to an abrupt halt. Retired justice A.K. Patnaik, appointed by the SC to oversee an investigation into the charges against Verma, said there was no evidence that he had engaged in corruption, yet Modi saw to it that he was dismissed.

Removal of millions of voters from the voting lists and the appearance of millions of bogus voters, along with evidence of tampering with Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) in assembly elections, suggest that the BJP is willing to go to any lengths to win the 2019 parliamentary elections: an impression confirmed by Amit Shah’s statement that losing the elections is not an option. Many Indians fear that if the BJP wins the elections, they will be the last for the foreseeable future, again an apprehension confirmed by Shah’s statement that the BJP will be in power for 50 years. Ridiculing a fragmented opposition, Modi promised voters a ‘majboot sarkar’ (strong government). All the indications are that what he means by this is a totalitarian fascist dictatorship.

Economic mismanagement and corruption

How has the economy fared under Modi? The subordination of economics to politics typical of fascism can be illustrated by the campaign against cow slaughter and consequent lynching of Muslims accused of it. Hundreds of thousands of Hindu farmers who formerly bought cows for milk, sold them for slaughter when they stopped producing milk and bought another cow were now unable to sell their animals. Unable to feed them either – as one of them said, ‘How can I feed an unproductive cow when I can’t even feed my children?’ – they simply set them free, turning these cows into predators eating crops and further destroying the livelihoods of farmers already committing suicide in record numbers due to poverty and indebtedness.

Modi’s Finance Minister Arun Jaitley’s economic policies of robbing the poor through increases in indirect taxes and enriching the wealthy by cutting direct taxes on them and writing off billions lent to them led to a huge increase in inequality. The Rafale deal illustrates Modi’s deep commitment to his small family of oligarchs. The previous UPA government had almost finalised a deal with French company Dassault for 126 Rafale fighter jets, 18 to be delivered ready-made and 108 to be manufactured in the public sector company Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) in Bangalore, with full transfer of technology, when Modi came to power.

In a move that took everyone, including his own cabinet, by surprise, Modi unilaterally cancelled the deal, and along with National Security Advisor Ajit Doval negotiated a new deal to buy 36 jets ready-made from Dassault. Modi’s deal was disadvantageous to India in every way – a much higher price per jet, no transfer of technology, no sovereign guarantee from the French government, no bank guarantee, the seat of dispute arbitration shifted from India to Geneva – but it installed his friend Anil Ambani, who had

registered a defence company just days before, as offset partner.

Modi's Rafale deal came in for a great deal of criticism, both for the way it was arrived at - violating all the prescribed procedures and implicitly assuming that Modi has absolute power to do as he pleases - and because of the loss of jobs, technology and national security for India that it entailed.

But it is not the only time PM Modi has coddled a friend at the expense of the country. In 2014, Modi prevailed upon the State Bank of India to agree to lend his friend Gautam Adani \$1 billion for his project to mine coal in Queensland, Australia, build a railway to bring it to the coast, and build a port to ship the coal to India - a project so daft that no private bank would back it. Public protests against the loan from a bank to which Adani was already heavily indebted led to its abandonment. Then the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India made several changes to its regulations to allow Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Jio to rise rapidly to the top of the telecom industry, wiping out most of the competition. The quid pro quo for these handouts came in the form of unlimited support for Modi.

However, the biggest fiasco was demonetisation, again the brainchild of Modi. On 8 November 2016, Modi announced that at midnight all Rs 500 and Rs 1000 notes - 85% of the currency in circulation - would cease to be legal tender. In the following days and weeks, all hell broke loose as over 90% of wage-earners who are in the informal economy lost their pay and in many cases their jobs, people were forced to queue up for hours to access the money in their own bank accounts or change their demonetised notes into legal currency, the new notes could not be dispensed by the ATMs, the prices of agricultural products plummeted and still they couldn't be sold, and over 100 people reportedly died as a result, with probably many more unreported cases.

The reasons cited for this drastic step were (1) to get rid of black money (even though not more than 6% of black money was kept in cash, most of

it being invested in jewellery, real estate and foreign bank accounts), (2) to get rid of counterfeit currency, and (3) to deprive terrorists of funding. To cut a long story short, the new currency started being counterfeited almost immediately, terrorism did not decline, and years later, the RBI admitted that 99.3% of the demonetised currency had been deposited in banks, effectively laundering the black cash.

So none of the purported aims of 'notebandi' were realised. But after it, the BJP seemed to have unlimited quantities of cash, which it used to fund itself in state elections and buy up MLAs as and when it needed them. The catastrophic effects on the economy were covered up by government propaganda outfits releasing less and less credible statistics, until in January 2019 two independent National Statistical Commission members resigned in protest against the government suppressing a National Sample Survey Office report showing that the unemployment rate in 2017-2018 stood at a 45-year high. This confirmed the report by the independent Centre for Monitoring the Indian Economy in September 2018 that demonetisation resulted in 3.5 million jobs lost, but in addition the labour force shrank by 15 million as the unemployed ceased to look for jobs.

Given that creating employment had been one of Modi's key promises, increasing unemployment, especially among the young, was leading to mounting dissatisfaction with his regime. Along with regular farmers' protests against rural distress, this posed a threat to his re-election bid. This is probably what led to his determination to raid the RBI in late 2018 in order to get cash to hand out in various 'welfare' and infrastructure projects as he criss-crossed India at public expense for his election campaign. This was one step too far for RBI governor Urjit Patel, who resigned citing personal reasons in order not to be held responsible for Modi's reckless mismanagement of the economy and willingness to rob the RBI in order to win an election.

Is India safe in Modi's hands?

As we have seen, India's democracy is not safe in Modi's hands, nor is India's economy; but what about national security? Surely a 'majboot sarkar' is good for national security?

Not necessarily. Reducing the number of Rafale jets to 36 from the 126 that had been requested by the airforce shows scant regard for national security. And the conflict in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) deteriorated after Modi came to power, with a sharp increase in both civilian and military casualties. In February 2019, after the Pulwama attack in which over 40 security personnel of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) were killed in a suicide bombing carried out by a Kashmiri youth and claimed by Pakistan-based terror group Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), Modi, who was engaged in a promotional photo-shoot, did not respond for hours instead of taking charge immediately. Since the BJP had brought down the elected state government of J&K, Modi and Doval were directly responsible for the abysmal security failure that allowed a vehicle packed with explosives to ram into a convoy of buses carrying CRPF personnel.

Subsequent airstrikes on Balakot in Pakistan were carried out with much fanfare. This forced Pakistani PM Imran Khan to respond to public outrage in his country by carrying out retaliatory airstrikes in India, and in the course of repulsing them an Indian plane was shot down and Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman captured. The attack itself generated a great deal of controversy, because the government claimed that hundreds of terrorists had been killed and their training camp destroyed, whereas international media, on the basis of visits to Balakot and analysis of satellite images, concluded that the bombs only felled pine trees, the only casualty was a villager who had been injured when his windows shattered as a result of the blasts, and the JeM madrasa in the vicinity suffered no damage.

One way of reconciling these reports

with the Indian Air Force head's statement that they had struck the targets given to them is the view of various Western military analysts and security officials that JeM training camps in Balakot had moved elsewhere years ago, leaving behind only the madrassa. Contradicting government claims that what mattered was their demonstration of determination to strike inside Pakistan, analyst C. Christine Fair said on NDTV programme Truth Vs Hype that the intention of striking terror camps was not enough, what was required was the capability of doing so, which the strikes had not demonstrated. It is noteworthy that these Western analysts are as hostile to the Pakistani deep state's sponsorship of terrorism as anyone in India, yet they did not concur with the Indian government's claims.

According to these international accounts, Balakot was a botched operation. However, what if the real

objective of the airstrikes, as BJP leader Yeddyurappa hinted, was to win votes for the BJP by whipping up war hysteria in India? This would explain the publicity given to an operation that should have been carried out in secrecy, and the failure to hit terrorist training camps. It would explain why Modi carried on smiling for the cameras after the suicide bombing in Pulwama, and his election campaigning continued uninterrupted; why he failed to condemn countrywide attacks on Kashmiri students and traders until the SC intervened; why he used the image of Abhinandan in his campaign despite being responsible for his capture; why he used images of the Pulwama victims despite his government having refused the CRPF's request to airlift them over the dangerous stretch of road, although it would have cost peanuts compared to the massive government expenditure on flying Modi and his entourage to and from project inaugurations,

foreign trips and election rallies; why the ultranationalism whipped up by Modi and Shah was used by the BJP to brand anyone questioning the government as pro-Pakistan and therefore a traitor.

If this was the real objective, then inhabitants of South Asia have reason to be grateful to the international community for prevailing upon Imran Khan to de-escalate by releasing Abhinandan and rounding up the JeM, thus averting a war. And the national security of India is not safe in the hands of a man who is willing to risk a devastating war in order to win an election, a man whose obsession with consolidating his power drowns out all love for his country. It is worth remembering that Hitler's 'majboot sarkar' led Germany to defeat and ruin.

March 8, 2019

[Alliance of Middle East Socialists](#)

Zimbabwe in 2019: the state we're in and the roadmap forward

18 March 2019, by Japhet Moyo

In the 1980s there was confidence amongst ordinary citizens who generally did not understand the underlying economic structural functionalities. But this changed in the 1990s with the introduction of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP), supported by the World Bank, which introduced harsh austerity measures and economic liberalisation, thereby exposing workers to the harsh realities of neo-liberalism. The trend worsened as Zimbabwe trudged into late 1990s when large-scale retrenchments bit workers and destroyed the social fabric of the country.

The chaotic land redistribution programme, which started in 2000, forced Zimbabwe's agrarian economy to its knees. Between 2000 and 2009,

we witnessed a slump in agricultural production caused by the flight of experienced farmers and successive droughts. This in turn weighed heavily on the manufacturing sector which relies on agricultural produce for raw materials.

The economy briefly recovered from 2009 to 2014 following the introduction of a multi-currency system with the United States dollar as the base currency following the formation of a coalition government after the disputed 2008 election. But since 2015 the economy has been in recession.

All key socio-economic indicators have declined, with inflation, cash liquidity, the budget deficit and public debt all taking a turn for the worse. [94]

Persistent shortages of foreign currency have spawned shortages of basic commodities and has driven the cost of everyday goods to record levels. The official year-on-year inflation rose from 2.97 per cent in November 2017 to 3.56 per cent in January 2018. By November 2018 it officially reached an all-time high of 31 per cent, the highest since inception of the multi-currency regime, although noted economists have put that figure at a staggering 186 per cent, making Zimbabwe's rate of inflation second only to Venezuela's 1.4 million per cent. [95]

Rising inflation has had a devastating impact on ordinary citizens; incomes for those luckily enough to be in work or to have a pension have been massively eroded. Their predicament

is worsened by the fact that most people do not have access to foreign exchange while service providers are demanding payment in hard currency. There are also tens of thousands of workers who are victims of wage theft. All of this leaves most people unable to pay for their basic needs, be it food, housing, education, healthcare or transport. [96]

As if things couldn't get any worse, in January 2019 the government increased the price of fuel by 158 per cent sending the economy into a tailspin that is likely to result in hyperinflation. Workers called for a stay-away and citizens joined in. [97]

Workers face a wall of silence and an iron fist

Prospects of an economic recovery this year remain remote, as the country is unlikely to meet neither its economic growth projections nor its inflation targets. Current circumstances have forced Finance Minister Mthuli Ncube to revise the projected economic growth rate for 2019 from 9.0 per cent to about 3.1 per cent, and even this is unlikely to be achieved thanks to ever-declining confidence from the international community and the high cost of living. Unless the government and its social partners – namely business and labour – quickly and sincerely revive the social contract, labour unrest is likely to be a recurring feature of the months ahead.

Faced with an economic implosion and an agitated populace, instead of addressing economic fundamentals and engaging in dialogue, the government has sought to silence all of its critics. For years Zimbabweans have been calling for economic stability, electoral reforms, rule of law, institutional reforms and decent jobs, but they have met a wall of silence and an iron fist.

Damaging economic measures forced the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) to call for demonstrations in October 2018 which were quashed by the police. [98] In

January 2019, the ZCTU called for a stay-away and the state responded with brutal force unleashing the military which left about 17 people dead with reports of beatings, rape and other atrocities. [99]

The ZCTU leadership has been in the firing line with ZCTU President Peter Mutasa and me not only facing trial for public order offenses following the October protests, but more recently we have been charged with the grave offense of trying to subvert the government. If convicted, we face 20 years in prison.

Over the past 12 months, teachers have also been under fire for going on strike to demand payment in US dollars as the value of all other forms of money (bond notes, electronic money) has plummeted. [100] Members of the Amalgamated Rural Teachers Union of Zimbabwe have been hauled before the courts, while doctors and nurses have been arbitrarily dismissed for calling for better pay and working conditions.

The government is trying to intimidate organised labour so that it can pursue its austerity agenda undisturbed. As a result, the situation for trade unions is more precarious now than it was during the Mugabe era: the government is unilaterally imposing its decisions on civil service collective bargaining processes; trade union leaders are being targeted for arrest and detention; the courts appear to be captured and no longer sensitive to labour. Collective power, despite the state's attempts to break it, is the only hope left for Zimbabwe's workers.

11 ways Zimbabwe can move forward

Despite the seemingly hopeless nature of the situation facing labour in Zimbabwe, there are a number of ways that we can move forward.

Cutting government expenditure – the people have lost confidence in the government owing to fiscal indiscipline. The reality of government spending stands in stark contrast to its rhetoric. Senior officials must cut

their expenditure and the foreign trips that have consumed millions of the country's scarcely available forex.

Informal sector – Zimbabwe has the second largest informal economy in the world after Bolivia. These workers need access to capital and to be supported towards formality, rather than criminalised and attacked. [101] Additionally, the government urgently needs to open credit lines for small and medium enterprises to recapitalise the economy.

End corruption – there is hardly a sector in Zimbabwe that hasn't been blighted by corruption. The guilty need to be held accountable and the business community needs to be assured of the safety of its investments.

Encourage responsible foreign direct investment – printing more money will not solve Zimbabwe's current economic crisis. Responsible foreign direct investment is the key to economic growth, and the government needs to create a conducive and sustainable environment for such investments.

Policy consistency – this remains a major challenge. Zimbabwe has various excellent blueprints for the positive transformation of the country, but these policies are never implemented. Government ministers must also refrain from issuing conflicting policy statements, as this tarnishes Zimbabwe's already battered image.

Create decent jobs – Zimbabwe has an abundance of natural resources, from agriculture to minerals, and a huge skilled labour force. What is now needed is the political will and the right economic policies to create decent work for all.

Drop the dollar – although the introduction of the US dollar was necessary after the demonetisation of the Zimbabwe dollar in 2009, in the long-term Zimbabwe needs to reintroduce its own currency.

Rejuvenate production – production must be recapitalised starting with the agricultural, manufacturing and mining sectors. The land reform

programme which started in 2000 destroyed an agricultural sector that was once described as ‘the bread basket of Africa’. With regards to manufacturing, there are cheap and affordable products that should be produced locally (matches, candles and mineral water, for example), but currently they are all being imported. Meanwhile, the mining sector lacks product value addition. How can Zimbabwe be the second largest platinum producer in the world but the majority of its people live in absolute poverty?

Curb illicit financial flows – serious levels of illicit financial flows have been recorded in the mining sector, while our unfortunate economic circumstances have led the government to mortgage our mineral

wealth to bogus ‘investors’ hellbent on looting our minerals. The government must come up with strict laws to curb these losses. Zimbabwe’s diamonds are said to be worth US\$60 billion but who benefits from the proceeds? Certainly not ordinary Zimbabweans. Instead US\$15 billion from the nation’s diamond sales are unaccounted for and have likely been siphoned out of the country. This needs to stop.

Real reforms – the country’s image is severely dented owing to its poor human rights record, the absence of the rule of law and the recent military clampdown on civilians protesting against widespread hardships. Zimbabwe’s government needs to engage in practical and meaningful reforms on every level. Despite the crushing national debt, no credit lines

will be open to Zimbabwe until this takes place.

Social dialogue – an all-stakeholders dialogue platform needs to be put in place urgently. The inclusion of opposition parties, trade unions, religious institutions, academia, students and other parts of civil society is crucial. The ‘command’ style of governance favoured by the current administration has proved to be incredibly ineffective. Key government policies are repeatedly announced without effective stakeholder engagement and the result has been resistance. Respecting the social contract will build the trust, transparency and accountability Zimbabwe needs to prosper.

[Equal Times](#)

On the Eve of March 1st: Imagining Peace in an Age of Violence

16 March 2019, by **Bodueræ Kwon**

The decade between 1910 and 1920 witnessed revolutions breaking out throughout the world, but it is difficult to find one both as spontaneous and as widespread as the March 1st Movement in what was then a united Korea [102] Transcending geographical, ideological, and class divisions to elicit nationwide participation, and emerging after nearly a decade of oppressive Japanese colonial rule that completely banned any kind of political or social organizations, the March 1st Movement was in many ways without precedent.

Of course, some individuals and small groups – both in Korea and overseas – had already issued their own version of the Korean Declaration of Independence and had been active in Korean independence movement activities long before March 1, 1919. [103] Yet for the most part, the March 1st Movement began without

the support of international organizations or networks. At the time, there were no cohesive political organizations or structures in Korea, and although various religious organizations played a considerable role in distributing copies of the Declaration of Independence and spreading news regarding the protests, their activities were often limited to specific regions.

Instead, the movement demonstrated the extent to which protestors resolved to take matters into their own hands and shape their destiny. This was a decade dominated by the Wilsonian doctrine of “national self-determination,” which offered the possibility of asserting the conditions of each nation’s existence on its own terms, fortified by the collapse of the previously established world order and power structures. At the end of the Declaration of Independence issued by the March 1st Movement,

only one of numerous such declarations produced and disseminated in those months, 33 individuals who had been selected without much deliberation from various religious denominations signed their names on behalf of the Korean nation, and by doing so had declared themselves the representatives of all. [104] Despite bypassing any kind of formal election or democratic process of selection, the 33 Representatives demonstrated a collective resolve that was to prove the spark that set the country ablaze.

On March 1st itself, a considerable number of protestors involved in the actions had originally come to Seoul to attend the state funeral for Emperor Kojong, and ended up participating in the protest purely by chance. The main actors were ordinary people residing in rural villages who had prepared their own copies of the Declaration of Independence and the

national flag without any external guidance or support. Without any kind of system to mobilize the people, the protest's success was contingent upon its size and location. In some cases, it began through a lone individual's decision to cry "Mansei!" [105], that cry then being taken up by other voices and swelling into a huge collective protest. Yet in other instances, those same cries were met with no response other than arrest.

Anger born of destitution, oppression, and discrimination, and the longing for security, freedom, and equality, gave rise to this immense political energy, which was shaped by plunging into the depths of "chaotic openness." [106] It was precisely the strength of this immediate uprising that allowed for the possibility of imagining alternatives to the given parliamentary system. Closing the gap between language and reality, the act of "declaration" served as the impetus for invoking both a temporal and political immediacy—a leap into the future.

Less than two weeks after the March 1st Movement, Kim Kyu-sik arrived in Paris for the Peace Conference talks. The 39-year-old adopted son of missionary Horace Underwood, Kim was a religious and military organiser proficient in several languages, having studied in the United States and participated in revolutionary activities across China, Russia, and Mongolia. In many ways he was an obvious choice to represent the land known as Korea. [107] Yet he was not the only such representative. Various individuals from overseas Korean organizations in Russia, China, and the United States (including Syngman Rhee, who would become South Korea's first president after the division of the peninsula) had also been selected. For the most part, though, the difficulties of obtaining passports and travel expenses frustrated their attempts to travel to Paris.

In the end, it didn't matter: the conditions of colonialism made it impossible for Africa and Asia to send delegates that fulfilled the requirements as defined by

parliamentarianism, i.e. officially approved through elections or a legislative assembly—generally, such structures simply did not exist for the colonized. Despite these setbacks, "unofficial" delegates from colonized countries painstakingly travelled to Paris in hopes of an audience with one of the Five Major Powers. A young Vietnamese man named Nguyen Tat Thanh, later known to the world as Ho Chi Minh, went so far as to borrow a suit from a French friend in trying to meet with Wilson. [108] In contrast, the Senegalese delegate succeeded in meeting with George Clemenceau, the Prime Minister of France at the time, and would later participate in the Pan-African Congress organized by W.E.B. DuBois. [109] Nevertheless, the lukewarm response by the major powers made it clear that self-determination was not for all nations.

Even the Chinese delegation, which had been formed through officially recognized means, was repeatedly excluded from the talks and their concerns dismissed. Their fierce efforts to block Japan's power were no match for the meteoric rise of that nation's authority among the "Five Major Powers." Korea was ignored and ostracized to an even greater extent. In the documents concerning the Paris Peace Conference, Kim Kyu-sik's name is entirely absent and that of "Korea" appears only once: in May, after the March 1st Movement had been nearly completely extinguished, in a news story by an American reporter interviewing the Japanese delegation. [110]

In 1919, the sense that both catastrophe and utopia were simultaneously imminent gave rise to a new experience of time, one that manifested itself in immediacy. Within this context, critical reflection and reconstruction of the concept of "representation" took place in many populations as they sought to close the gap between the people and its representatives. Was political mediation truly necessary? Was it impossible for individuals or for the people themselves to become the stimulus for change? Citing Marx, Lenin said that under capitalism "the oppressed are allowed once every few

years to decide which particular representatives of the oppressing class shall represent and repress them in parliament!" [111] It was not obvious that this Leninist vision would triumph everywhere, but the power of his vision was reflected in many of the national liberation struggles: "We cannot imagine democracy, even proletarian democracy, without representative institutions, but we can and must imagine democracy without parliamentarism if criticism of bourgeois society is not mere words for us." [112]

Contrary to the anticipations of utopia catalyzed by the Wilsonian moment, the majority of Europe regressed to the previous world order after the Paris Peace Conference. Although Europe succeeded in maintaining their illusive utopia by getting rid of imperialism domestically and founding a system of nation-states, colonialism abroad continued unchecked and untouched. On the other side of the world, the nascent Japanese Empire began its imperial expansion in full swing. The seeds of the rapidly expanding colonial liberation movements were sown in the early twentieth century, but they would only come to fruition after the devastating experience of World War II.

The representatives of the March 1st Movement were born amid the turbulence of this world history. The appellation of "33 National Representatives," a title that has persisted to this day, was merely one of numerous experiments in dismantling and revitalizing the very concept of "representation." Through the popular uprisings of the March 1st Movement, the 33 National Representatives were able to ratify their legitimacy as representatives of the people, and their successors capitalized on the movement's revolutionary force by establishing the Korean Provisional Government in Shanghai the following month. However, in the spring of 1919, there were as just many groups declaring themselves the "Korean Provisional Government" as there were individuals proclaiming themselves "representatives." [113] Without the March 1st Movement as a catalyst, these groups would have likely remained divided and fragmented; it

was only through the March 1st Movement that they were able to eventually unify in Shanghai. This was the place where the voluntary "representatives" of the March 1st Movement, without undergoing any kind of parliamentary or electoral system, would settle. Among the

numerous experiments in political "representation" held throughout the world at the time, Korea's "33 National Representatives" can perhaps be considered as one of the few success stories. We, as inheritors of their legacy, must remember that

this success was made possible only through the courage of ordinary people to revolt through a single voice crying, "Mansei!"

March 1 2019

[Verso](#)

Small farmers, peasants, landless workers and agriculture in Pakistan

15 March 2019, by Farooq Tariq

The large landholders have all the political powers and economic advantages. Around 50.8 percent of rural households are landless while the poverty.

Over the last few decades a new form of feudalism emerged particularly during the periods of military dictatorship. With the help of the state machinery, the poor, small landholders are forced to hand over their land to a particular family for insignificant sums. New feudal owners like Jahangir Tareen of Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek Insaaf now own thousands of acres of land. He has become a typical Pakistani feudalist: a "well-educated" person who, with the help of military dictators, was able to buy sugar mills along with thousands of acres of land. It's a vulgar combination of feudalism and capitalism.

The landlords' base of power over local people is taken place at every step. Debt bondage is passed down "generation after generation" and the landlord controls the "distribution of water, fertilizers, tractor permits and agricultural credit." This in turn gives them influence over the "revenue, police and judicial administration" of local government and its officials. In recent times, particularly harsh feudalism has existed in rural Sindh, Baluchistan and some parts of Southern Punjab. It is a form of slavery in 21st century Pakistan.

In 2017, Agriculture contributes about 24 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Pakistan and accounts for half of employed labour force. Important crops are wheat, cotton, rice, sugarcane, maize etc. However, the situation of the small farmers, peasants and landless peasants remains bad in all aspects.

Despite being rich in agriculture, the National Nutrition Survey 2018 reported that 62 percent of Pakistan's population is food insecure, while the International Food Policy Research Institute's (IFPRI's) Global Hunger Index (GHI) 2014 states that Pakistan is one of the most food insecure countries in Asia

Agriculture is heavily contributing towards the economy of Pakistan. However, water deficiency and drought conditions, long duration load shedding issue, poor extension services, absence of land reforms, absence of distribution of certified varieties, high price of fertilizers, deliberate use of adulterated, non-recommended and expired insecticides, non utilization of cultivable waste land, conventional farming practices, indirect access of farmer to main market, absence of ecological based cropping education & extension services, depletion of forests and disease outbreaks of poultry birds are some of the key issues that are playing a negative role in demotion of agricultural sector in Pakistan. Over 60% population is agriculture

dependent, yet there is not a single school or a training centre for hands-on-job farmers. Extension Services meant to educate and guide farmers with neutral advice are dormant. Knowledge gap is filled by sales representatives of inputs supply companies. Their advice is generally biased and as a result, due to excessive use of purchased inputs production cost increased, quality of output decreased, and farmers profit decreased while soil and environment polluted.

Most of the state owned policies towards agriculture are in favour of the landlords. Look at this figure; During 2018, 18,606 big landlords got agricultural credit worth Rs222.7 billion. Against this, 1.752 million small farmers got just Rs183.6bn. A little more than 110,000 mid-sized landowners received Rs76.3bn.

Big landlords are defined as those holding more than 50 acres of land in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and over 64 acres of land in Sindh and Balochistan. Small farmers are those who hold up to 12.5 acres in Punjab and KP, up to 16 acres in Sindh and up to 32 acres in Balochistan. Mid-sized landowners of each province fall in between.

The fact that less than 20,000 big landlords get more bank credit than 1.75m small farmers explains a lot about public and private sector banks working on the advices of the

government.

Government policies are meant to support processors of agriculture produce. There is no vehicle for progress and no institution to address farmers grievances.

Subsidy which is a marketing tool is used for selling. Subsidy should be used for the introduction of new technology, process or machine tool and from there on it should sell on its own strength. Here, and in most countries subsidy is misused and never reached to the end beneficiary.

Agri production as well quality of production is declining year after year due to a process of agriculture production known as industrial agriculture, introduced in late 60's which recommend use of inorganic materials and genetically modified seeds.

Pakistan is at the edge of water scarcity and over 80% water is being wasted. Underground water level dropped over 80 feet in the past 20 years due excessive pumping that has caused wastage and salinity in soil, resulting reduced fertility and output.

Pakistan is burdened by devastating water shortages. The country's per capita water availability ranks among Asia's lowest, and is lower than that of many African nations. At least 90 percent of Pakistan's dwindling water supplies are allocated to agriculture, yet in-efficient irrigation and poor drainage have produced epidemics of waterlogging and soil salinity across the countryside.

Due to the absence of the land reforms in Pakistan, the subsidies and other farmer based incentives given by the government are enjoyed by the landlords and the farmer with small land holding suffers in the end. About 2 percent of households has a complete hold on the 45 percent of the land area. Absence of the land reforms is also bringing about negative changes in the society and is resulting in an over increasing rate of poverty and consequently there is an increased rate of the negative behavior in society.

The first land reform by military

dictator Ayub Khan were put into force through the Martial Law Regulation No. 64 on February 7, 1959.

2.5 million acres of land was resumed 2.3 million of it distributed amongst 183,271 tenants and small owners

By another account, the government overtook only 35% of the holdings that exceeded the ceiling.

Riding a wave of socialism, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto as the Civilian Martial Law Administrator (CMLA) and then President, promulgated on March 1, 1972, Martial Law Regulation No. 115 of 1972, often called Land Reforms Regulation 1972. A second wave of reforms were introduced through the Land Reforms Ordinance, 1977 (Ordinance II of 1977)

on January 5, 1977. Ceiling on land holdings was reduced to 100 acres for irrigated land and 200 acres for un-irrigated land.

The reforms of 1972 resumed 1.3mn acres and 0.9mn of which was distributed among 76,000 beneficiaries. In 1977, 1.8mn acres were resumed. However, the feudal lords went to the Islamic court and during the 80s, under the martial law of General Zia Ul Haque, lands reforms were declared unIslamic. A case against the decision by Workers Party is still pending in front of a full bench of Supreme Court of Pakistan.

Landlessness and poverty are closely linked to each other. Being agricultural country, land is considered as a principal asset in Pakistan.

The situation of women peasants is even worst. More than 80% of rural workers do not own their homes; they live under the age-old feudal system, which does not grant them right to shelter. Therefore, all human settlements that are located on state land of any kind held by any civil and non-civil government departments or institutions in the rural area should be registered.

Despite much opposition by civil society organisations (CSOs), small farmers and progressive growers, the Senate of Pakistan approved Seed (Amendment) Act in early 2016. According to the amendment, no

unregistered person, whether it is farmers or institutions, will be allowed to stock, sell or exchange any seeds without official permission. It will be a punishable crime with prescribed fines and imprisonment.

The Seed Act 1976 was a farmers friendly and the legislation was such that there was little concern about gene tampering in Pakistan. It made citizens sovereign over their seed, and the public sector alone was responsible for seed development and registration. This present Seed Act allows multinational corporations to produce basic seed for its multiplication and certification, and also set up accredited seed testing laboratories".

Majority of people living in rural areas depended on agriculture, livestock, and fishing as their prime source of income and livelihoods.

Although there were no estimates for 2019, in 2012, it was estimated that 13.46 million people were employed in Sindh, including 7.74 million in rural areas; the majority of whom were working as sharecroppers (tenants or peasants; most of them were landless), and wage workers on agriculture farms. In 2000, there were an estimated 1.8 million bonded peasants (sharecroppers) in Sindh, and 6.8 million tenants were performing caste-based labour without pay.

One report on fisher folk suggests that in 2013 in Sindh, 40 per cent or 26,002 out of the total of 53,728 people in inland fishing were doing part-time fishing. Over the 13 years from 2001 to 2013, the number of fulltime fishermen had decreased from 29,732 to 27,726, while, the number of part-time fishermen had increased from 19,614 to 26,002.

An increasing number of small and marginal farmers migrate to urban areas to escape poverty. In fact Pakistan is already the most highly urbanized country in South Asia. Clearly increasing migration from the rural areas will create more pressure on already stretched infrastructure of urban metropolises.

Additionally, as industrial growth in the country remains stunted, and

much of the installed industrial base is already capital-intensive, most migrants will be forced to work in the services sector. Thus majority will probably end up working in the informal or black economy at extremely low wages and atrocious working conditions, reinforcing the cycle of poverty and exclusion.

Nature is the biggest farmer on earth and farming since billions of years. We must not go against nature which has four fundamentals:

Soil and crop plants are not designed to survive in inundation
No-tillage of soil
Soil should always remain covered with organic materials
Plants diversity to develop echo

system

We recommend that the Shariat Court decision on land reforms as Un-Islamic should be overturned. A whole sale land reforms be carried out in Pakistan. Food sovereignty should be part of the constitution. Land must be distributed among landless peasantry and small farmers.

BKF/BKS and Sub-District Council Elections in Bangladesh

14 March 2019, by **Badrul Alam**

In the country, there are different types of local governments. The union council is the lowest tier of the local government and then Sub-district councils (Upazila Parishad).

On the top of them, there are District Councils (Zila Parishad). District Council is not elected by the people directly. They are elected by the elected members of the Sub-district Councils. So, it has less importance than the sub-district election. Nevertheless, it is the office of profit. People run for this post.

Next month is the month of Sub-District Council Elections. As it is in the middle of District Council and Union Council, it creates lots of enthusiasm among the people. The Sub-District Council consists of one chairman, one female vice-chairman and one vice-chairman. For the post of Chairman and Vice-Chairman, anybody, male or female, can contest, but for the post of female Vice-Chairman only women can contest. However, both men and female voters will vote for the post.

For the post of Chairman any political party can nominate the candidate and run the election with the symbol of the party. But the independent candidate can also take part in the election for the post of chairmanship. For the posts of two Vice-Chairmen, including

female one, there is no partisan policy. Party can select their candidates non-officially. The candidates cannot use the party symbol. They have to use the symbol allotted by the Election Commission.

The election commission decides nomination fees, the expenditure of the election that one candidate can spend, size of posters and its color, campaign cost, etc.

According to the election commission one candidate can spend Tk.500,000/- for the above-mentioned sectors.

Bangladesh Krishok Federation (BKF) always emphasizes local government elections where it has its organizational stronghold. This year it has decided to encourage two candidates to run the election. Among them one is already elected for the last two consecutive terms as Female Vice-Chairman. Her name is Shamsunnhar Khan Doli, who is the President of Bangladesh Kishani Sabha (BKS), an associate organization of Bangladesh Krishok Federation. She is actually founding president of Bangladesh Krishok Federation which was established in 1990 through a big grand conference held in Dhaka sponsored by Bangladesh Krishok Federation. Since then she has been playing a key role in the Khasland (fallow land) movement

in the country.

Doli Khan will compete in the election in Dashmina sub-district under Patukahli district where BKF has its massive Khasland occupation. She is also the daughter of late veteran peasant leader Abdus Satter Khan who was also the founding president of Bangladesh Krishok Federation. As Abdus Satter Khan has a huge contribution to the land movement in the Southern District of Bangladesh, Doli Khan has inherently plus points. Moreover, majority people, especially the landless people in the area, are direct beneficiaries of the land movement of Bangladesh Krishok Federation (BKF) and Bangladesh Kishani Sabha (BKS).

Despite all the benefits they enjoyed still they have lots of problems to be solved as, for instance, the question of education and health care for the landless people in the occupied islands. Four occupied islands, out of 22, are situated in Dashmina sub-district. This landless people are majority voters in the area. Among them BKF has its strong political hegemony which brings landslide victory for Doli Khan previous two elections.

Apart from that, the organization has its regular activities which concern Doli in different ways. As Doli is based

in that area she seeks well-being of the island people in regular basis. So, she is part and parcel of the local people. She is rushing here and there when she hears any death incidents or danger facing landless people. She should win the election, although there is a possibility to have 6-7 rival contestants.

The second candidate Asrafuzzana Roni, is based in Bhurungamari sub-district under Kurigram district. He joined Bangladesh Krishok Federation in 2004 when BKF operated a massive occupation. In fact, he was initially against the land occupation and opposed it as a young local person. But he was convicted later to join it and since then worked with the organization.

He is now president of Bangladesh Krishok Federation Bhurungamari sub-district Unit. He has a very close connection with the landless people. In behalf of organization he attended a 7-day workshop on Zero-Budget Natural Farming which is Subas Palaker, a method of sustainable agriculture in India. Moreover, he actively worked for the climate caravan in 2011. This is the first time for him to run for elections. Landless people like him very much as he is with them in their difficult times. Hopefully the landless people will vote for him and he wins the election.

Because Doli was Female Vice-president for two terms, she received some salary from the government. Besides this salary, she did not have any income. Unlike some politician, especially from the ruling party, she never made money from the

government project implementation in the locality.

Roni occasionally does some contractor job from which he gets fixed commission by which he makes his living.

Both candidates need financial support for their elections.

The election date for Roni is on 10 March 2019 and for Doli on 31 March 2019.

Therefore, both need the election expenditure declared by the election commission. It stands at Tk 500000+500000=1000000/-

As discussed with them, they will be able to collect 25% from the local sympathizers. So they need the actual support of Tk.750000/-. In Euro it would be: 8152. In word: Eight Thousand One Hundred Fifty-Two Only.

Bangladesh Krishok Federation is trying to raise the funding for them from different sources so that they can conduct their election activities in smooth manner.

We ask all sympathizers and well-wishers to stand by them in this crucial time. Having being elected, they will be able to help the poor people better than before.

For donations

If you wish to help in these electoral campaigns, you may send donations through ESSF with the mention "Bangladesh")

Cheques

cheques to ESSF in euros only, payable in France, to be sent to:

ESSF
2, rue Richard-Lenoir
93100 Montreuil
France

Bank Account:

Crédit lyonnais
Agence de la Croix-de-Chavaux
(00525)
10 boulevard Chanzy
93100 Montreuil
France
ESSF, account number 445757C

International bank account details :

IBAN : FR85 3000 2005 2500 0044 5757 C12
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Chicago Charter Teachers Strike, Win

11 March 2019, by Robert Bartlett

After picketing four days, the unity and enthusiasm of the charter teachers, along with widespread sympathy and solidarity among parents, forced the Acero leadership to capitulate. This led to a major step

in closing the gap between charter and Chicago public school teachers on compensation, hours and working conditions.

The demands that charter teachers

raised included issues that the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) are not even legally able to raise in bargaining with the Chicago Public Schools (CPS). In 1995, Bill 4.5 amended the Illinois School Code to limit mandated

bargaining to wages and benefits. Issues including class size and working conditions are only “permitted” if the school board agrees. (This law was designed to affect only Chicago teachers.)

Since charter schools are privately run, charter teachers were able to bargain these issues. The Acero striking teachers won a reduction in class size from 32 to 30 (still too large), established a salary scale for paraprofessionals who often receive short shrift during negotiations, reduced the pay gap between teachers at Acero and CTU and reduced the outrageously long school year without reducing the classroom time.

They also forced the incorporation of sanctuary language, an important issue given that 90% of the student body is LatinX.

These key gains improved the education for students, and will also tend to improve the retention rate of charter school teachers. At the Robert Clemente campus, teachers told me that out of a staff of 32 teachers last year, eight did not return.

Since Clemente opened in 2012 only three original teachers remain. This churn is typical in an industry which prides itself on overworking and underpaying their staff.

Acero became embroiled in a conflict of interest scandal. The politically connected leadership of the United Neighborhood Organization (UNO) gave construction contracts to relatives of UNO board members. This was radioactive for the UNO leadership, whose chairperson Juan Rangel was one of the co-chairs of Rahm Emanuel’s election committee.

The combination of internal corruption and political cronyism paved the way for UNO to become the largest unionized network in Chicago! In fact it proved so damaging that the charter had to change their name to Acero.

How the Acero Strike Won...

The strike was won with the overwhelming support of the Acero

teachers, who voted 98% in favor of the strike. Picket lines were solid with over 90% of the unionized staff picketing every day. They engaged in exuberant line dancing, going from school to school during the below freezing weather.

Each afternoon teachers from the 15 campuses converged in downtown Chicago to picket the Board of Education, the headquarters of the Illinois Network of Charter Schools (INCS), the Acero headquarters, to attend a rally at CTU headquarters or visit elected officials to explain the deficiencies in their schools and how it hurt their students.

One liberating aspect of the strike was the ability of teachers in the same building to talk to each other on the picket line — something that the demands of the job seem designed to prevent.

Over the course of the four days, teachers told aldermen who visited their picket lines of the struggles they have. A new teacher told Alderman Gilbert Villegas about being hired as a special education teacher, only to report to school and being forced to replace the kindergarten teacher who just quit.

Another special education teacher explained how she was unable to spend the state-mandated hour-and-a-half individual time per week on a student’s individual education plan but only 30 minutes.

Such compelling stories led the Latino caucus in the Chicago City Council to draft a letter, signed by all their members, stating that “We demand that you agree to a contract and settle the strike as soon as possible; it is truly shameful that Acero Network has come to this point!”

Acero’s leader Richard Rodriguez’s salary of \$260,000 a year is roughly equal to that of Chicago Public Schools head Janice Jackson. Yet he is responsible for 15 schools while she runs about 520.

... And What It

Means

The stunning victory left the anti-CTU Chicago Tribune fuming in a December 23rd editorial “Is the final bell ringing for charter schools in Illinois?” The answer is twofold.

Charter proliferation occurred with a series of structural changes that began to undermine public education. Since Illinois passed legislation in 1996 allowing the establishment of charter schools, the number has increased rapidly.

Today there are 141 separate campuses; 126 are in Chicago, comprising 57,000 students. Ninety-four percent are students of color; most schools are located in poor neighborhoods. Linked to the proliferation of charters is the erosion of neighborhood schools that were forced to “compete” with nearby charters.

The Board of Education, appointed by the mayor, promoted charters through the Renaissance 2010 plan. [114] that led to the closing of 140 schools between 2001 and 2013. As the charters opened, neighborhood schools were destabilized and ultimately closed.

When the Caucus of Rank-and-File Educators (CORE) was elected to leadership of the CTU in 2010, they saw unionizing charter school teachers as part of their mission. So long as these teachers were an unorganized work force, charter operators would use them to build their infrastructure and undercut public education.

Although the project began before CORE won office, the new leadership understood that it needed to organize charter school teachers to fight for the schools students deserve just as CTU members were motivated. [115]

Merging Teachers

The result of this organizing was the creation of a union of charter school teachers across a dozen different networks, the Chicago Alliance of Charter Teachers and Staff (ChiACTS).

After a process of discussion within both the CTU and ChiACTS, both unions agreed to merge in early 2018.

Some CTU members expressed resentment toward their charter colleagues, wrongly equating them with the charter operators and political forces in Chicago who closed schools and put public school teachers out of jobs. It is clear these forces will use charter school teachers as a battering ram against public school teachers to undercut the wages and working conditions of both. So it makes sense to unite.

From the point of view of the charter school teacher who has just recently joined the union, he/she/they may be worried that the larger organization will overlook one's specific needs. In order to facilitate a healthy merger, each union held discussions and separate ratification votes. CTU teachers voted 77% in favor and ChiACTS voted by 84%.

While these are large margins, a sizeable opposition shows some of the bitterness in the wake of public school closings and the disproportionate dismissal of Black teachers remains. One strong factor in the merger is that both CTU and ChiACTS teachers were on record against further charter expansion. A second factor is that charter teachers were facing the expiration of 11 separate contracts and were preparing to strike.

During the Acero strike, the CTU's organizational experience was put to good use in framing the negotiations around the needs of both the students and teachers. The CTU was able to provide the infrastructure to support Acero teachers in having both a delegate as well as a strike captain at every school.

It also applied the very successful tactics of 2012 to both pickets at each campus and rallies in central locations. This allowed the 500 Acero members to feel and demonstrate their collective power.

Picketing was strong at every school as well as participation in the centralized rallies. CTU members who worked in nearby public schools stopped by the picket lines every morning to bring coffee and donuts,

and march with Acero teachers.

Underfunding and Corruption

On the picket line I talked to a teacher who took a job at Acero after having taught in the unionized Waukegan (north of Chicago) school system. I asked if it was hard taking a pay cut to work at a charter school, and was stunned to hear that she received a \$13,000 a year raise!

This pointed out to me the particular underfunding of rural schools — as the “Red State” teacher strikes have highlighted.

Underfunding schools is a universal problem, and teachers and parents need to demand a quality education for all children. This requires the wealthy to pay a much larger share of the taxes so that there won't be a vast gulf in resources. It means unionization that can unite teachers across boundaries to fight for the education of their students.

This includes smaller class size, wrap-around services, innovative methods of education, music and art as an integral part of the curriculum and an end to punitive discipline practices.

The Acero strike revealed that charter teachers are just as committed as public school teachers to securing a better education for their students. They can be organized into unions capable of blunting the egregious features of the privatizers and their corporate sponsors. This, in turn, takes away much of the incentive to further expand charter schools.

CICS Strike

On February 5th teachers struck four of the 15 Chicago International Charter Schools (CICS). CICS operates under a self-described “portfolio” model where five different School Management Organizations (SMOs) run subsets of the schools. This portfolio model is eerily familiar to a recent proposal of the Los Angeles United School Board to create a breakup of the district into different

portfolios.

CICS is divided into five SMOs, with one to four schools and headed by an executive officer. These layers of duplicated management mean there are 14 executives making more than \$100,000 a year; the overall CEO makes \$231,000. Starting teachers, on the other hand, earn \$8,000 a year less than their counterparts in CPS.

The Lloyd Bond campus of the Chicago Rise SMO lists 11 administrators and 19 teachers. Along with a top-heavy administration, CICS has a high overhead. Roughly 30% of the public funding they receive goes to its parent organization, which holds \$36 million in reserves. Nineteen million in bonds is controlled by a firm owned by Craig Henderson, a founder of CICS and former president and treasurer.

Several of the founders of the SMOs started as Teach For America (TFA) alums; teaching appears to have been a step out of the classroom into the boardroom.

Eight CICS directors come from the corporate world. There are several partners from law firms including Laner, Munchin, Dombrow, Becker, Levin and Tominberg, which concentrates “exclusively in the representation of employers in labor relations, employment litigation, employee benefits and business immigration.” Others are from the investment world.

The CEO, Elizabeth Shaw, is a TFA veteran who was part of New Orleans' “recovery school district.” Another member of the board is a founder of the Illinois Network of Charter Schools, the public face of the charter industry in Illinois. This is a complicated web of individual entrepreneurs, privatization advocates, and opportunists looking to make a buck out of the charter industry.

A similarity between the Civitas-run CICS network and the Acero schools is the high turnover rate of teachers and unfilled positions in classrooms. At the Quest campus 5 out of 14 teachers left last year, and students ask teachers if they are going to leave them also. It is

understandable as a special ed teacher at Quest left for a job that paid over \$8,000 more; the school has been unable to fill that position leading to non-compliance with state mandates on meeting the needs of students with IEPs.

After nine days on the picket lines, CICS teachers won another victory for teachers in the charter industry by reaching an agreement that will bring salaries up to or even surpass CPS over four years. This includes both teachers and paraprofessionals.

Depending on funding increases over those years, the base wage is guaranteed to rise by 31.1%, but may go as high as 38.7%.

Eliminating the disparity between the charter and public sectors of education was one of the main goals of the CTU. Now for Acero and CICS unionized teachers this has been largely closed. This is a huge victory and should provide an impetus to organize the remaining 11 non-union CICS campuses as well as the other 70% of non-unionized charter schools in Chicago.

Along with the wage increases, a firm class size limit was written into the contract. Most classes should be no larger than 28 students with a limit of 30. In grades K-2 grades every teacher will have a classroom aide. CICS had proposed paying for both class size limits and pay raises by cutting student support services like counselors and nurses, but had to back down. They had to guarantee

maintaining student supports as well as sufficient special teachers.

Another sticking point that management had to concede was parental leave for staff – something that management gave itself. This was a particularly sore point for the mostly female workforce.

A larger share of health care cost will be picked up by management, the school day and year will be shortened with no loss of instructional time for students – all of these are blows against the exploitative conditions that charter teachers work under.

CICS will be forced to pay for these concessions by taking money that they have siphoned from public funds to their umbrella organization. They moaned in the press that they would be forced to reduce the number of “instructional coaches” and assistant principals to shift the money toward the classroom. For the first time sanctuary school language was included in the contract, an issue every school needs to address.

Creative Disruption

For strike preparation and during the strike there was both creativity and resolve to force CICS to cave over the demands. The CTU’s research spotlighted CICS’s byzantine management structure, revealing corporate ties of some CICS board members. Strikers then used that research to carry out direct actions.

A notable example was at the headquarters of Price Waterhouse and Cooper, an accounting firm which employs the current president and treasurer of CICS, Laura Thonn. One hundred and fifty teachers jammed into their Loop high-rise headquarters, blocking the lobby doors, and moving on to block the elevators. Out of the 200 striking CICS teachers and staff, 40 volunteered that day to be arrested.

This dedication on the part of the strikers was key in garnering the support of candidates for mayor in Chicago, a U.S. Senator and members of the city council’s Latino Caucus.

With these victories in two of the largest charter chains in Chicago, the bar has been raised for all charter teachers in the city. These examples can lead to unity between all educators, charter and public, in the fight to provide both good learning and working conditions.

Another 13 unionized campuses still have to settle their contracts this year. With these victories, however, a standard is being set that all charter operators will need to meet or answer to their teachers who will wonder why they work under much more difficult conditions. Public school teachers and charter school teachers have developed a good working relationship that is deepening as the battles unfold, and as they fight for the rights of their students together.

[Against the Current](#)

No to the imperialist threat against Venezuela! No to the Trump-Guaidó coup attempt! In defence of the sovereignty of the Bolivarian national and people!

11 March 2019, by Fourth International

What is happening in Venezuela and South America at this time, particularly since 24 January, when Juan Guaidó, president of the National Assembly, under the patronage of Trump, proclaimed himself president in defiance of the constituted powers, is much more than a simple attempted coup d'état - that the sad history of the region has known dozens. It is an imperialist interventionist manoeuvre that threatens the sovereignty of Venezuela and peace on the continent. Therefore, an imperialist military intervention in Venezuela would ignite a broad civil war in the region and, if the attempt to overthrow the Venezuelan government by this means were successful, it would provoke a change in the relationship of forces at the continental level and a new and imminent threat against other Latin American countries, those that have different situations from those already governed by pro-US or ultrarightist puppets.

Provocation at the borders and economic blockade

As Trump's puppets, the Bolsonaro and Duque governments have had Colombian and Brazilian troops stationed on their borders with Venezuela, to force the entry of supposed "humanitarian aid" to the country's people, with the clear goal of provoking a reaction that would give a pretext for open conflict.

Surely it would be easier and quicker for Trump and his hawks, given the unparalleled war power of the United States, to intervene directly. The problem is that he has not got an internal balance of forces in his country for another adventure like Iraq or Afghanistan. The imperial strategy is thus the combination of blackmail of external military intervention through regional allies, with a coup d'état from within, to restore an openly neoliberal government and regime.

In this strategy, the ideological dimension of interventionist propaganda is fundamental. It is about conquering the hearts and minds of the peoples of the world, particularly Latin Americans, in favour of its operation in South America with the cynical weapon of "humanitarian aid" to the suffering people of Venezuela.

Humanitarian aid, in its original concept, has nothing to do with specific political and military ends. Those who have been helping, from the Obama administration (which declared Venezuela a threat and stopped the export of products like medicines, machinery and raw materials for production, all them essential for the Venezuelan economy) to deepen the country's economic and social crisis, are not morally authorized to use the expression "humanitarian aid". There is nothing "humanitarian" about the same cynics who, since 24 January, have dedicated themselves to tightening the economic-financial screws against the Venezuelan state, preventing them from selling the remaining oil they had in the international market and vetoing the Venezuelan government's access to the currencies of Citgo - a subsidiary of PDVSA in the United States.

Today's interventionists and "humanitarians" are at least co-responsible for the situation that has caused the average Venezuelan citizen to lose 8kg in the last few years, which has reduced the Venezuelan diet to one meal a day, that has forced millions to emigrate.

A country in a state of emergency

At least since the global crisis of 2008, the fall in crude oil prices has deeply punished the Venezuelan economy and the government of Nicolás Maduro, which has followed the model of deep dependence on the oil industry. Nor has Maduro taken elementary protective measures against

indebtedness and dependence on the centres of world finance.

The result of economic policy in recent years, combined with the blockade of U.S. exports to Venezuela, has been a drop in economic activity to a level similar to that of a war (around 40%), the collapse of health services, the reduction of general food supplies, unemployment and mass emigration. It is a humanitarian emergency that only now, under the unacceptable pressure of intervention, Maduro is beginning to recognise.

In the wake of the loss of popular support due to the worsening of the crisis, Maduro curtailed trade union, party, electoral, expression and demonstration freedoms - even with prison and the use of armed force against protests. The democratic mechanisms of popular participation in social decision-making and the autonomy of Bolivarian neighbourhood and workers' organizations have been stifled.

For these reasons, together with the struggle against the threat of intervention and against the Guaidó-Trump coup, the Fourth International defends the right of the working class, the popular sectors, as well as the Venezuelan people as a whole to recover their standard of living and the fullness of democratic conditions.

Against all imperialist interference and intervention in Venezuela

The Fourth International joins the struggle for the lifting of the blockade and for "humanitarian aid" to conform to international conventions in agreement with the institutions that control the Venezuelan state. At the same time, it is necessary for Nicolás Maduro to recognize the existence of

the humanitarian emergency, especially in the areas of food and health (medical supplies), in order to concretize the application of effective mechanisms of solidarity and international cooperation. We also consider it indispensable to immediately stop the debt payment, one of the preconditions for improving the provision of food and medical supplies.

The Fourth International calls on all democratic and progressive forces in Latin America and the world to

absolutely reject the interference of Trump, the "Lima Group" and the military provocations of the forces of Brazil and Colombia on the borders of Venezuela. At the same time that we reject Guaidó's coup and any political or military aggression against Venezuela's sovereignty, we call on the peoples and social and political organizations of the world to mobilize for the suspension of the economic sanctions imposed by the United States and other governments on this South American country.

We reject any solution or overcoming of the crisis that poses a threat to peace or that comes from outside the constitutional frameworks of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Adopted by the International Committee of the Fourth International

(one abstention)

Amsterdam

5 March 2019

Turkey: Reading the Runes

10 March 2019, by **Uraz Aydin**

For several years in Turkey, there has been a rise in references to the Asian and pre-Islamic past of the Turks, accompanied by a more and more blatant visibility of racist remarks, whose circulation the internet of course encourages. If an ethnic ultra-nationalism and a pan-Turkic identity are not unprecedented in the political history of the country, their popularization, especially among youth, but also within the armed forces, constitutes a singular and relatively recent phenomenon related to a combination of national and international political factors.

The national-religious balance

In Turkey, nationalism constitutes the principal element, considered as almost natural, of all political formations and all ideological currents. From right to left, from secularists to Islamist conservatives, from employers' associations to unions, even though the weight of patriotism may differ, it is never absent, and it is perceived as a source of legitimacy. Only the Kurdish movement and those sectors of the radical left which solidarize with its demands, escape this.

As for ethnic nationalism, although the concept of the Turkish race was perceived as an element of national cohesion and rupture with the Ottoman past at the foundation of the republic (formally in October 1923), it was balanced over time with a nationalism based on citizenship, culture and even more on the feeling of "belonging to the Turkish nation".

Alparslan Türkeş

However, racist and pan-Turkish ultra-nationalism, linked to the ideal of a "reunification" of the Turkish peoples of Asia, continued to survive ideologically, especially under the inspiration of Nihal Atsız, until the 1970s. According to Tanil Bora, author of several books on the issue, this current, even as a minority, retained its presence in the nationalist movement only to be finally marginalized in the 1970s. "In the conditions of civil war between the radical left and the far right represented by the MHP - Party of the Nationalist Movement - led by ex-colonel Alparslan Türkeş (1917-1997) and his paramilitary formation of "Grey Wolves", the latter mainly recruited among the conservative-religious youth of central and eastern Anatolia, which precisely

strengthened the Islamic identity within the party," he says.

The famous "Islamic-Turkish synthesis" decreed as a dominant element of the new official ideology following the military coup of 1980 accentuated this trend even more, ultimately resulting in a split by the Islamic wing in the 1990s. "This division was also desired by Türkeş, who could no longer control the Islamic dynamics within his party" says Bora.

Secularization and ethnicization of nationalism

During the last decade of the twentieth century, faced with the dual challenge of the Kurdish rebellion and the rise of political Islam, nationalism evolved on two bases. First of all, there was "Turkic" ethnic nationalism as a reaction to the Kurdish movement in a context of "low intensity" war. It was during this period that the works of Nihal Atsız (real name Hüseyin Nihal Atsız, 1905-1975) were republished, and their racist theses reached a wider audience. Moreover, the disintegration/implosion of the Soviet Union and its regime and the

accession of several Turkish states of Asia to independence generated enthusiasm and a perspective of neo-Turkic unification ("Touranist") which reinforced this ethnicist tendency, as Bora emphasizes.

On the other hand, and on a much larger scale, there was an exacerbation of secularist and "Atatürkist" nationalism in the face of the rise of institutional Islamism represented by Refah Partisi (Party of Prosperity) which won the municipal elections in Istanbul and Ankara in 1994 and came into the national government in 1995 as part of a coalition. "It was at this time that we witnessed the first emergence of pop nationalism" says Güven Gürkan Â-ztan. A political scientist at Istanbul University and a specialist in relations between the nation and militarism, Â-ztan has been repeatedly tried for "insulting the President" and "terrorist propaganda" because of his articles and petitions.

"This republican nationalism was generated by a sense of the threat of an Islamization of society and a division of the territory resulting in a crisis of national identity. At the grassroots level this atmosphere manifested itself in the form of the extremely widespread wearing of Atatürk and Turkish flag badges" he says. In addition to these symbols of individual identity but also the state, secular and unitary and of course "indestructible", there were "pop" versions of national songs and marches from the early days of the Republic sung on any occasion. "But that differs from the new wave of popularization of ethnic nationalism that we are witnessing today inasmuch as it was a question of a commodification of symbols known to all and always identified with, whereas today there is a kind of discovery of a distant past, which was absent from the popular political imagination" says Â-ztan.

Thus, throughout the 1990s and in the following decade a new basis for nationalism consolidated, now secular and particularly present on the shores of the Aegean and Mediterranean and with its ethnicist assumptions reinforced by waves of migration from the Kurdish regions.

Sources and manifestations of the current ultra-nationalism

It is through this ideological current and an urban, young, middle class and educated social base that the renewal of ethnic nationalism initially developed. According to Tanil Bora "anti-Islamic allergy" intensified during the long period in power of the AKP and Erdogan. However, this rejection was combined with the nationalist movement's outrage at the talks with the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party), which began in 2009 and the negotiation process with Abdullah Ocalan - leader of the PKK - initiated in 2013.

In addition, the issue of Syrian immigrants, who today number three and a half million, has reactivated cultural, traditional and historical hostility towards Arabs. "As in Atsız, the main precursor of ethnic and anti-Islamic nationalism, the Islamization of society is also perceived as an Arabization that is identified with a kind of decadence. Thus, in the face of the neo-Ottoman vision of the regime, the Islamic-Turkish synthesis, there is a quest for national identity, and it is pre-Islamic references and symbols that are emphasized", Â-ztan argues.

However, the fact that new generations, younger, more urban and with a certain level of education are mobilized in this movement, in this ultra-nationalist nebula, has, it seems, increased the quantity and the quality of the material available to an audience interested in the history, language and mythology of the Turkish tribes of the Asian steppes. "There are many more sources and materials nowadays for those who want to find legends and symbols in this area" says Bora.

Among the popular manifestations of ethnonationalism is Göktürkçe, the language of the "Celestial Turks" consisting of runic characters, such as the inscriptions found at Orkhon. [116] While online courses and videos on Göktürkçe have been

very popular for several years, it is above all the inscription of the word "Turk" in runic character, on t-shirts, hats, backpacks and so on which serves as an ostentatious sign of claiming Turkish identity.

The runic letters also appear on countless Twitter accounts of young Internet users related to the movement, often accompanied by the swastika. However, the reference here is not to the Nazi swastika but to the "seal of Oz" of the proto-Turkish cosmogony signifying reincarnation in another world through union with Tengri (God). If the symbol is indeed common in many Asian cultures - and not limited to the Turks - the meaning of its use in the exhibition of race-based nationalism remains rather ambiguous. A certain sense of national pride from the fact that (even) "Hitler has stolen our acronym" can also be seen in the many debates on social networks about the meaning of the symbol. Along with the Turkish flag and Mustafa Kemal - having thus completed the Ottoman Empire - we also very often see the image of the wolf's head again referring to the Turkish mythology that a she-wolf fed and raised the last surviving child of the Celestial Turks and thus allowed the renaissance of the Turkish people in Central Asia.

Groupuscules and political formations

Apart from the exhibition of symbols, this ultra-nationalist nebula is expressed through the journals and Twitter and Facebook accounts of a multitude of associations and groups, some organized nationally, others simply small local groups, bearing names such as "Atsız Youth", "Turanian Movement Platform", "Turan-Turkish Union", "Turkic Mountain of God", "White Turks Movement" and so on. Directly racist remarks against other ethnic groups such as Kurds, Armenians or Syrians are rare in official journals and accounts where the merits and superiority of the Turkish race are praised. It is rather on the personal accounts that the hatred of Kurds

(“terrorist”, “traitor”, “underdeveloped” and often assimilated to the Armenians who constitute a kind of historical enemy) is allowed expression. At the directly political level, two issues are in the foreground. First of all, ardent support for the repression of the Kurdish movement (in Turkey and Northern Syria, or in Rojava), which is often expressed rather violently. But also, the defence of the Turkish people (Uyghour) in Xinjiang – named as Eastern Turkistan – persecuted by the Chinese authorities. Erdogan’s regime is thus criticized for having mobilized for the Syrian, Palestinian and Rohingya (Myanmar) Muslim peoples, while abandoning their Chinese counterparts to their fate.

At the level of political representation, the IYI Party (“Good Party”) led by Meral Aksener attempts to capture this secular nationalist anti-AKP dynamic. Resulting from a split with the MHP which was allied with Erdogan, the party of the former Minister of the Interior of the 1990s – the darkest hours of the war against the Kurds – adopted as an acronym the seal of the Kayi tribe which was one of the 24 tribes forming the Turkish tribal union of Oghouzes. This tribe, whose seal is made up of symbols evoking the letters IYI, was also at the origin of the Ottoman dynasty in the thirteenth century. In the parliamentary elections of June 2018, the IYI Party obtained 10% of the votes, a large part of which came from the MHP and to a lesser extent from the most nationalist fringes of the Kemalist centre-left People’s Republican Party (CHP). Even though the party relies mainly on far-right cadres from the MHP, it aims to become a centre-right formation. Thus, it does not lean towards an ultra-nationalist discourse but adopts a position which is critical of the

regime on “ordinary” nationalist and secular positions (especially on the issue of Syrian migrants).

Nationalism rhymes with militarism

However, a decisive step in the popularization of racist nationalism was the resumption of war in the south-east of the country, in the Kurdish region. Following the parliamentary elections of June 2015, when the AKP lost the possibility of forming a government by itself, thanks in particular to the results of the pro-Kurdish left-wing party HDP, Erdogan put an end to the negotiation process. He had already made a nationalistic turn in the previous months, considering that the negotiations would not allow him to obtain more Kurdish votes. “Erdogan and the AKP thus opted for a military resolution of the Kurdish question. As we already observed during the war of the nineties, militarism goes hand in hand with nationalism. It was also a way for Erdogan, weakened, to establish new alliances within the state with the nationalist sectors” says Ismet Akça, a leading militarist political scientist dismissed for signing a petition for peace with the Kurdish people. The violent repression carried out by the police and special operation units (the PÄ-H and JÄ-H) in the course of the winter of 2015-2016 and the traces it left in ravaged neighbourhoods were relayed through social networks and the media.

“We then witnessed an assortment of symbols, slogans, oaths and wall hangings which were Islamic-nationalist on the one hand and pre-Islamic-Turkic on the other” he says. Among the latter is particularly the

extremely widespread wearing of mufflers and shields embellished with rune letters, or images of wolf heads on uniforms and helmets. More expressive are the inscriptions on the walls such as “If you are Turkish be proud, if you are not, obey”, “Abortion should be free for whores, otherwise it is we who must take care of their offspring”, “You must submit to the Turk”, “The fangs of the wolf are blooded, be afraid”, “You will see the strength of the Turk” and so on. According to Ismet Akça “just as in the 1990s, the climate of war and patriotic exaltation is not limited to militarized regions and spreads throughout society. There is therefore another period of popularization of ultra-nationalism, but obviously the symbols change from one period to another”.

Having been debated in parliament at the initiative of HDP deputies, the wearing of badges, stickers and other material not in accordance with the regulations was finally banned by the armed forces. However, many testimonies indicate that the wearing and the exhibition of these nationalist symbols is still very frequent not only among soldiers at the front (in Afrin in Syria for example) but also among ordinary soldiers performing their military service.

If the learning of the alphabet of the celestial Turks and the ostentatious display of mythological symbols could be perceived as a kind of sub-culture, reactionary but still limited, the atmosphere of nationalist conflagration and militaristic effervescence provoked by the regime has allowed this anti-Islamic ethnic nationalism to unfold while combining with that of the government. “What is both distressing and frightening is that despite the range of different nationalisms that already existed in Turkey, it was not enough ...” sighs Professor Güven Gürkan Ä-ztan.

Solidarity with the Sudanese revolution!

10 March 2019, by **Fourth International**

The inhabitants of the city of Al Damazin (the capital of Blue Nile State), followed by those of Atbara in the north-east of the country on 19 December, were the first to protest against the tripling of the price of bread, against a background of drastic austerity measures, inflation and massive corruption driven by the government. Then the demonstrations spread to the rest of the country and to the capital Khartoum, demanding the overthrow of the regime. Despite the repression that has already left dozens dead, thousands wounded and tortured, the uprising has become massive and deeply self-organized, developing an extraordinary imagination to propose peaceful initiatives on a daily basis.

This movement stands against the power monopolized by President Omar Al Bashir, a military man who seized power in 1989 with the intention of never letting go, who, with his entourage, corrupted the various security apparatus and his party the National Congress (formerly the Islamist National Front). This clique has repeatedly appropriated the country's wealth and reduced democratic freedoms and the rights of women and oppressed minorities.

El Bechir is charged with war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide by the International Criminal Court in The Hague concerning repression in Darfur. This led to the secession of Southern Sudan in 2011, where oil wealth was concentrated, and Sudan has since been plunged into economic slump. Recently, Al Bashir tried to save his regime by approaching the Saudi Arabian monarchy, the Egyptian dictator Al-Sissi, Putin's Russia, Bashar Al Assad and the far-right

government of Israel. Salah Gosh, the head of Special Services, was also able to travel to France in the autumn to meet with an official from Macron's party.

At the same time, the Sudanese regime is zealously implementing the IMF's anti-grassroots economic programmes: cuts in public services, privatisations and increases in basic prices.

Power had already been challenged on the streets in previous years, especially by students, but today we are witnessing the country's transition into a revolutionary process of the kind that emerged in the Arab region in 2011. The organisation of the uprising was first and foremost driven by the Sudanese Professional Association (SPA), composed of networks of doctors, teachers and other civil servants and professionals. They kept the principles and memory of class struggle trade unionism alive while the unions were put under the total control of the regime, and progressive militancy severely repressed over long decades (We should remember that the Sudanese Communist Party was one of the most massive in the Arab world). They have been able to combine this memory and give a prominent place to youth but also to women, which allows a strong inventiveness and the necessary size and strength in the current situation.

Under this impetus, the revolution adopted a plural political and organizational leadership called Forces of Freedom and Change, with a founding document of the same name that lays the foundations for a democratic break with the regime and its policies. This coordination publishes a weekly press releases

presenting a daily timetable of mobilizations, but also daily guidelines, district by district, taking into account technical and safety aspects. "Committees of resistance at the grassroots" have been created as part of this collective process.

The revolution set itself the objective of a "political" general strike through peaceful means, alone, capable, according to it, of overthrowing this power, and leading to a truce declared by the armed opposition. The movement's objective is a "political" general strike with peaceful means. While the broadened nature of this branch to include various unions or parties currently limits the social aspects of its programme, the convergence with the organized labour movement is beginning, it has thus taken up the demands of striking Port Sudan port workers against the privatization of the container terminal, which is intended to be bought by a Philippine company.

The Fourth International expresses its full solidarity with this powerful uprising of the Sudanese people, and calls for an end to repression and the release of detainees. We wish them every success in their goal of overthrowing an autocratic regime that has been responsible for the suffering of the Sudanese people for too long. We hope that this dynamic will contribute to the momentum of popular struggles

*Adopted unanimously by the
International Committee*

of the Fourth International

Amsterdam

5 March 2019

Catalonia/Spanish State: "A trial against

democracy”

9 March 2019, by **Martí Caussa**

If people examine the events that took place between September 20 and December 27, 2017 in Catalonia objectively, they will see that there was no rebellion, for the simple reason that there was no violence. There were demonstrations, civil disobedience, a massive referendum, a general strike and a declaration of independence with no practical effect. All these peaceful actions for the defence of liberty should not be criminalized and still less lead to such punitive criminal charges.

The accusation of rebellion is based on a manipulation of the facts, supported by the absence of separation of powers. This is a manoeuvre to try to distort the interpretation of the Penal Code, to turn it into a shield that protects the authoritarian evolution of the Spanish state [or Spanish Monarchy]. This would make it possible to further criminalize the mobilization of fundamental rights and freedoms and to characterise any mass and peaceful political activity aimed at putting an end to the monarchical regime established by the 1978 Constitution as a rebellion. These are the reasons why the trial against separatists that will begin on February 12th can be described as a trial against democracy.

All parties, institutions and persons defending democracy, whether they support the independence of Catalonia, its membership of a federal state or its maintenance in a unitary state, should engage in denunciation of and mobilization against this trial. All these political alternatives are legitimate and, in a democracy, they must be defended by electoral candidacies, mobilizations, strikes, referendums and civil disobedience. But when the state identifies with only one of these alternatives, restricts certain freedom to defend others, represses those who demand them and condemns their representatives to long prison terms by characterising

what other European courts consider as the exercise of fundamental freedoms as rebellion, then this state attacks democracy and all those who defend the latter – whether for independence, federalism or a unitary state – must denounce this and mobilize to push it back.

The difficulties of mobilization in Catalonia

Currently, this denunciation of the trial and the unitary mobilization for the defence of democracy are not as massive as they should be in Catalonia and they are frankly weak in the Spanish state. In Catalonia, the strategic divergences between the pro-independence parties have not diminished, they have instead become chronic and have been accentuated by the proximity of the municipal and European elections, which will show who holds hegemony in the pro-independence world.

The Crida per la República (“National Appeal for the Republic”, a Catalan pro-independence movement and political party), led by Puigdemont and Jordi Sánchez, was formed to run unitary pro-independence candidates, but it is unclear whether the Catalan European Democratic Party (PDeCAT) will finally find its place in the new organization. On the other hand, the Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC - Republican Left of Catalonia) is determined to face the elections alone since the polls are favourable to it. Moreover, the Catalan National Assembly (ANC), which was disappointed by the management of the October 1, 2017 referendum by the majority parties, the abandonment of unilateralism and the lack of unity, has promoted the initiative of *Primàries Catalunya* to obtain open lists of pro-independence candidates

in municipalities. Finally, the Popular Unity Candidacy (CUP) will promote its own candidates and is very critical of the bigger pro-independence parties. These divisions are understandable, but the pro-independence world has spent years demanding party unity and is now discouraged to see that not only is there no common road map, but that division has become established.

The social organizations of the independence movement have had difficulty organizing major mobilizations since September 11 (*Diada Nacional de Catalunya*). The anniversary of October 1 was still important, but the mobilizations of December 21, 2018 gathered fewer people. On each of these two dates, the *Àmnium* cultural association, which works for the promotion of Catalan language and culture, the ANC and the Committees for the Defence of the Republic (CDR) organized separate actions and interpreted the unitary convocations differently.

For their part, the *Comunes*, a network of municipalities, who declare themselves pro-sovereignty, have voted against the application of Article 155 of the Constitution [an emergency measure applied by the state to control the autonomous communities] and are clearly opposed to the imprisonment and the exile of activists, continue to promote very low-level mobilizations, beyond the statements and participation of some of their best-known personalities.

To meet the challenge posed by the beginning of the trial of the pro-independence leaders, a change is needed. Strategic differences will not disappear, but it would be useful to discuss these as openly as possible without interfering with the necessary unity of action. Electoral rivalry is inevitable, but disqualifications should be avoided, as they reinforce

advocates of repressive involution. And it would be necessary to build a very broad unity to denounce the trial against democracy which is opening before the Supreme Court, to turn this event into a denunciation of the monarchical regime, into a great mobilization for the acquittal of the accused, for civil rights and for a political solution that recognizes the right of Catalonia to decide its future. There should be a unity of parties, bodies and individuals into a single entity at the level of Catalonia, and into thousands of entities in all cities, neighbourhoods and communities of the country. This is where we could find all the defenders of democracy, without distinction between pro-independence and non-independence. A unit which would have as priority unitary mobilization around the points on which there is consensus, along the lines of the Som 80% platform ("we are 80%", the platform of Omnium).

... and in the Spanish state

The situation in the state as a whole has become more difficult following the outcome of the Andalusian elections. The attitude of the government of Pedro Sánchez (from PSOE, in government since June 2018) is deplorable: the dialogue with Catalonia is limited to offering the possibility of voting on a new status of autonomy and the only measure to improve the situation of prisoners has been to allow their transfer to Catalonia for a few months, whereas this is a right. The public prosecutor's office continues to maintain the charge of rebellion and sedition, with 95 and a half year sentences for the nine accused in the Supreme Court who have just been transferred to Madrid. The weakness of the

democratic convictions of the government of Pedro Sánchez, reasons of state and the fear of criticisms from Ciudadanos and the Popular Party (PP) do not allow us to hope that there will be an initiative with a view to the acquittal of the Catalan prisoners or a dialogue with Catalonia.

This attitude contrasts sharply with the position taken by the Spanish Government towards Venezuela, where it is ready to recognize Juan Guaidó as interim president, an illegal action according to the charter of the Organization of American States (OAS) and according to the Venezuelan constitution, to favour a man who has won no election and can only rely on the support of a large number of protesters (but whose number is no greater than those who support Maduro), and who is taking part in the coup organized by Trump to overthrow the Maduro regime. In other words, the government of Pedro Sánchez ignores all legal and democratic procedures to support a rebellion that is part of a coup d'état while, in the case of Catalonia, it supports the accusation of rebellion to ignore and repress the democratic decisions of the majority of the Catalan people expressed in elections, demonstrations, consultations and referendums.

Podemos remains the only state-wide force to defend the right to decide by referendum, which recognizes that the pro-independence leaders are political prisoners who should not be in prison; but this position has not yet led to mobilization for the freedom of these prisoners. Instead of using its influence to win over socialist activists to these positions, Podemos is ready to give up doing so to get closer to the leaders of the PSOE.

Mobilisations of solidarity with Catalonia have been significant in the

Basque Country and to a slightly lesser extent in Galicia, but in the rest of the Spanish state they have only had the support of anti-capitalist sectors of Podemos, radical left-wing organizations and social movements; only in certain cases, such as that of "Madrileños por el derecho a decidir" has it been possible to build a unitary solidarity organization. It is these sectors that have been responsible for explaining that what is at stake in Catalonia is not fundamentally a question of independence or unity, to opt for Catalan or Spanish nationalism, but a question of democracy, people's ability to decide on all matters that concern them.

A risk and an opportunity

It is not certain that the opening of the trial will significantly change this situation. If this is the case, we will see new restrictions on liberties, a reinforcement of authoritarian democracy and parties of the extreme right (Ciudadanos and PP) and the neofascist extreme right (Vox). When democracy is not defended by active or passive means, it is always reaction that benefits.

But the trial at the Supreme Court also offers an opportunity. Because the prisoners will make a political defence, they will denounce the state and it will not be able to silence them, even if the coverage of the television and state-wide newspapers is as bad and partial as it was in relation to September 27 and October 1 and 3. All those who, like us, defend democracy, have the duty to seize this opportunity, to mobilize and transform the trial into a #JoAcuso [I accuse] against the monarchical regime of 1978.

The Activism of Angela Davis

8 March 2019, by David Finkel

Times change. When the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute (BCRI) was intimidated into cancelling the 2019 Fred Shuttlesworth award it had announced for her, the charges hurled at Angela Davis weren't that "she's a lifelong revolutionary and a communist," or "she supported the Panthers," or "she wants prison abolition!" — all of which are true — but that "she's antisemitic," which is absolutely 100% false.

Angela Davis, especially in recent years, is outspoken in support of Palestinian rights and freedom. That's why she, like many other supporters of the Boycott/Divestment/Sanctions (BDS) campaign opposing Israel's system of discriminatory laws and

daily atrocities in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, are smeared with the "antisemitic" label. Congressional representatives Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib, the first two Muslim women elected to the U.S. Congress, are of course also recent targets of this assault.

The BCRI cancelled Davis' award when it received a letter of "concern and disappointment" from the local Holocaust Education Center. But another sign of changing times is that the cowardice of BCRI's leadership blew up in their face.

The Birmingham mayor and city council came to her defense, as did a huge outpouring from civil rights, Palestinian and Jewish voices and

organizations, including more than 350 scholars and Civil Rights veterans who issued an Open Letter in support of Angela Davis and Palestinian rights. After a quick turnaround the award was reoffered.

Once upon a time, the U.S. Civil Rights Movement and pro-Palestinian advocacy were supposed to remain separate, and the liberal wing of the "pro-Israel" lobby worked overtime to keep it that way. No longer. Struggles for freedom, self-determination and human rights can't win in separation from each other. Great respect to Angela Davis for helping spread that message!

[Against the Current](#)

Angela Davis: Relevant as Ever After Thirty Years

8 March 2019, by [Alice Ragland](#)

Women, Culture, and Politics, a compilation of speeches shedding light on struggles that Black women face in a white supremacist, capitalist, imperialist world, was published (NY: Random House) in 1989. Yet Davis's words remain as relevant today as they were back then. They should be revisited by anyone interested in engaging in and learning more about global struggles for justice.

In light of Women's History Month, I recommend three key takeaways from the book that are as necessary today as they were 30 years ago.

1. The women's movement still needs to take seriously the concerns of poor and working class women of color.

We are living in an era of #MeToo, #TimesUp, #MuteRKelly, and other movements to bring to light the abuse that women face daily. Pussy hats and women's marches occur against a backdrop of the continued violence

and devaluation that women face. Yet even within these movements, race and class biases mute the voices of women of color, including and especially Black women.

Angela Davis warned in 1989 that the women's movement was not as effective as it could be, because white middle-class women failed to focus on the needs of poor Black and Latinx women. And this is largely still the case. Issues that disproportionately have a negative impact on poor women of color, frequently marginalized in discourse on women's equality.

Davis's call to action in Women, Culture, and Politics needs to be central to the current women's movement:

"We must begin to create a revolutionary, multiracial women's movement that seriously addresses the main issues affecting poor and working-class women. In order to tap

the potential for such a movement, we must further develop those sectors of the movement that are seriously addressing issues affecting poor and working-class women, such as jobs, pay equity, paid maternity leave, federally subsidized childcare. . . Women of all racial and class backgrounds will greatly benefit from such an approach."

It's not enough, she argues, for predominantly white middle class women's organizations to simply recruit more women of color, but rather "the particular concerns of women of color must be included in the agenda." (7)

Voices and struggles of women of color need to be central, not peripheral. A higher minimum wage, affordable housing, free healthcare, and ending mass incarceration, environmental racism and police violence are all issues that need to be taken seriously by women in the movement.

2. The United States is still taking away money from social programs while increasing its budget for organized violence.

Women, Culture, and Politics was published toward the beginning of what we now know as the neoliberal era, which entails the slashing of social welfare programs, privatization of public institutions, outsourcing of jobs, and accelerated, unregulated destruction of the environment in a concerted effort to consolidate and maximize the wealth of the wealthiest individuals on the planet.

Even in 1989, Davis already sees the detrimental impacts of the decimation of social programs and jobs traditionally held by African Americans on their communities â€” increased poverty and joblessness, food insecurity, lack of healthcare, and extreme health disparities. The increase of the defense budget at the expense of social programs has hurt poor and working class communities across the nation, with African Americans hit particularly hard.

On this topic, Davis warns: “The increasing militarization of the economy is perhaps the most prominent feature of the structural crisis of capitalism.” (86)

“In cities like Chicago, Black youngsters suffer from diseases of malnutrition that afflict children in the famine areas of Africa, yet school breakfast and lunch programs have been abolished to provide the weapons developers and manufacturers with an unending supply of money.” (71)

“Instead of providing poor people with adequate food stamps, the corporations that make up the military-industrial complex are awarded giant defense contracts.” (62)

Davis further highlights the ways that unending U.S. military interventions oppress people of color all over the world while domestically, poor and

working-class people enlist in the military as a way to make a living or attend college for free, since many of the jobs that those populations traditionally held are now gone.

War-related violence is inflicted on people of color from the Middle East to the global South for the purpose of bolstering U.S. economic domination. Military surplus weapons go back into U.S. ghettos for police forces to inflict additional violence on poor communities of color.

As Davis contends, “we should be...exposing the connections between the threat to world peace posed by the Pentagon and the escalating domestic attacks on the lives of our people.” (70) A message as real as ever today!

3. Violence against women is still an issue that needs to be examined as a byproduct of violent social structures.

The Brett Kavanaugh confirmation and memory of the Clarence Thomas hearings, Harvey Weinstein’s and Bill Cosby’s convictions, the release of #SurvivingR.Kelly, and the calling out of various other high-profile men for sexual attacks have taken place alongside increased discussions about consent on college campuses and #MeToo marches.

As working-class women and women of color are still not receiving the attention as are more affluent white women on this problem, the movement against sexual violence could benefit from Davis’ assessment of the issue as the byproduct of a violent system that needs to be radically transformed. She points to the connections between racism, capitalism, imperialism, and the perpetuation of sexual violence against women.

Davis urges us to think about rape not as a result of an individual personality flaw or a natural characteristic of maleness, but as the consequence of a system based on violent domination. To this point, Davis questions: “Do men rape because they are men, or

are they socialized by their own economic, social, and political oppression â€” as well as by the overall level of social violence in the country in which they live â€” to inflict sexual violence on women?” (46)

She also points out the often overlooked reality that imperialism and war are interrelated with rape and violence against women â€” and the same violent social structures that embolden sexual assault in the United States lead to rampant sexual assault, both inside the military and toward civilian women in occupied areas abroad.

In situations of war and occupation, women’s bodies are used as targets or collateral damage. To further illuminate the connection between rape, fascism, racism and imperialism, Davis says that “Indeed, rape is frequently a component of the torture inflicted on women political prisoners by fascist governments and counterrevolutionary forces. In the history of our own country, the Ku Klux Klan and other racist groups have used rape as a weapon of political terror.” (46)

We live in the aftermath of a genocidal and slaveholding society that produced the rampant rape of Black enslaved women, and its post-slavery continuation when the majority of Black women were only allowed to be employed as domestic workers. The structure of an overtly racist and slaveholding society made this possible, and the current structures of an unequal and violent system continue to enable unfathomable levels of sexual violence against women.

Davis warns that relying on the carceral state will not fix the underlying problems that lead to rape, arguing that “sexual violence can never be completely eradicated until we have successfully effected a whole range of radical social transformations in our country.” (49)

[Against the Current](#)

Iran: What happened after March 8 1979

7 March 2019

Can you introduce yourself ?

I'm Fariba, I'm a communist women and a member of the *8 March Women's Organisation (Iran-Afghanistan)* [117]. It is an independent and democratic organisation with a revolutionary approach. By « democratic », we mean that women from different ideology and backgrounds can be a member of our organisation. « Independent » means that we are separate from the men and from political parties or governmental institutions. Women of Afghanistan are the most oppressed women in Iran, they are not considered as citizens in the country so a lot of Afghan women living in Iran won't call themselves Iranian.

The statistics show that violence against women is increasing. In 2014, there were a series of acid attacks in the city of Isfahan by men who judged that women didn't wear the hijab properly. By then, we understood that we needed to build a coalition with other women to act in the long run and not just occasionally. Two years ago, we started to work in a campaign named Karzar (#kaarzaar) [118] to fight state, social and domestic violence against women in Iran. The campaign involved women from the 8 March organisation but also other activists, women's organisations and leftists.

For us, revealing the link between the three different forms of violence - social, domestic and state - is really essential. If we use only the term « violence against women », leftists often focus only on the violence of the state and ignore domestic violence. When you speak about social violence (that is violence in public spaces) or domestic violence, some feminists have a tendency to downplay state violence. We argue that there are different spheres of violence that work together and reinforce each other and

that we have to fight them all.

Another important political position of Karzar is that we all agree that there is no possibility that women's situation can improve without overthrowing the Islamic regime of Iran. There are other political organisations in the opposition of the regime such as the People's Mujaheddin (National Council of Resistance of Iran) who are pro-imperialist or the Monarchists, but we are totally different from them too. Karzar is a coalition in exile, most of the women live in Belgium, England, The Netherlands, Germany, Canada, Turkey and Sweden. Some women in Iran do follow us but we don't make any official contact because it is too dangerous for them.

What are the key points of the situation in Iran ?

After the takeover of the Islamic regime in February 1979, we always had resistance in the society. But, last year, in Dey mah [119] there was a major class uprising that changed the whole political atmosphere. Before that, the hegemony of the political ideology of opposition was reformism. If you wanted to do something, everyone was answering you "we need time", "we can change something with another President"... We changed some faces like Moussavi, Khatami or Rohani but it didn't change anything in our political situation because all of them defend the interests of the ruling class.

The Dey protests were really important because nobody could believe the huge anger of the people who shouted that they didn't want the Islamic regime anymore. Poor people, ethnic minorities, women and men, took to the streets in hundred of cities and villages that, as a political activist, I didn't even know existed. It was a snub to the reformists who spread the idea that the working class and less educated people support the regime.

Since the Dey protests, the reformists lost some power and it is the best moment to talk about changes and alternatives.

This year, 2019, is the 40th anniversary of the takeover of the Revolution by the Islamic regime. At that time, the Islamic fundamentalists took the power but the revolution wasn't made by them. It started with leftist, communist and secular organisations. The leftists did a big mistake by thinking that they could go hand in hand with the Islamists against the Shah [120] and the imperialist powers. Because most Iranian people are religious, they thought that they could use Khomeini [121] as an Islamic ideological leader for the revolution and that they will be able to change the society after it. But Khomeini had his own plans, he wanted to build an Islamic State and the Hezbollah party [122].

After two years of political freedom just after the revolution, the regime began to forbid all other political parties. Over 7 years, they arrested and killed thousands and thousands of activists and political opponents. We lost them physically but we also lost their experiences, this is a big loss for the young generations who have lived only under the hegemony of the Islamic regime. Most of the rest of the « generation of the revolution » is either in exile, or not politically active anymore. In the nineties, the regime started to give some freedom for reformist parties to be built but not parties built by the people, they were parties, organizations and unions built by the reformist part of the government, parties built from the top and controlled by the regime. They made fake « trade unions » and fake « organisations » to control and profile activists.

Ten years ago, before the « Iranian green movement » in 2009, we had a

movement of students, workers, teachers and women. After the uprising of December 2017, all those movements and especially the environmentalist, the women, the drivers, the nurses and the teachers, became more radical. For example, there are new unofficial trade unions trying to stay independent from the state like the workers struggle of the sugar refinery of Haft Tapeh.

This radicalism doesn't come from nowhere. During the last ten years, the Iranian regime had to establish more and more relationship with western advanced capitalist countries. They call themselves anti-imperialist but this is just varnish. They had the illusion that those relationship will help them overcome the effects of the worldwide capitalist crisis.

Rohani signed the nuclear deal in 2015 with the P5+1 (America, Russia, China, United-Kingdom, France and Germany) which brought more capital and enabled them to sign official contracts with the cartels. But, in every country, neoliberal policies increase the gap between the rich and the poor. In May 2018, Trump announced the withdrawal of US from the agreement and re-established strong economic sanctions. Almost overnight, the prices of essential goods tripled. Can you imagine that? You cannot find products imported from the west like Pampers [123] or women's sanitary products anymore.

Some workers didn't get paid for one year (one or two months pay during the year is the best anyone can expect). This affects both the public and the private sectors and in fact it is really difficult to make a distinction between them in Iran. For example, numerous guards of Sepah-e Pasdaran, the paramilitary army of the regime, are the owners of so-called "private" companies. A lot of small companies had to close down and a lot of people are jobless for years. We see situations that we never faced, some people sleep in empty graves in the cemeteries because they don't have other shelter.

The climate and environmental questions are also important. Scientists say that many parts of Iran will soon become uninhabitable. The

situations in the countryside is generally worse because some people don't have access to water. Water wars have started in Iran. In Isfahan last week, we could see that they had water again in the famous Zayendeh river but it is mostly for the tourism. The decision makers bring water from other cities and villages, mostly from the areas of Iran where Arabs live. The environmental problem mixes with the national question because the water is taken from poor region where people of the minorities don't have any rights. Isfahan is a good example because it has many steel plants which need a lot of water but the city is in the middle of the desert. Can you imagine? It is really crazy.

The Shah wanted to build industries for the prestige of the city, to bring power in the center. Now, on the one hand (for example in Haft-Tappe) if they want to keep the industries, it takes all the water. And in the other hand, if they close them, there are five thousand workers who lose their job. These are some examples of the conflicts between the needs and welfare of people and the neoliberal agenda of the Islamic regime.

The crisis that capitalism has brought upon in Iran is not just economic, it is also political. There are contradictions inside the Iranian regime but also between the Iranian regime and western countries and between the Iranian regime and other powers in the Middle East. Inside the regime itself, the government don't know how to solve the crisis and there is no unity as there were 30 years ago. Historically, there are two main political positions. There are the ones who think that we need to reinforce the ideologic varnish of the Islamic regime and keep allies like Russia and China against "imperialism" because the opposition against America is important for the supporters and sympathisers of the Islamic regime. On the other hand, there is the "Rohani part" who think we have to develop more relations with the west to fulfil the neoliberal agenda of the regime: to fit themselves into the global market by providing a cheap labor source as well as providing a big market of consumers.

After Trump's last move, both positions are in crisis. We fear a war with America but it is not easy to predict. I think we are already at war, not inside Iran but in Syria, in Afghanistan, in Yemen, in Iraq, in Palestine, in Lebanon. Everywhere the Iranian regime makes war to strengthen its front against America and its allies, such as Israel, Saudi Arabia and sometimes Turkey. There is a strong nationalist tendency in Iran and a lot of Iranians are racist against Arabs, Afghans and other people from ethnic minorities. However, the regime does not acknowledge these complexities: for the Iranian regime, either you are with them or you are with America. This dynamic is really important both for the Iranian and the American regime because it prevents people thinking about alternatives.

About anti-imperialism, one of the biggest mistakes of the communists was that they didn't understand that the essence of imperialism is based on relations of production. Some communists think imperialism is only the USA, because it is the world's first military power and they attack everywhere. But imperialism is relations of production and the Iranian regime was never anti-imperialist. From the very beginning, they had the exact same interests in international economic relationships as defined by imperialism. Some parties like PTB [124] and other currents make that mistake, but they didn't experience the kind of revolution we did.

The Iranian regime reproduces imperialistic economical relationships with its neighbours, for example in Syria. So, they cannot call themselves "anti-imperialist". For that, they would need to be socialist, which Iran has never been so far. It's a very big mistake of some parts of the Western left to support this regime and consider Iranian regime to be an anti-imperialist regime based on its fake facade. Another common mistaken approach towards regimes like Iran is the argument of cultural relativism and arguing that "Iranians are not ready for socialism, or anti-capitalism, or women's liberation". But it's not true!

Can you talk about the situation of

the women and why March is an important month for the women's movement in Iran ?

The problem of the economic and class gap firstly and directly affects women. Women are the first to be under economic pressure, the first victims of poverty, as everywhere. Poverty and the prolétariat are feminine. In Iran, it's the same.

In most Third World countries, we still have a mix between slavery, feudalism and the modern capitalist wage system. Also, the Islamic State uses religion as an ideological tool of power and domination. The Iranian Islamic regime was the first to build an Islamic State with God as the ultimate leader. All these relationships support and feed the subordination of women that we call the patriarchal oppression. The Imams updated the tenets of Islam from thousands of years ago to use it in a "modern" capitalist state but a lot of the Sharia laws are still based on slavery and feudalism. For example, a father has the right to kill his wife or daughter if he suspects of having sexual relations (with a man?).

Women are trapped in a contradiction because the wage system and neoliberalism give them more right to leave home, to go to work or to study. But, on the other hand Islamic fundamentalist ideology considers their place is to stay at home. That is why the regime imposes the hijab, so that women have to show that when they go out of their husband or father's home, they are still under their control, the control of the state and the control of God. The hijab functions as a portable prison for women.

It is not easy to be a woman under these contradictions. Some revolutionary communists don't understand that laws have a real impact on people's lives. If women want to resist and fight the Islamic regime, they firstly need some basic minimum bourgeois democratic rights to be full citizens. In Iran, when someone kills somebody, he has to pay an amount of money (called Diya-blood money). This money is halved when the victim is a woman. If a woman gives testimony in court, her

words has half of the value of a man's words. This means that you are officially considered as half of a man. You don't have the right to study, to work or to travel without your father or your husband permission. Of course, a lot of women do it, especially women from the big cities, but men potentially have the right to control women and prevent them from doing any of those things. They also have the right to rape and to beat them. If a stranger does rape you, he can easily use the argument that you were not wearing your hijab properly or that you didn't have permission to go out. If a woman is married, it is likely that having a relationship with another man would lead to sentencing to death by stoning.

Two weeks after Khomeini came to power, the first reactionary sign was that women were forced to cover themselves in public. All over the world, the very first attacks of the reactionary forces primarily target women. It is the case in Afghanistan with the Taliban, in Iraq with Daesh (ISIS), in America with Trump.

In Iran, it was in March 1979. During six days, thousands of women went out in the streets to protest against the Ayatollah's fatwa. Compared to the other demonstrations during the revolution, this one was not the biggest but it was mostly women. They were attacked by Islamic militants with acid, guns and razor blades. We call this women's demonstration "the birth of the new women's movement" because it was the first time in the history of the country that women went in the streets to fight for gender issues.

Women went in the streets for the revolution, for economic reasons, against the war and over many other social questions, but against gender oppression. They were really, really, brave to oppose Khomeini at that time because almost everyone accepted him as a leader and almost all the parties considered him as a progressive anti-imperialist leader. Women were the first to understand that the regime was reactionary and they had a famous slogan: "we didn't make revolution to go backward, we made revolution to go forward".

This history is poorly known and not properly conveyed. We try to keep it alive with the women's movement. There are some books, articles, interviews and also the small movie "Année zéro" [125] made by the French Movement for Women's Liberation (MLF). The women's political role at that moment was not recognised by the communist, socialist and secular people. Unfortunately, back then, in some leaflets of political forces and even leftists, women were called "bourgeois", "monarchist", "sympathisers of the Shah family, Ashraf or Farah", "bitch". After the attacks on the women, the regime starts to attack ethnic minorities; Turkman, Kurds, Arab, gay people, and other minority groups. And then, after all that, left parties. As told by a German poet "first they came for ... then they came for me and there was no one left to speak for me".

As women, we have to resist against many things and fight for everything: for what we want to wear, to eat, to say, for the way we want to be or to act, for the right to go to school, to come home late, to play sport,... From first thing in the morning, you start "against my father, my brother, my husband". The regime controls your bed, your privacy: "with whom you are, why, how long and what is the result?". When you resist everything, you are like a soldier who is permanently on-call. Women fight in their own creative ways to survive in our daily life and also to go forward, to change their condition. Step by step. 60 percent of the students in university are women which means that they want to be in the public spaces. Dey mah was important because when the whole society is against the regime, it gives you more driving force, power and place to show that you refuse the control of your body.

The women who took off their scarves in public places did so not only to have a photograph taken but to stay there, to fight, to convey a message. These are women who want to overthrow the regime. For me, as a revolutionary woman whose concern is women's emancipation, acquiring the right to wear what we like is not the goal, though it is a very basic right that everybody should have. Our fight

against compulsory Hijab is not limited to the right to control what we wear, but to choose our clothing has another, deeper level and that is the concept of Hijab. The hijab has a special function, it is the flag of the Islamic regime on women's body. It is the symbol of women subordination, treating women as a commodity and as sex objects. The patriarchal oppression in the capitalist system of exploitation needs to control women's body as a tool for reproduction. It is not just a question of religion and ideology, it has actual material basis. If we get a secular regime it will not automatically mean that the control of women's body will stop.

Why do you think we need an international struggle?

We need to learn from each other, not to copy. We can't dictate our way of fighting to the others but we need to learn from our respective achievements. With Karzar, it is really important for us to strengthen our voices. We don't support either the Iranian Islamic regime, or the

imperialist intervention.

I don't want Belgian women to fight against the Iranian regime in Iran, we can do that. I do want them to fight against their own regime in Belgium, that is their role. If they fight well, it will be easier for us to fight there. Imperialism works because anti-imperialist movements in western countries are weak. If the women's movement has a revolutionary face in Belgium, not a reformist one, of course we will get more victories in Iran. For me, that is the meaning of internationalism. I don't fight only for the freedom of the Iranian people. If we overthrow the Iranian regime in a revolutionary way, we open a window for the people of many Middle Eastern and Islamic fundamentalist countries to fight against their regimes.

We have a lot to teach feminist women in the western countries. If they learn the lessons about the reactionary forces in Iran, they can understand the danger of the far-right. Internationalism is not begging western feminist to come to our

demonstrations and make speeches for us. Of course, it is nice and it shows support, but we need more than that. We need a united comprehensive international fight against the patriarchal class systems all over the world.

Support : join the rally in Brussels in front of the Iranian embassy, Friday 8 March at 2.30pm [here](#)

Further readings :

Dominique Lerouge, ESSF (article 43456), Iran : 39 ans après le 8 mars 1979 :

<http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article43456>

Frieda Afary, ESSF (article 47941), Iran: Ongoing Labor Strikes, Women's Protests and Ideas for International Solidarity :

<http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article47941>

Alliance of Middle East Socialists <https://www.allianceofmesocialists.org/womens-emancipation-gender-and-sexual-minorities/>

The feminist strike extends across Europe

6 March 2019, by Laia Facet

This feminist incursion comes after a decade of austerity policies that have revealed and exacerbated social and economic inequalities. Of course, these have a clear gender impact. The struggles against the processes of privatization and cuts to the public sector of the previous cycle are taken up by the feminist movements in recent years particularly in health, education and social services, as well as the struggles in highly feminized labour sectors such as cleaning or care.

However, the crisis has had a particularly acute impact among migrant women who carry the bulk of reproductive and care burdens throughout Europe, filling the increasing gaps left by cuts and

privatisation of state provision. With different intensities in each country, the presence in the feminist debate of migrant women is already an indisputable and indispensable fact. From one country to another, from the Spanish State to Belgium, demands for the right to have rights are central. With the threatening boom of the most authoritarian and reactionary right, feminism must necessarily shout loudly in an antiracist fashion. This involves taking part and building the organisations of migrant and racialized women that exist in Europe.

Precisely that same authoritarian boom began an attack on the rights and freedoms of women, trans people and the LGTBI + collective as a whole in recent years. Attacks that have

consequently generated a reaction, politicization and mobilization of these same sectors. Among these struggles, we can highlight the struggle for abortion and reproductive rights in Poland or Ireland, to give examples of the most important mobilization.

Evidently, the fight against sexist violence has been a vector of radicalization on a world scale, including in Europe. This conflict has precipitated the entry of a whole new generation into feminism. Among the changes that are demanded the central one concerns the collective and structural nature of violence. After decades of a mantra in which violence was considered an intimate, personal, family problem ... this feminist cycle has exposed the

systematic, structural and political character of violence. This fight is repeated in practically all European countries from Italy to Denmark, passing through Germany and France. Feminist movements in Europe are planning mobilizations and defending concrete demands.

The response to the strike call on this 8M will be a snapshot although always imprecise, of the state of feminist movements in Europe. We can affirm

that, despite the unequal development of the movement in the whole of the continent, this year more countries will organize on the day of feminist strike. Feminists have launched a strike call for March 8 2019 in places including Portugal, Belgium, Switzerland or Germany where a new layer of women is getting involved and revitalizing the feminist struggle. This spreading of the call to different European countries plays a key role in the expectations we have in the

Spanish State for the success of the feminist strike.

This year there will be elections to the European Parliament and, therefore, to extend and nurture the autonomous feminist movement will be fundamental to build the necessary networks to face the authoritarian offensive that can be expected with the growth of the extreme right. Perhaps this 8M, Europe trembles before the advance of feminists.

Britain Slammed in UN Court Judgment over Illegal Occupation of Chagos and Diego Garcia

6 March 2019, by **Lalit**

In a strong judgment (13-1 of the Judges) argued closely that Britain now has to leave Chagos as soon as possible and that all other UN member states have a responsibility to monitor this. Mauritius, to complete its decolonization, will therefore be reunified with Chagos in the Republic of Mauritius.

The colony British Indian Ocean Territories, set up with the dismembered bit of Mauritius in the 1960s, is equally unlawful. Its days are now numbered. Not that any country other than the USA and UK ever recognized this rump colony, set up so as to make possible a US military base that was outside of all social control.

The judgment and argumentation immediately change the balance-of-forces against the imperialist occupation by the UK-USA of Chagos and Diego Garcia.

The victory is total for the UN General Assembly which, on a Resolution proposed by the entire African union and voted massively 94-15, called for this Advisory Opinion from the ICJ. After fascinating input last year from many states, including Mauritius, judgment was handed down yesterday. The dissenting judge is not totally

surprisingly a USA judge, who maintains the fiction that the dispute was a bilateral one between the UK and Mauritius, thus denying the UN Charter's role in assuring decolonization on the basis of self-determination of nations without any interference in their territorial integrity. And her line, of course, covers up for the USA military base set up there.

This judgment vindicates 40 years of LALIT's struggle. It was finally, first a Mauritian Labour Government that took a case to the UN Tribunal under the law of the sea and won it in 2015, and then the present MSM Government with Sir Aneerood Jugnauth taking the lead, that finally went to the General Assembly via the African union and in its own right, for the ICJ case. This was what LALIT called for from the 1980s.

So, the judgement is also a political victory for LALIT's long-term struggle, showing how, even a small political party like ours, if it acts in a principled way, and keeps up the pressure over time, and gathers allies on the substance of the struggle, builds up a momentum that can bring to book even the most outrageously

domineering powers like the UK and its ally in this illegal project, the USA.

LALIT has, since it was a tendency around a magazine called Lalit-de-Klas from 1976 onwards made the struggle on the Chagos-Diego Garcia issue one of its flagship ongoing campaigns. We were consistently opposing the abject line, mainly in Mauritius, that "Chagos was already ceded to Britain" or "Chagos was already sold to the English". Thus we were "wasting our time", at best. Two of our members were amongst the eight women arrested in the Diego Garcia women's demonstrations, for example, at the peak of early confrontations with the Mauritian police in this struggle. It was in March 1981, Ragini Kistnasamy and Lindsey Collen, together with LALIT supporter Roselee Pakion, and Chagosians like Charlesia Alexis, Lilette Goyaram, Philinne Frivole, Marie Louise Armoogum were arrested during a big street demonstration that was the culmination of struggles from 1977 onwards. And from then, LALIT has continued the struggle both in Mauritius, and internationally. We have built massive support for the triple aim of closing of the US military

base, decolonizing Mauritius (now a mainstream possibility since yesterday), and winning the right of return of all Chagossians, heads held high in a decolonized reality.

LALIT's participation in the No Bases movement gave an international dimension to the struggle, and our members spoke to the entire world Anti-War Movement, for example, in Mumbai in the wings of the World Social Forum in the name of the No Bases Movement. In 2010 and 2016, LALIT held international Action Conferences - which further added to the international dimension.

LALIT members have also run two other parallel campaigns - one in relation to all British MPs. We have won over many. And, the other, which was very difficult, was winning over the first mainstream reporter, the first mainstream news outlet, to take up the issue, which was, curiously, being hidden by some kind of tacit omerta. Once the silence was broken, news literally gushed out. The hegemony of silence is that fragile. To his credit the first to hit the mainstream press was The Guardian reporter who broke the silence on 17 November 2016 at the time Mauritius was threatening to go to the UN General Assembly for a case, and has kept ahead of the pack in this important reporting. He is Owen Bowcott.

In Mauritius, LALIT worked sometimes alone, but also in common fronts, with the Chagos Refugees Group, in Rann nu Diego Committee, in Ad Hoc fronts, and in the Komite Diego in recent years together with

unions like the CTSP, the women's association the Muvman Liberasyon Fam, a Village Council group in Baie du Tombeau and the neighbourhood group MPRB.

A Warning To our Government and About our Government

LALIT calls on the Mauritian Government to beware of its strategy of trying to make money out of renting Diego Garcia to the USA, instead of calling for the decision to dismantle the base in the interests of peace.

LALIT also calls on the Mauritian Government to continue to work in alliance with all anti-colonial forces, especially the African union. We mention this because at the recent summit, the Mauritian Government sent a low-level delegation, which is potentially harmful to future developments in the decolonization of Chagos and in African solidarity on decolonization. The key point in the future strategy is to get the base closed by now relying on the Pelindaba Treaty for a Nuclear Arms Free Africa which is being infringed by the presence of a US base on Diego Garcia, in Chagos.

LALIT calls for the Government to act so as to in practice administer Chagos. This entails:

1. Organize to affreight a ship for an official state visit - with government

and opposition parties, with Chagossians' delegations, with local and international press.

2. Organize to purchase a Government fishing vessel to begin fishing in these Mauritian waters, and organize to have prospection for minerals set in operation. This is in any case already enforceable after the UNCLOS judgment of 2015, which is binding.

3. Set up a Chagos Constituency Number 22 with a representative in the National Assembly.

Victories are never total victories. They change the balance of forces. In times when there are strong right wing currents - with Trump, Duterte, Putin, Bolsonaro, Salman, Orban, Netanyahu all in power - there are also progressive currents growing stronger. We have not just Bernie Sanders on a socialist line in the USA, but a whole array of young members of Congress, many women amongst them. In the UK, we have the Jeremy Corbyn tendency having ousted the Blair line in Labour. And this victory for the anti-colonial philosophy strengthens the line which sees working people's interests before those of the capitalist class and of their State apparatuses. This is what we mean by its contribution to the changing of the balance of forces.

We are publishing the entire judgment for you to get easy access. See our ["Documents" section](#). Just click on the title of the document. Its argumentation is important.

26 February 2019

Whose "Security" — and for What?

5 March 2019, by **Against the Current Editors**

Meanwhile, there are millions of people without security, whose lives are made worse and more insecure by Trump's antics "and by the cynical manipulations of imperialism, in this hemisphere and globally. Where is

"security" for the people of Venezuela, or Honduras, or Yemen, or in African and Asian countries already devastated by effects of climate change?

Start at home. By the time the shutdown of government agencies lurched into its second month, security had taken on a different meaning for 800,000 federal workers furloughed, or performing "essential"

work going unpaid. Mostly not high-income earners, they were worrying about the security of their mortgages, their credit ratings (on which, for those with security clearances, their employment may depend), their access to prescription medicines and health care, even the ability to feed their families. Low-paid contract workers, who will probably never be paid for their lost time, faced outright destitution.

The December-January shutdown ended when it became clear by Friday, January 25th that going into another week would cause the airline transport system to collapse. With increased stress, absenteeism among TSA airport workers and air traffic controllers had already reached as high as ten percent, portending a real threat to public security — to say nothing of airplane and food safety inspections going undone, government monitoring of violent weather not happening, and funds for low-income subsidized housing and SNAP (food stamp) programs running low.

The head of the flight attendants' union, Sara Nelson, and even a mainstream analyst on NBC Nightly News, had gone so far as to suggest that TSA workers' strike action might be needed to end the shutdown. Airline industry executives must have been warning the White House that the health of a significant sector of U.S. capital was at serious risk. That's why a second shutdown was ultimately unthinkable — if only because the air transport system would be going down within days, not weeks.

Trading one debacle for another, Trump of course issued his February 15 presidential "national emergency" declaration in defiance of Congress, Constitutional process and common sense to extract money for his wall. The legal and political catfight over that is just beginning as ATC goes to press. We'll be finding out whether the institutions of U.S. capitalist political "stability" can defend themselves.

There's a lot at stake — more than a garden-variety abuse of power, this is a first-rate impeachable offense and an astonishing precedent if allowed to stand. If a president can conjure up a

national emergency at the border from his own imagination, what's to stop one from ordering mass roundups of "illegal" immigrants, or restoring torture prisons for actual or alleged terrorists (as Trump has advocated), or abolishing birthright citizenship (as some of his advisors suggest)?

Meanwhile the FBI — after decades of murderous abuse of civil rights, now the darling of the liberal wing of the political establishment! — warned that its capacity for criminal investigations was seriously compromised. That could have affected its capacity to monitor far-right white racist hate groups — if only that were happening in the first place. (We are unable to report whether the FBI was forced to cut back on monitoring and harassing Black Lives Matter, pro-immigrant sanctuary, and antiwar activist groups.)

Insecurity at Home and Abroad

It's important at this critical moment to get beneath the surface of the "border security" discourse. Trump's vanity wall is absurd, of course, even in terms of his own definitions of national security. The United States is not confronted with an "invasion" of "illegal aliens" storming the border; drugs in large quantities are arriving through ports of entry, not hauled on people's backs through the desert; sex trafficking and exploitation are not facilitated by the "ease" of entering the United States, but precisely by the difficulty of doing so.

Turn the lens to the south: Mexico faces a real and murderous crisis of guns imported from the United States, which get into the hands of wealthy drug gangs and criminal syndicates. Would a "big, beautiful wall" stop this ghastly commerce? Of course not: weapons aren't smuggled a few at a time by foot traffic — they come in wholesale, through myriad ways and means at the cartels' disposal.

In fact, both parts of the hideous two-way drug and weapons traffic, killing people by the thousands in Mexico and the United States, result from the

monstrous crime of the failed U.S. "war on drugs." That's the poisonous root of this insecurity. Every serious analyst and medical expert knows this, but practically no Republican or Democratic politicians will say so (with the exception of a maverick like Rand Paul).

Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer emphasize the inability of Trump's wall to stop the influx of drugs. That narrow focus, however, is itself part of the problem. More border agents and space-age technology, the Democrats' more "sensible" proposal, could put a dent in the drug flow, but probably only temporarily — and do nothing to prevent the weapons traffic that's destroying so many lives in Mexico and Central America, the biggest cause of people fleeing northward. The accepted "security" discourse serves to obscure the structural and systemic crisis.

Insecurity stalks the lives of millions of U.S. citizens — not from terrorist threats both real and imagined, but by economic and financial desperation. The plight of federal employees after one deferred paycheck, let alone two, is a window on structural inequality. These are fulltime workers, not the highest but certainly not the lowest-paid sector of the U.S. labor force, with scarce financial reserves — thrown into crisis, even though their eventual back pay was guaranteed.

There are more desperate insecurities for recipients of DACA and Temporary Protected Status, which Trump revoked and then had offered to "extend" as part of the Republicans' pre-shutdown border-wall package. The brave intransigence of the "Dreamers," refusing to trade away the lives of their undocumented families and communities in exchange for their own status, put a measure of backbone into the Democratic leadership on this issue. And that's before we even discuss the mass detention and separation of families who are legally seeking asylum.

Far from easing the crisis driving people out of their homelands, the Trump gang has turned to openly promoting a civil war in Venezuela. The administration — even during the U.S. government's own shutdown

â€” encouraged the leader of the Venezuelan National Assembly to declare himself interim president, then called on the Venezuelan armed forces to intervene on the side of the “new government” that’s been elected by no one, and rallied a consortium of rightist Latin American governments and some of its Western allies to its side.

The political-economic implosion situation in Venezuela was already so dreadful that it was difficult to imagine how it could be made worse â€” but true to form, U.S. imperialism has found a way. Far from a peaceful political resolution that Venezuela desperately needs, the prospect of a fragmented Venezuelan military â€” with the involvement of the new ultra-reactionary Brazilian regime and Colombia’s rightwing government â€” could mean horrific violence.

While the governments of Mexico and Uruguay attempt to resolve the Venezuelan crisis, the U.S. neoconservatives work to sabotage the effort. Nothing in the Trump-Bolton-Pompeo scenario for Venezuela points toward any kind of democracy, or toward ending its economic and social collapse.

The United States already endorsed the straight-up stolen and unconstitutional reelection of Juan Orlando Hernandez in Honduras, accompanied by brutal repression that accelerated the flight of refugees from that country. Washington’s project in Latin America clearly goes beyond Venezuela, to the restoration of the era of total U.S. imperial dominance.

The appointment of Elliot Abrams â€” architect of the Reagan administration’s 1980s genocidal crimes in Central America, convicted for lying to Congress and pardoned by George H.W. Bush, a man who should be serving consecutive life prison terms for crimes against humanity, now dredged up as a “special envoy” to Venezuela â€” shows what Trump, Bolton and Pompeo intend.

The revival of rightwing rule in the strategic countries of Argentina, Colombia and especially Brazil have given the discredited neoconservative militarists a new opportunity to rule

the continent â€” with the approval of half if not more of the Congressional Democrats. In Brazil, the election of the near-fascist Jair Bolsonaro followed the coup-like impeachment of president Dilma Rousseff â€” one of the very few top-level Brazilian politicians not accused of corrupt personal enrichment â€” and the highly dubious conviction and imprisonment of former president Lula da Silva, the likely winner if he’d been allowed to run.

Democratic processes in Honduras and especially Brazil could have offered the region and Venezuela a ray of hope. Now only a popular and international outcry against the imperialist scenario may halt the slide toward the worst possible outcome.

Why a World of Insecurity?

There are urgent and powerful lessons to learn here. “Security” for the peoples of the United States and the world does not grow from border walls, or from expeditionary military interventions, or from sponsoring coups, fake elections and civil wars in countries considered to be “vital to America’s strategic interests.” Those interests themselves are at the heart of the problem.

The internal war erupting between Trump and the U.S. intelligence and security services illustrates how a system generates disasters it can’t solve. Trump, who unilaterally withdrew from the nuclear agreement with Iran, insists that the Iranian regime has violated the deal. The intelligence and nuclear weapons control experts point out that it hasn’t. They do, however, state that North Korea has no intention of relinquishing its nuclear weapons. No, says Trump, that threat ended when he and Kim Jong-un “fell in love.”

There was “*no collusion*,” bellows the president, between Russia and Trump’s 2016 election campaign, as mountains of evidence to the contrary pile up. ISIS “has been defeated” in Syria, claims the White House, while U.S. military intelligence estimates that twenty or thirty thousand jihadist

fighters remain on the ground.

After 40 years of externally manipulated war in Afghanistan and 17 years of the United States’ invasion, the U.S. military cannot stay there, nor can it leave without generating yet another security “vacuum” and chaos.

The most ominous present development, coming at the same time as Trump’s imaginary “national emergency,” is a very real global emergency â€” the United States’ rapidly escalating drive toward war with Iran. At the Warsaw meeting where John Bolton and Mike Pompeo attempted unsuccessfully to whip European nations into line behind U.S. policy, Israel’s prime minister Netanyahu let the snarling cat out of the bag when he “told Israeli media that Arab states and Israel are coming together â€” in order to advance the common interest of war with Iran.” (Trita Parsi, MiddleEastEye.org, February 15, 2019)

Netanyahu posted this “war” message in Hebrew, evidently thinking the rest of the world wouldn’t notice. He later changed the wording on his Twitter account. While Washington’s demands that U.S. allies withdraw from the Iran nuclear deal fell flat, every sign indicates that the United States will engage in continual provocations to create a pretext to attack.

While many previous threats have been more rhetoric than real menace, the present moment has the feel of the 2003 buildup to the U.S. invasion of Iraq – aggravated by the subjective factor of a U.S. president who’s besieged at home and unhinged from reality.

From Venezuela and Central America to Palestine, Yemen and Afghanistan, and from mass refugee detention camps at the U.S.-Mexican border to the disaster facing furloughed federal workers â€” and contractors who will never get their lost pay â€” people pay the price for ruling elites’ criminal mischief. Capitalism and imperialism create a world of insecurity, at home and abroad, for people and for the planet.

[Against the Current](#)

Merchants of devastation - Pulwama and the danger of war in South Asia

4 March 2019, by **Lal Khan**

Merchants of devastation - Pulwama and the danger of war in South Asia

Ever since the bloody partition of the South Asian sub-continent in 1947, the endless history of hostility between India and Pakistan has been a curse for the oppressed masses. Periodically, either one of the two regimes turns this mutual hostility into episodes of acute confrontation – mainly in the interests of continuing domestic politics by other means. The latest incursion into mainland Pakistan and the bombing at Balakot by IAF fighter bombers after the Pulwama terrorist attack, and the subsequent shooting down of two Indian jetfighters by the Pakistan Air force, have heightened the danger of a full-scale war between the subcontinent's two nuclear-armed states. This military escalation has exacerbated a mad rush by the belligerent media on both sides of the Radcliff Line to bring about a scenario described by some as –MAD' – the "Mutually Assured Destruction" syndrome. However there is some method in this madness.

This military escalation has exacerbated a mad rush by the belligerent media on both sides of the Radcliff Line to bring about a scenario described by some as –MAD' – the "Mutually Assured Destruction" syndrome. However, there is some method in this madness.

Sidhart Bhatia wrote on the role of the Indian media in *The Wire*, "When the history of these times is finally written, the media's reprehensible role in creating a climate of hate will merit a special mention...the nightly screaming about the nation, patriotism and Pakistan and the constant hate mongering against –traitors' was done with an eye on the numbers. In a difficult environment, where channels

found it difficult to make money, every trick in the book was legitimate. The audiences were manipulated into wanting it and the channels gave it to them, ensuring viewer sickness – it made business sense." In the Pakistani media the modus operandi was perhaps a little different, but the intent was just the same.

According to Vipin Narang, professor of political science at MIT, "neither side seems to want a war. They have had their –Cuban Missile Crisis' moment and recognise how a couple of wrong turns could set off uncontrollable escalation". In this gimmickry of war and peace negotiations, the Modi regime's prime concern is the vulnerability of the BJP at the coming elections. In sheer desperation, it is trying to arouse the hysteria of Hindutva chauvinism, exacerbating anti-Muslim and anti-Pakistani hatred to inflame mass bigotry and thus secure electoral victory.

Despite the pressures from imperialism, international finance capital and the Indian bourgeoisie, Modi wants to keep a sub-threshold state of near-war to linger on. For instance, just moments after the announcement of the release of the captured Indian pilot, Modi responded with a sarcastic broadside against Pakistan, saying: "A pilot project has been completed; now we have to make it real." While his supporters applauded, most observers found the comment arrogant and crude. Modi is acutely keen to keep militaristic jingoism simmering as a means of luring voters into the BJP camp. Perhaps Modi seems to harbour the misconception that he can continue toying with xenophobia without risking a full-fledged war.

The –moderate' reaction of the

ruling circles in Pakistan has been somewhat more restrained. Imran Khan's gestures of peace and his warnings of the danger of Armageddon have more to do with Pakistan's crumbling economy and the instability that ravages the state. He is desperate to avoid letting the conflict go beyond the brink, something that could bring down his short-lived government and bring Pakistan's mounting crisis to disaster.

For long years now, the spymasters of Pakistan and India have maintained the pretence that they don't really sponsor terror groups carrying out subversive activities in each other's vulnerable regions. In fact, the Indian deep state wants to destabilise Pakistan by interfering in Baluchistan and other vulnerable regions where the Pakistani state has been rocked by chronic dissent and at times episodes of armed struggle by local nationalist movements. Likewise, Pakistan's deep state has the long-term aim of wrenching Muslim-majority Kashmir from India. In the past three decades jihadist groups based in Pakistan have struck targets in India, but the Pakistani state has been conveniently ambivalent in punishing them. In this conflict between the subcontinental rivals as in many others around the world, war by proxy has become a new norm.

The irony is that both states pose to end the plight and bring prosperity for the Kashmiri masses; it's the oppressed Kashmiris that suffer most on both sides of the LoC. In the Indian-occupied Kashmir, the viciously oppressed population has risen up against its oppression at the hands of India's army, the largest deployment of military personnel against a civilian population in the world. The deprivation, religious discrimination and brutality of BJP rule have

provoked a revolt that has rocked the might of the Indian state. One of the main causes of the revolt since 2016 has been the unemployment and deprivation under the Indian occupation. Yet across the LoC in the Pakistan administered Kashmir, according to a government's Bureau of Statistics report released on March 02, 2019, unemployment rate in 2017-18 was 10.3 percent almost double to that of 5.8 percent in rest of Pakistan.

It's a shocking fact that the Indian and Pakistani governments are the world's top spenders on armaments and among its lowest spenders on health, education and social welfare. According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), in 2018 India allocated four trillion rupees (\$58bn) - 2.1 per cent of its gross domestic product - to finance its 1.4 million active troops. Similarly, last year Pakistan spent 1.26 trillion Pakistani rupees (\$11bn) - about 3.6 per cent of its GDP - on its 653,800 troops. The two nuclear adversaries have ballistic missiles capable of delivering these weapons of mass destruction. Achin Viniak in his epic work *After The Bomb* estimates that the costs of the two countries' nuclear programmes would, if spent on social development, have largely eradicated women's deaths during obstetrics, infant mortality and child illiteracy.

To perpetuate their rule, the subcontinent's elites have used the Kashmir time-bomb that was left behind by the British imperialists to keep the region unstable. And yet successive wars between India and Pakistan have miserably failed to resolve the conflict. All negotiations have failed. Individual armed attacks, sans movements, have only furnished the occupying army with an alibi to perpetuate its tyranny and oppression.

For the last seventy years, the world's superpowers and their subservient institutions such as the United Nations have failed to grant the Kashmiri masses any respite. In a startling confession, the United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres publicly washed his hands of any responsibility to promote a dialogue between India and Pakistan that would pave the way for the resolution of the

Kashmir conflict. On January 18th he said: "I've been offering my good offices in relation to the dialogue between the two countries that, until now, had no conditions of success." It's only mass uprisings by the Kashmiri people that have shaken the occupation forces. The militant movement that started in 2016 defied India's 750,000 troops and even won support from Indian students, workers, academics and left political activists.

Most world powers have their economic and diplomatic interests aligned to a larger India, in terms of markets and potential for exploitation. Even Pakistan's dearest friend China has partially supported the Indian narrative. On 27th February, without referring to the Indian Air Force's cross-border strikes in Balakot on the previous day, China's foreign minister Wang Yi said that it was "especially important to eradicate the breeding grounds of terrorism and extremism".

Arundhati Roy wrote on the recent escalation of the conflict: "The country might be poised on the edge of a war with Pakistan or more likely against the people of Kashmir...the Modi government was making moves to push the country into a war-like situation to make the people forget the myriad oppressions the current regime had inflicted on them. The Modi government had promised to create two crore jobs every year. But unemployment was skyrocketing. One per cent of rich Indians had wealth equivalent to the combined wealth of 71% of the population."

By exacerbating the economic and social onslaught by India's coercive capitalism upon the masses, the Modi regime has aggravated a greater mass resentment. The world's so-called "largest democracy" has the largest concentration of poverty in the world. Wars and conflicts are systematically used to obscure the working people's revulsion and their growing revolt against the system. In such frenzied periods of aggravated hostility the bosses inflict further attacks on the living standards of the working class.

If the rulers of India have exploited the tension of this military confrontation to attack the ordinary

people, so too their Pakistani counterparts have also not been lagging. Just during these two weeks of these sharpened hostilities, they have drastically increased the prices of petroleum products, gas and electricity. The inflation rate has shot up to a record 8.2 per cent. Once again the economic costs of this war hysteria will be laid upon the shoulders of the ordinary people of the two countries.

Despite his Hindutva chauvinist hysteria, Modi might still end up losing the election. But the threat of war and devastation for the almost two billion inhabitants of south Asia will linger on. Without this state of enmity and hatred, the rule of the elites would be precarious. There would be no justification for the massive military arsenals and expenditures of both sides. Hence the region's elite and the top brass have a vital stake in maintaining this mutual hostility. At the same time, the imperialists and their military-industrial complexes extort huge profits from their arms sales to India and Pakistan. However, their heavy investments in these countries that extract billions from the sweat and blood of the region's workers and resources are also put at risk by the threat of an actual all-out war. It's one thing to start a war, but something totally different to contain once it unravels.

History is witness to the fact that from the wombs of wars often arise revolutions. The First World War was brought to an end by a chain of mutinies and uprisings culminating in the Russian revolution. The aftermath of the Second World War saw the revolutionary uprisings throughout Asia, Europe and beyond. The Chinese revolution of 1949 was perhaps the second greatest event in history. In the united India of that time, the revolution of 1946 spearheaded by the sailors of the Royal Indian Navy could easily have changed the course of world history. The Indo-Pak war of 1965 was followed by the eruption of the 1968-69 revolution in Pakistan, and even after her victory in the 1971 war Indira Gandhi was later overthrown by an upsurge of the Indian masses.

Serious experts of the ruling classes are worried at the prospect of such outcomes; hence they try to avoid wars. But the social and economic turbulence that arises from the crisis of their rotting capitalist system forces the ruling class to maintain warlike conditions to divert the class struggle and forestall the danger of revolution. This dilemma of the ruling classes is an inevitable outcome of their obsolete system. Hence, to expect any profound or lasting peace within the confines of the present system would be a delusion and its propagation a deception.

Lenin wrote on May 14, 1917: "All wars are inseparable from the political systems that engender them. The

policy which a given state, a given class within that state, pursued for a long time before the war is inevitably continued by that same class during the war, the form of action alone being changed... Nothing but a workers' revolution in several countries can defeat this war. The war is not a game, it is an appalling thing taking toll of millions of lives, and it is not to be ended easily."

The current hysteria can backfire sooner rather than later. The misery, deprivation, bloodshed and poverty perpetuated by this system after seventy years of so-called independence has left the masses in agony and rage. There is a seething

revolt against this system below the surface. The ruling classes cannot crush the working classes under this millstone of bigoted frenzy, loathing and wars. Paradoxically these could boomerang into the eruption of a mass movement with the class war coming to the forefront throughout the subcontinent. In such conditions the nationalistic and religious hatreds will be swept asunder once the masses arise in revolt on the basis of class unity. A victorious socialist revolution will not only change the socio-economic system and the character of the state; it will also transform geographical impositions and the course of history" uniting the oppressed of the whole region into a socialist federation of South Asia.

Pulwama "End the pernicious cycle"! No to war

3 March 2019

Terrorism is not a reference to any category of persons but refers to a particular method, technique or tactic that involves the killing or injuring of innocent civilians or, outside of a battle or war zone, of even soldiers who by virtue of the distinctive nature of the attack are rendered completely defenceless. Precisely because terrorism is an act of this kind it can be and is carried out by the individual, a group, or larger collectivities like the apparatuses of the state. 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.Â

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.Â

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.Â

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.Â

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.Â

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.Â

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.Â

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.Â

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.Â

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.Â

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.Â

A consultative process from both sides must start 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.

The condition of the ruling classes of India and Pakistan is such that we can not rule out a short sharp border clashes, lethal surgical strikes or a belligerent militaristic act to satiate the thrust of the reactionary hysteria they have evoked for gaining votes on the basis of Hindutva chauvinism.

In the ongoing rhetoric of war and the hysteria being propped up by the subcontinent's elite, once again truth and sanity are the foremost victims. It's the organic nature of the region's postcolonial bourgeoisie being reflected in their hypocrisy, crookedness and deceit of their politics, ethics, morality and character. These odious characteristics stem from their

origins.

External interference and terrorism have inflicted heavy blows against the indigenous movement of the Kashmiri masses spearheaded by the youth. Various religious terror outfits sponsored by strategic interests have been trying to use this situation to the detriment of the movement.

But the struggle of the Kashmiri masses on both sides 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 both parts of 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.

joint statement by

1- Jammu Kashmir Awami Workers Party

Nisar Ahmad Shah

2- Radical Socialist, India
Sushovan Dhar

3- Farooq Tariq
(Personal capacity)

4- Pakistan Trade Unions Defense Campaign
Dr Lal Khan

5- Haqooq Khalq Movement Pakistan
(Peoples Rights Movement)
Dr. Ammar Ali Jan

3 March 2019

Message to the working class of the sub-continent

3 March 2019, by Jammu Kashmir National Students Federation

First of all, let us clearly mention that we have no sympathies for warmongers, national chauvinism and so-called Jihadi militants. We, Kashmiri, believe that with a peaceful struggle and a joint movement comprised upon the masses from IoK, Jammu, Ladakh, Valley, PoK, and Gilgit Baltistan we can attain our destination of freedom. A joint struggle on the basis of class contradiction can ensure our victory, no religious movement or any sectarian stance can help us in our struggle.

Secondly, we cannot turn our faces towards Pakistan or Indian state for help instead we believe that the youth,

women, workers and masses from India and Pakistan are more powerful and trustworthy in our movement.

To all the oppressed working class of Pakistan,

Your rulers and military establishment are snatching every single coin from you in the name of Kashmir war. But this war is only a business motive for them, they rob you and kill innocents. Your money is ending up as a bullet in the chest of a Kashmiri. We appeal you to speak against this brutality. Now, The time is up! Stand up and raise your voice against it. Your courage, support and solidarity is our biggest strength.

Dear Pashtuns and Balochis,

We know that you are facing tremendous difficulties from last few decades. Missing person and beaten to death is a common practice in your areas. The state is cruel and it's very much clear now but by joining our hands against this cruelty we can strengthen our voices.

To the Indian masses,

You also have seen turbulent times. A Hindutva fascist regime is in power and to be in power they are playing with our dead bodies. A war criminal is heading the state and his brutality exposed him in Gujarat first and now in Valley. Communal violence is oxygen for this regime and Kashmir

question is like a heart for its state, pumping the blood of innocents in its veins. There is a huge wealth gap between the rich and poor of India, that the history never witnessed such difference ever.

The so-called biggest and "Shining" democracy also has the biggest slums in the world. 80 crore of Indians don't have access to moderate food. Naxalites are fighting for their separation, while South Indians and Nagas never showed trust in the Indian state. Nagas are struggling for their identity. The state has failed to resolve the genuine issues of the

whole population. Instead by encouraging Hindu fundamentalism they are diverting the attention from real issues. We believe in You, the working class of India, that are in millions. We believe that you will stand up against all cruelties!

Comrades,

Let's join our hands and stand together with fists raised and voices high against all the oppression and cruelties of both the states and its ruling elites. We believe, the powerful working class and mass struggle against all oppression will pave the way towards our destination, the Freedom! not only the Kashmir's

Freedom but the Freedom of the whole Subcontinent, Freedom from Oppression, Freedom from Deprivation, Freedom from Imperialist Aggression. Freedom of Identity, Freedom to Speak, and Freedom to Live.

And the freedom of the subcontinent will be the catalyst for the World's freedom movement,
FREEDOM OF HUMANITY!

Down With Oppression!
Long Live Resistance!
No War but Class War!

—

Turkey in 2019: an assessment

2 March 2019, by Yasar Boran

In Erdoğan's view, the election was an endorsement of his decade-plus rule (he was prime minister between 2003 and 2014); and the ushering in of a new executive system greatly enhancing his powers as president. After the election he triumphantly declared Turkish democracy was "an example for the world."

Although Erdoğan and his party had overwhelming, and highly undemocratic, advantages during the campaign, a sense of optimism in the leadup to the election had grown in some opposition circles. Many believed there would be a second round in the presidential election (which would have been profoundly damaging to Erdoğan's legitimacy), while the AKP's majority in government seemed to be in jeopardy.

A new term for Erdoğan, together with a parliamentary majority and vastly expanded executive powers (approved by a disputed referendum in 2017 during a state of emergency), is a disappointing "and frightening" reality in today's Turkey.

Some writers have pointed out, however, that despite his party's advantages over the political

opposition in money and media exposure, to say nothing of the atmosphere of intimidation and fear in which the election was conducted, Erdoğan was unable to substantially increase his percentage of the vote over previous elections.

The AKP, moreover, lost seven percentage points from the last election, falling from 49.5% to 42.5% (although to everyone's surprise the ultranationalist MHP increased its share of the vote to over 11%, more than making up for AKP losses). The inability of Erdoğan and his regime to extend their dominance thus suggests the persistence of opposition and resistance in the face of severe repression.

Prior to the election, some analysts went so far as to suggest there is a new left in the making in Turkey. In particular, the Kurdish movement and the relative success of the pro-Kurdish and leftist People's Democracy Party (HDP) since its creation in 2012 has been a cause for optimism for some on the Turkish and international left.

The HDP's passing of the 10% threshold to enter parliament in the June election in a deeply oppressive

environment, and the party's presidential candidate Selahattin Demirtaş's garnering of more than eight percent of the vote despite being imprisoned "and therefore silenced in the media and unable to campaign" further suggests there exists a base for radical social change in Turkey. [126]

Such a base could conceivably expand with worsening economic conditions, which reached crisis levels in the months after the election. The Turkish lira, whose value has steadily declined since 2015, plunged to new lows after the Trump administration's imposition of steel and aluminum tariffs two months after the election. [127]

Over the course of 2018 the lira lost a staggering 66% of its value. With no end to serious and deep-rooted economic problems in sight, it might be expected that popular support for the government could, and should, decline along with people's economic prospects.

Repression and

Electoral Politics

Thus, there are two ways in which to view Turkish society from a socialist perspective in 2019. On the one hand, the election results of 2018 appear to further entrench the authoritarian AKP regime government while providing it with a veneer of democratic legitimacy, as Erdoğan and his rightist coalition continue to suppress dissent and supporters rally around the populist-conservative appeal of the Great Leader.

On the other, the inability of the conservative alliance to make deeper electoral inroads demonstrates the failure of the AKP's hegemonic project, and portends instead a possible progressive future. Which of these of these interpretations is more persuasive?

Perhaps more importantly, what does an accurate analysis of Turkish society today portend for the future of social justice and the left in the country?

The regime strategy was transparent. With unemployment and inflation rising, and the value of the Turkish lira daily reaching new lows, President Erdoğan moved elections scheduled for November of 2019 up to June 24, 2018 – a year and a half earlier than scheduled.

Although it justified the early election by claiming the country needed stability in a chaotic geopolitical context (mainly a reference to the civil war in Syria), the government was clearly scared and knew the situation not going to improve anytime soon.

Although the violent elimination of the nationwide Gezi Park protest movement in the summer of 2013 already revealed the AKP government's willingness to suppress opposition with brute force, a failed military coup in July of 2016 provided the pretext for the wholesale eradication of perceived enemies of the Turkish regime.

During a state of emergency lasting more than two years, approximately 107,000 public sector workers were sacked by emergency decree. The centrist opposition People's

Republican Party (CHP) has claimed that at least 5,000 academics and more than 33,000 teachers have lost their jobs. [128]

The government's position is that this massive number of people have links to "terrorist organizations" – that they are either followers of Fetullah Gülen, a U.S.-based cleric and alleged mastermind of the coup; or they are members of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK); or even more implausibly, that they belong to both.

The mass firing of academics and the closure or state takeover of numerous media outlets added to the atmosphere of fear while substantially limiting the range of available views. Turkey led the world in the imprisonment of reporters in 2016 and 2017; it will in all likelihood have the same distinction for the foreseeable future. [129]

The sale of the popular mainstream newspaper Hürriyet to pro-Erdoğan Demiroren Holding in 2018 further cemented mass media support for the government. Although opposition newspapers like Cumhuriyet and Birgün continue to exist, they remain on the margins of public life while fear of government prosecution and closure is unceasing.

Television coverage prior to the election suggests the extent of pro-government bias in the mainstream media. According to the official broadcasting watchdog RTÜK, between May 14 and May 30 Turkish state television provided Erdoğan and the AKP with over 67 hours of coverage; the Kemalist CHP and its candidate Muharrem Ersoy received 12 hours. The new nationalist İyi Parti (the "Good Party," a splinter group from the MHP) got 12 minutes while the HDP and Demirtaş received no airtime.

Privately-owned stations were no better. In the first three weeks of May, news channels CNN Türk and NTV between them gave 70 hours to Erdoğan, 22 hours to the CHP and Ersoy, and 17 minutes to the İyi Parti. [130]

The silencing of the HDP was not confined to a media blackout. Since

the party's electoral breakthrough in the summer of 2015 approximately 10,000 party members, including mayors and city officials, have been arrested. Between the coup attempt in July 2016 and November of the same year 6,000 HDP members were detained and 2,000 were imprisoned.

Party co-leaders Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ were arrested with eight other party members for "making terrorist propaganda" or "being a member of a terrorist organization." Yüksekdağ received a 10-month prison sentence and was stripped of her party membership in 2017; in September of 2018 Demirtaş was sentenced to four years in prison. [131]

Finally, the election was conducted during a state of emergency – historically a frequent occurrence in Kurdish areas that went national after the coup attempt. Since the summer of 2015 curfews were declared at least 332 times in 11 provinces in at least 50 districts, affecting close to two million people and creating a permanent state of exception in much of the southeast. [132]

Although officially ended after the election in July, the new system implemented during the state of emergency allows presidential decrees and executive control over the judiciary. According to Amnesty International, there remains a "suffocating climate of fear" in Turkey despite a supposed return to normalcy. [133]

With all these advantages, the fact that the AKP was compelled to make an alliance with the MHP (members of whom were formerly highly critical of many AKP policies – particularly those recognizing the existence of Kurdish people) prior to the June election suggests the extent of the regime's fear of election losses.

The rightwing electoral alliance was made possible, in large part, by the breakdown of a peace process with the PKK in 2015, thus allowing the government to appeal to the ultranationalist MHP. That large numbers of former AKP supporters voted for the MHP while still voting for Erdoğan indicates that many

Turkish conservatives, though unhappy with the economy and ruling party, were unwilling to abandon the Great Leader or vote for a secular-centrist CHP or liberal-leftist HDP.

Piety and nationalism run deep in Turkish culture, and as elsewhere ethno-nationalist groups in Turkey have fanned hostility to minorities, immigrants, and refugees. Appropriately symbolic of the times was that the first head of state to congratulate Erdoğan on his victory was Victor Orbán, the nationalist rightwing prime minister of Hungary.

A New Left?

Though worsening economic conditions and a spirited campaign by opposition parties failed to dent Erdoğan's electoral popularity, proponents of a new left in Turkey emphasize the bitter hostility of half the population to Erdoğan and his vision of a pious, obedient population. Crucial in this vision is the Kurdish movement and its supporters, particularly as manifested in the HDP.

Pro-Kurdish parties were first formed in Turkey after a 1980 military coup decimated the Turkish left. New social movements around Kurdish and women's rights developed in the 1980s and 1990s, while the Marxist-Leninist PKK attempted to achieve an independent Kurdish state in the region through guerilla warfare.

The government's war against the PKK destroyed thousands of villages and created an estimated two million refugees. The New Internationalist accused Turkey's prime minister, Tansu Çiller, of war crimes in 1994 for profiting from land dispossession and ties to the mafia. [134]

The Turkish state has portrayed all pro-Kurdish parties and groups as extensions of the PKK. Since 1990 the People's Labor Party (HEP), the Freedom and Democracy Party (ÖZDEP), the People's Democracy Party (HADEP), the Democratic People's Party (DEHAP), and the Democratic Society Party (DTP) were all closed by Turkey's Constitutional Court.

With the possibility of a political solution to the conflict in the south and east foreclosed, the continued existence of the PKK serves to fan Turkish ethno-nationalism while militarizing a large segment of society.

After its formation in the early 2000s, the AKP appealed ideologically to conservative Kurds while establishing clientelist relationships with Kurdish economic elites and Islamist groups. The superficiality of the party's ostensible commitment to democratic norms were revealed in 2009, when the DTP was closed.

A ceasefire and peace process between the state and PKK launched in 2012 broke down in 2015; shortly afterward the government began its crackdown on the HDP.

Founded in 2012 as the political wing of the Peoples' Democratic Congress, a coalition of leftwing groups, the HDP is an associate member of the Party of European Socialists and consultative member of the Socialist International.

Between 2013 and 2015 its supporters often likened the HDP to other parties of "radical democracy," specifically Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain.

In contrast to liberal-left populism (espoused by the political theorists Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe), however, HDP ideology is primarily indebted to the American libertarian-socialist Murray Bookchin's ideas on municipalism and social ecology (and, to a lesser extent, the works of Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt).

The HDP describes itself as representing the forces of peace and democracy in Turkey, and is comprised of "representatives of labor, ecology and women's rights associations, artists, writers, intellectuals, independent individuals, workers, representatives of different ethnic and religious groups, the unemployed, the retired, farmers, the handicapped, scientists and those whose cities are being destroyed." Important also is the party's stated emphasis on grassroots organizing in streets, neighborhoods, and cities throughout the country.

While there is nothing objectionable in the HDP's progressive agenda, there are a number of problems in the party that might impede hope for radical change in Turkey. The fact that the party was established on the suggestion of imprisoned PKK founder Abdullah Öcalan is enough to forever damn it in the view of a substantial portion of the Turkish population, who see Öcalan and all who support him as advocates of terrorism.

As Cengiz Güneş has noted, electoral support for the HDP has come overwhelmingly from Kurds — only nine percent of the party's supporters identified as ethnically Turkish in 2015. [135] For large numbers of Turks influenced by anti-Kurdish Kemalist ideology as well as pro-government media, the HDP is, like previous pro-Kurdish parties, nothing more than the political arm of a terrorist organization.

The party's commitment to "democratic autonomy," or "democratic confederalism," is inspired by the writings of Öcalan whose main theoretical influence is now Bookchin. When he abandoned Marxist-Leninism after his arrest in Italy in 1998, Öcalan also abandoned his vision of an independent Kurdish state, adopting over time a position calling for equal democratic rights for Kurds and political decentralization within Turkey.

But in a highly centralized country — where memories of nationalist movements attempting to undermine the integrity of the state predate the Turkish Republic (dating to the Ottoman Empire in the early 19th century) — any suggestion of federalism or local autonomy reeks of separatism.

Critics on the left have also pointed to the reformist nature of Öcalan's ideological turn; some believe Öcalan's ideas have conveniently shifted with the political winds. [136] While advocates of a new Turkish left like Güneş see the HDP's links to European parties as boding well for international solidarity, the desire to appeal to mainstream Western public opinion greatly restricts the party's ability to formulate a radical agenda.

Appeals to the European Court of Human Rights (of which Turkey is a signatory) may be an understandable legal tactic, but it is difficult to see how international solidarity can compensate for an absence of domestic mass support in the long term.

The state's efforts to simply destroy the party is yet another "and probably the most important" reason for caution. It is entirely possible that, as it has in the past, the Turkish state will simply shutter the party and justify its closure with an avalanche of anti-terror propaganda.

While the HDP, in contrast to other Kurdish parties, has made electoral inroads in northern and western parts of the country (especially in the large cities of Istanbul and Izmir), it seems unlikely that the party can expand its electoral base beyond 10-15% of the vote. The best-case scenario for the party in the foreseeable future, it seems, is for it to become a vocal oppositional voice within the government "if it can survive."

Challenges and Possibilities

A number of writers have noted how the AKP in the early 2000s sought to incorporate those previously excluded from the traditional Kemalist elite into its "hegemonic project." Importantly, the party copied traditional tactics of the Turkish left in neighborhood organizing strategies, while deploying a liberal rhetoric to demand women's freedom to wear headscarves and allowing religious expression in public life. Erdoğan's appeal as a "man of the people" solidified the party's power in the early 2000s. [137]

Yet during AKP rule violence against women has skyrocketed, union density has plummeted, and strikes have been repeatedly suppressed by the government.

The murder of women has increased 14-fold since 2002, while reports of domestic violence and archaic patriarchal practices like child brides and so-called honor killings (of gay men as well as women) have also

grown dramatically.

As of 2016, Turkey ranked 130 out of 145 countries in terms of gender equality according to the World Economic Forum Gender Gap Report; it was 69 in the Gender Inequality Index Rank. [138]

The state of workers and the labor movement are particularly illustrative of the challenges as well as the possibilities for a resurgent left in Turkey. In addition to limiting press and individual freedoms, a post-coup constitution in 1982 banned strikes if deemed "prejudicial to public health or national security." While the 1980s and 1990s witnessed the important emergence of new Kurdish and women's rights organizations, the labor movement atrophied in a "capitalist free-for-all" environment. [139]

Since coming to power in 2002 the AKP government has repeatedly invoked the anti-strike law to disallow labor actions while accelerating privatizations and relaxing labor laws. In 2017 union density stood at 8.6%, down from close to 30% in 2001. Turkey now vies with Hungary for lowest union membership in the OECD, with the United States a close third. [140]

Worker accidents and deaths "most shockingly the killing of more than 300 coal miners from a mine explosion in 2014" have increased dramatically, especially in the construction, agricultural, and mining industries. [141]

Yet evidence of labor militancy in recent years is abundant. In May, 2015 workers in the auto industry engaged in a series of wildcat strikes across the country. Workers defied management-friendly unions and occupied factories; negotiations were led by worker-run strike committees and union representatives were absent. [142] Their demands included higher wages, job security, and "significantly" recognition of worker representatives and the elimination of company unions in bargaining. [143]

Strike actions spread to 30,000 workers, forcing European auto companies to agree to workers'

demands. Yet struggles in the industry continue, and the state has unsurprisingly sided with capital.

In early 2018 the Erdoğan government banned a sector-wide strike scheduled for February 2. Although an agreement reached shortly after was hailed by union representatives as a victory, wage increases lag far behind inflation and some sections of metalworkers rejected the agreement.

While strikes and labor protests continue in a number of industries, the state's willingness to resort to blunt force to stop worker protests also persists. In September of 2018, workers at a massive new airport in Istanbul stopped work in protest over miserable working conditions and occupational fatalities.

Gendarmerie teams attacked strikers with pepper spray and over 400 workers were taken into custody. Arrested on a number of bogus charges, a message from those apprehended appearing on the website of the Construction Workers Union) stated the "real culprits are the bosses at the IGA," and "Construction workers are not slaves!" [144]

The Need for Unity

While class conflict is clearly not absent, a cultural and political movement vehicle with the capability of uniting disparate organizations and groups does not exist at present. In Turkey as elsewhere, rightwing demagoguery is currently more potent than leftwing formations.

A distinguishing feature of Turkey is, of course, a level of state repression that makes resistance extremely dangerous. Erdoğan and MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli have, for example, both warned of the "heavy price" Turkish activists who find inspiration in the French Yellow Vest movement would pay.

The fact that Erdoğan and Bahçeli feel compelled to preempt anti-government demonstrations is itself suggestive of their fears of popular opposition. However, while the roots of resistance exist, discussions of a

“new left” are premature.

The joining of labor militancy with mass demands for an end to violence

against women and for Kurdish rights may seem today like a utopian dream. It is, however, more realistic than a hope that elections or street

demonstrations can in themselves radically alter the balance of power.

[Against the Current](#)

Betraying the Kurds

1 March 2019, by David Finkel

It’s certainly true that a couple thousand U.S. troops can’t resolve the Syrian civil war and destruction of that country, and that U.S imperialism has no legitimate business intervening there or anywhere else.

This doesn’t mean that Trump’s plan to withdraw this force has any progressive significance, or anything to do with peace. It’s a move on a regional chess board — and for imperialism, allies are pawns.

Syrian Kurdish forces have been the most effective fighters against the brutal “Islamic State.” They saved the Yazidi population from ISIS genocide on Sinjar mountain, liberated hundreds of Yazidi women from sexual enslavement, and defended the town of Kobane against the ISIS siege. Trump’s announcement might be a gesture to Turkey’s presidentialist-dictator Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and it’s a cynical betrayal of the Kurdish fighters.

Erdogan’s number one priority is crushing Kurdish national aspirations, along with all democratic opposition to his rule. The presence of U.S. troops in northeastern Syria restrains Turkey from launching a murderous assault on the Kurds there.

The imperial knife in the back of the Kurds and their desire for autonomy or independence is a recurring story. At the same time, Saudi Arabia’s murderous U.S.-coddled royal house is driving Yemen to genocidal famine. Israeli and U.S. threats against Iran are provoking Tehran’s buildup of its own asymmetric deterrent — the supply of sophisticated guidance missiles to Hezbollah near the Lebanon-Israel border.

The main point to understand is that imperialism creates problems that it cannot solve. That’s been disastrously evident ever since the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003.

It’s criminal that Democratic politicians, including some supposed liberals, are trying to outflank Donald Trump by striking a more militaristic posture. But it’s a big mistake for well-intentioned folks in the peace movement to say they support or even applaud Trump’s withdrawal announcement. The question isn’t whether this or that tactical move — or verbal posture — by this imperialist administration is a good or bad thing, in isolation from its overall military-political interventionist project.

Trump now says he wants to move the

U.S. troops from Syria into Iraq, in order to “keep an eye on Iran.” It’s not clear exactly what that even means, but it’s undoubtedly part of the ominous and growing U.S. threats against Iran, which can only make matters worse. And Iraq’s political leadership has responded angrily against being drawn into Washington’s anti-Iran crusade, to say nothing of being treated like Donald Trump’s bathmat.

In the region’s horrifying descent into sectarianism, civil war and mass destruction, the Kurdish freedom movement, especially in Syria, is the only remaining force that both represents democratic aspirations and has some military capacity. Despite its limits and contradictions, this is the movement that should command the solidarity of international left and antiwar forces.

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

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