



IV533 - June 2019

Austerity Economics Russian Style: “The state never asked you to be born”

29 June 2019, by **Ilya Budraitskis**

If in the political arena aspirations for a certain kind of stability expressed themselves in votes for Putin, at the level of economic behavior it led to a massive increase in consumer loans. Even obscene 10-12% interest rates did not deter the majority of Russians from taking out credit to buy cars, apartments, refrigerators, furniture, clothes, or simply to spend on drinking and eating. Official “stability” propaganda merged into one with endless barrages of advertising, creating a situation in which the actual drop in incomes over recent years was doing nothing to slow consumption, while consumer debt was constantly rising. So much so that by the beginning of 2019 almost 80% of all Russians in debt earned less than 50,000 Rubles (680 Euros) per month, a quarter of whom faced monthly loan repayments higher than their salary. Poverty multiplied by growing debt is the root formula for social reality in modern Russia.

Putin’s campaign for re-election in March 2018, in addition to calls for national unity in the face of the threat posed by the West, was likely the last time state propaganda made active use of the “stability” motif. Immediately after the elections, the government began to carry out “structural reforms,” at the heart of which were a series of measures to cut

the state budget and increase taxation. The key and most painful policy, to raise the retirement age to 65 for men and 60 for women, was approved by the president in September 2018. No longer was the state promising good things to come in the future. Quite the opposite, this was an attempt to bring the population face to face with the harsh reality. The year 2018 saw a new theme in Russian propaganda, not previously characteristic of Putin’s regime, but well-known in the countries of the European Union—the rhetoric of “austerity”.

The defining characteristic of this new style of politics is that, whereas in the past, cuts in social spending and lowering of incomes in real terms were accompanied by elites’ attempts to make excuses or offer consoling promises of prosperity in the future, now budget cuts, falling incomes, and tax increases are presented as the “naked truth” that must simply be accepted. There is no choice between a range of solutions, one simply needs to come to terms with—“or, as Putin put it in his address to the nation on the need for pension reform, “have some understanding for”—“what is being presented as the only feasible course of action. In this case, the call for “understanding” is more akin to a formality at the end of a train

cancellation announcement than a politician addressing the nation.

This austerity rhetoric isn’t just about such robotic ultimatums. Amazingly, it has also incorporated appeals to Russians’ morality as well as aggressive attacks on so-called “losers” who have become accustomed to living on state handouts. These messages appear designed to be simultaneously depressing and shocking, to make people feel personally responsible for the state of the country, and to cultivate a set of expectations that one can only rely on oneself.

While President Putin mechanically reported that raising the retirement age was unavoidable, like the laws of nature, numerous officials and deputies from the ruling party United Russia subjected the public to some shocking moral preaching. Over the past year, such performances have often racked up millions of Youtube views, accompanied by a flurry of angry comments. In November 2018, the whole of Russia was atwitter over a speech by the head of the Yekaterinburg Youth Policy Department Olga Glatskikh, where Glatskikh complained that “the younger generation believes that the state still owes them.” On the contrary, according to Glatskikh as she addressed Russia’s mistaken

youth, "It's your parents who owe you. They gave birth to you. The state never asked them to." Following Glatskikh's lead, the governor of Lipetsk Region Igor Artamonov declared, "if young people think things are expensive it's because they're not making any money, not because prices are high." Condemning "professional whiners" with higher educations who will only work for high wages, Sergey Vostretsov, a deputy from United Russia, suggested that some Russians "can look for work that suits them for ten years and still never find it, while those who want work will always find what they're looking for."

Far from stopping these political elites, the streams of public condemnation that their retorts have met have only seemed to intensify production of this new Russian austerity rhetoric. Its distinguishing feature is its appeal to the moral sensibilities of a population that it simultaneously asserts has been corrupted by consumption gone wild, overinflated salaries, and the state's social safety net. As such, Russian ballet dancer and socialite Anastasia Volochkova recently called on less well-off Russians to "get up and ask your conscience a question: if each one of them and every one of us for that matter worked and thought about it, what could we do for the good of our country?" The call to consume less and work more in these types of statement organically becomes tied to norms surrounding patriotic duty and personal modesty. For example, Senator Ekaterina Lakhova drew a stark contrast between today's supposedly irresponsible generation

and "those who went through the war, who survived such horrors and hunger," admiring that, "having gone through so much, they still display such wisdom, such clear-headedness!" suggesting finally that, "Maybe it's precisely the stress and deprivation they suffered that made them that way?"

Analyzing the British government rhetoric that ushered in budget cuts in the late 2000s, Owen Hatherley has written about what he calls "austerity nostalgia." Then, the representatives of the political mainstream also called on people to recall times during the Second World War, when the British had to sacrifice their freedom of consumption to something "more important." According to the canon of austerity rhetoric, economic crisis and cost-cutting policies present challenging circumstances that help to strengthen character and teach people to make responsible decisions. Comparisons to the sufferings and shortages that fell to the lot of past generations help the current one to realize the scale of their responsibility before the country and their own children. In order to accept this challenge, the population needs, as one of the deputies of the Russian parliament put it during the discussion of the pension reform, to "get out of their comfort zone" and grow up at last.

The majority of the Russian authorities' liberal critics have explained away this avalanche of aggression as a symptom of the extent to which the political class is out of touch with popular sentiment. According to them, the absence of

democratic turnovers of power and a lack of full-fledged public debate have led to a situation in Russia where officials have simply forgotten how to talk to the public. However, the scale and frequency with which austerity rhetoric is being generated in Russia clearly show that this is not just a matter of the political insensitivity of individual representatives of the authorities. Moreover, the content and logic of these statements differs little from similar rhetoric found in countries considered liberal democracies.

These moral teachings of the rich addressed to the poor not only clearly indicate the presence of a class consciousness among the Russian elite, they also have a specific political goal. These shocking and aggressive statements are being used to remind Russians of the rules of the game that they have come to internalize passively in their everyday lives: only rely on yourself and don't be fooled by the mirage of collective interests. This is the truth of neoliberalism in Russia that over the twenty years of Putin's rule has penetrated much deeper into the pores of Russian society than in Western Europe. A spirit of competition and mutual distrust has formed the foundation for mass depoliticization and submissiveness, allowing for the dominance of the Putin regime, even under conditions of economic stagnation. In order to challenge this, the Russian opposition must question the very logic of neoliberalism that rejects the very idea of society as a phenomenon.

June 10, 2019

Diane Abbott, John McDonnell and Emily Thornberry are correct on Brexit

28 June 2019, by Alan Davies

This is a crisis that is a direct threat to the most important development ever on the left in Britain in modern times;

the Corbyn leadership of the Labour Party, which has opened up a real prospect of a left anti-austerity

government at a time when world politics is moving to the right. That prospect is still there but the Labour

leadership's stance on Brexit, the issue that defines politics in Britain at the present time, is going to have to change.

Labour not only saw its vote collapse, but it managed to facilitate both the rise of Nigel Farage's Brexit Party and of the semi-dead Lib Dems - putting them centre-stage at a very dangerous period of time. Emily Thornberry was absolutely right when she said on BBC, immediately after the vote, that this was because Labour had refused to be clear on the one thing that people wanted them to be clear on in those elections: i.e. where Labour stood on Brexit.

Labour haemorrhaged votes to the Lib Dems and the Greens because those parties were unequivocally pro-remain and for a second referendum in order to achieve it and Labour was not - even after it had become clear that the Brexit that people were promised in 2016 was not on offer. The combined Lib Dems and Green Party share of the vote increased by more than 10 points. Many of these were disillusioned Labour remainers who defected to these parties in the knowledge that they could let Farage in.

Had Labour placed itself at the head of the growing anti-Brexit movement the result could have been very different. Overall, the European election vote was pro-remain with pro-remain at 40.3%. and hard Brexit at 34.9%. The Brexit party result was no surprise. It is not a new party as Farage claims but UKIP mark 2. UKIP polled 28% in the last EU election and this transferred to Brexit with some additional votes mostly from the Tories.

Although Labour went on to win the Peterborough by-election - which was important in that it denied momentum to the Brexit Party at this point - it did so on a reduced vote and because the Brexit vote was split (equally according to John Curtice) between the Brexit party and the Tories and reflected the same underlying situation. The Labour candidate, Lisa Forbes, who beat the Brexit party by just 683 votes, argued that her campaign had been successful because it had ignored Brexit and concentrated on local issues. This is a

seriously wrong analysis that has been widely accepted on the Labour left and in particular by Momentum.

Despite SR's long held opposition to the EU as a neoliberal, anti-working class project, it has been against Brexit since the referendum was announced by Cameron in 2016. This was because the Brexit on offer was, and still is, a project of the hard right shaped by racism, xenophobia, English nationalism, and nostalgia for Empire. A Brexit that would fuel racism and shift the political situation in Britain, and indeed beyond, sharply to the right. The recent election results have only reinforced that view.

Labour's position

Labour was right originally to respect the result of the referendum, but wrong to cling to this position when it became clear that was not deliverable without unacceptable damage to society and a hard border in Ireland between Britain and the EU. It then compounded the problem by advocating its own so-called soft Brexit when no such thing existed. The discussions with May went on even after it became clear that she had no intention of shifting an inch and was using them as a ploy to get a further extension.

The danger with this fence sitting is that it is based on avoiding crucial issues. On the one hand, the further away we get from what was already an undemocratic referendum - in that EU citizens and under 18's were denied a vote - and as material circumstances changed, the less legitimacy the 2016 result has. This has never been challenged by the Labour leadership. Even worse was the idea that it would be possible to leave the EU without reducing the living standards of the vast majority in the process, or that there could be a Brexit that protected jobs. Ironically those areas where the majority voted leave which may well suffer most if Brexit goes ahead.

There is another very important reason as well to have a second referendum, and actually the most important, that is because it has become a democratic right at this stage of the Brexit shambles to have

another vote. A second vote is itself a democratic right as circumstances change. Democracy can't be a once off event that must be imposed despite the consequences and impact on peoples' lives. The government has failed to implement what was promised in the referendum and crashing out without a deal cannot be remotely seen as what people voted for then the natural process must be to go back to the voters.

Some change has happened

There have been some welcome changes since these election results - in Wales and Scotland for example.

In Wales, which voted Leave by 52.5%, and where Ford has announced the closure of the Bridgend plant with the loss of 1,700 jobs Labour have come out clearly for a second referendum - no doubt under pressure from Plaid who came second to the Brexit Party with Labour third. [1] It is worth noting that this has happened under the leadership of the new pro-Corbyn leadership of Mark Drakeford which makes it harder for people to dismiss this as coming from the right.

The Welsh Brexit Minister Jeremy Miles puts it like this: "We sought to reconcile the result of the 2016 referendum with the least damaging kind of Brexit but that effort has now reached the end of the road. The European elections have shown that the electorate remains profoundly divided - and indeed the split has widened with many of those who voted for Brexit in the 2016 referendum now supporting no deal, and many, probably a majority wanting us to remain within the EU.... So, as a Government we will now campaign to remain in the EU.... Any deal will require a new mandate from the electorate: and leaving without a deal must require one also. And - of course - any referendum must include remaining in the EU as an option."

Scottish Labour's shift is less surprising but again take place under the pro-Corbyn leadership of Richard Leonard. [2]

There were also shifts within the Corbyn cabinet. Thornberry's statement is quoted earlier but there has also been more forthright positions supporting a second referendum and a campaign for Remain from both John McDonnell and Dianne Abbott.

Corbyn's response

What is most alarming, however, is that Corbyn himself has not changed his position - even after all this. In his Marr interview on the Sunday following EU vote his position was essentially the same. A second referendum, he said, remained on the table but in the end, it was not his priority. He would prefer a general election despite the fact that it was highly unlikely and the clear dangers involved if Labour entered a Brexit dominated election without a clear position on Brexit.

Brexit dominates politics in Britain and will do for a long time to come. Any form of Brexit offer would be a further decent into the neo-liberal agenda with the Singapore model the Brexiteers have in mind. It would further de-industrialise Britain (in fact it is already doing so) and would further reinforce racism and xenophobia. These are all issues that fundamentally affect the lives of the working class and the future of the workers movement.

Jeremy Corbyn, however, who is the key to this situation, continues to equivocate. Worse than that, according to an article in the Observer of June 9, the reason that Rebeca Long Bailey replaced Emily Thornberry at PMQs on June 5 was as a reprisal for her comments on the EU election results. [3] Corbyn is also considering, the article claims, a shadow cabinet reshuffle and her replacement as shadow Foreign Secretary. This would be wrong. While Thornberry can be criticized for many things, the position she has but on a second referendum is completely in line with the decision of the last Labour Party conference and she should not be penalised for it.

Prevarication is being justified on the basis that Labour needs to protect its position in its Northern Brexit voting

constituencies. But this does not make sense. As John Curtice points out 70% of Labour voters and remainers and that for every vote that Labour loses to the Brexit party it loses three to the Lib Dems! As Owen Jones says in the Guardian of June 8 "The danger is, by the time Labour unequivocally embraces its existing policy, it risks facing all the downsides without reaping any of the benefits: if it loses remain voters in leave seats, including working-class people who are young or BME, it will struggle to win a majority." [4]

In fact, for the perception of Labour to change on this issue Corbyn would have to adopted a second referendum as a full-blooded position. He would have to call for a second referendum as a matter of democratic principle: no ifs, no buts, not deals and no negotiations. If he was prepared to do that then the remain votes would flow back from the Lib Dems to the Labour Party. As Owen Jones says in the Guardian of June 8, it is an issue that he is inevitably going to have to face.

Labour's crisis

Paul Mason had an article in the Guardian of May 27, entitled "Corbynism is now in crisis: the only way forward is to oppose Brexit". [5] I don't agree with everything he says in the article, on the Trident nuclear weapons system in particular, but on Brexit and the EU elections I think he gets it dead right.

He quotes a senior Labour Welsh politician as saying "Leave voters thought we were pro-remain; remain voters thought we were pro-leave and the membership were so fed up they refused to take part in the campaign." He points to a ConRes poll on 21 May which showed that, with a clear position of remain and reform and the call for a second referendum on any deal, Labour could have beaten Farage's Brexit party and cemented the electoral alliance that could put it (Labour) into power

He also points to the role of Corbyn's key advisers - all of whom have long standing Brexiteer positions.

Some of the responses to his article,

from the left, however, have been disgraceful. A particularly nasty one came from Unite in the form of an article by Howard Beckett, assistant general secretary for politics and legal affairs for the union in the New Statesman of May 29 which talks about "sneering traitors" and "flinching cowards". [6] He claims that to attack Corbyn's aides is to attack Corbyn. But how can it be right to have such a one-sided set of advisers on the absolutely crucial issue of the day? Seumas Milne is Corbyn's personal advisor and director of strategy no less.

Beckett strongly defends the stance of the Corbyn leadership saying that: "In fact, the Corbyn (and Labour) position of appealing to voters on both sides of this new artificial divide into 'remainers' and 'leavers' is the only way to general election success, and to create a public base strong enough to sustain a progressive Labour government in the teeth of the challenges it will surely meet."

He goes on to deny political reality by claiming that the political situation has not changed since the 2016 referendum: "The tallied votes for pro-Brexit and pro-Brussels parties show very little shift in opinion. It does not make sense for Labour to set as the limit of its aspirations trying to corral as much as possible of the 48 per cent who voted remain three years ago."

If this is the advice Jeremy Corbyn is getting from those around him, some of whom are closely connected to Unite, no wonder there is a problem. It is not only the EU election results but also the opinion polls that now show a consistent majority for remain. If you add to that the one million demonstration calling for a second referendum and the six million petition calling for the same as an indication of mood and the three million extra young people that will come onto the electoral register next time and that three million EU nationals were not allowed to vote last time it could hardly be clearer what the result would be for a second referendum.

Some of the things Paul Mason has argued, however, emerged at the

meeting of the parliamentary Labour party (PLP) meeting on Monday night (June 10), which was described by some of Corbyn's supporters as the worst such meeting since he has been leader.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle, a key Corbyn supporter intervened to insist that MPs should be allowed to criticise senior staff by name if they were influential in policymaking". His comments were a direct counter to Corbyn, who had earlier called for MPs not to publicly attack his staff or the shadow cabinet. (Guardian June 11)

The radical left

One of the problems in fighting opposing Brexit and fighting for a second referendum is that the radical left is deeply divided.

Inside the Labour Party the left have mostly supported the Corbyn position or are opposed to a second referendum. Briefing is divided on it and carries material arguing a range of views. Socialist Appeal strongly support the leadership. They argue that the Peterborough campaign had rightly concentrated on the 'class issues' rather than Brexit. This is a seriously flawed analysis.

Most of far left organisations have offered no analysis of the class nature of the Brexit project: i.e. far right, racist, English nationalist and nostalgia for lost empire, but have hid behind commentary on the Tory crisis and giving general support for the Brexiteers in the LP. They have also argued that Brexit is not the 'real issue' which is the struggle against austerity and Tory policies when in fact these issues will be determined most importantly by the outcome of Brexit. They are what Brexit in end is about.

The radical left outside of the Labour Party mostly support a hard-line Brexit. They include not just the CPB but also the Socialist Party the SWP and Counterfire - who are most vocal on the issue. In their current broadsheet they describe a second referendum a poisonous and divisive right-wing project. They also launch a

remarkable attack on Paul Mason and defence of Seamus Milne. The threat of a second referendum comes they say "less from increasingly discredited figures like Tom Watson and those who support him in this argument such as former revolutionary socialist Paul Mason who now calls for the sacking Seamus Milne Corbyn's trusted head of communications and strategy".

The threat now comes, they go on to say, "from members of the shadow cabinet, who although they were no part of the original Corbynite left, and although they share little of Corbyn's radicalism, have been seen as loyal to Corbyn because they have observed the discipline as shadow cabinet members. That veneer was cast aside by Emily Thornberry in the most public way possible on election night when she used a platform on the BBC to break with Labour Party policy and call openly for a second referendum. That call was then taken up by Dianne Abbott and John McDonnell."

Particularly inside Labour, but to some extent more widely, there are a number of reasons for these positions. There is a sense that what counts above all is loyalty to Corbyn and Corbynism without considering what impelled the left to win the leadership in the first place. One of the promises of the Corbyn leadership campaign was 'doing politics differently', offering vibrant political discussion.

In reality in most places the structures of the Labour Party have not adapted to that challenge to change, meaning that many of the young people who flocked to join remain mainly keyboard warriors rather than core activists, Momentum, which sold itself as the voice of this new wave, has not at all lived up to its pledge but has become a bureaucratic shell centrally and in many localities of its earlier promise.

The loyalty impulse leads to them ignoring the fact that while it's true that some of Corbyn's opponents may support a second referendum as yet another stick amongst many to beat him with, those on the left such as Clive Lewis are either ignored or treated as potentially disloyal. At the same time and partly for the same

reasons the argument that a supposedly 'soft Brexit' which would protect jobs and living standards, is widely accepted despite the fact that it stares political and economic reality in the face. The reality remains that in the current political situation any form of Brexit will increase poverty, unemployment, casualisation and racism - and increase the gap between the rich and the poor.

And if Labour is seen as in any way the handmaiden of any form of Brexit the real danger is that the chance of an anti-austerity left government will be dashed not only for the next few months but potentially for generations.

Tory leadership race

Meanwhile the Tory leadership election process is dominating the media. All of the leading candidates are completely delusional both about their own abilities and the complexity of the process pledging themselves in ever more strident terms that they will take Britain out of the EU on October 31 come what may. This is pushing the Tory Party (and potentially British politics) ever further to the right and ever deeper into the hands of Boris Johnson, Nigel Farage and Donald Trump - who intervened strongly into the process during his state visit and who is, as Sadiq Khan rightly pointed out, the poster boy of the far-right and proto-fascists globally. This is the framework in which Brexit takes place, and a framework to which Brexit has itself contributed substantially in developing.

It is ironic that a dispute that started in the Tory Party and resulted in Cameron calling a referendum on EU membership without the slightest idea, let alone agreement, as to the consequences or the alternative, is now back inside the Tory Party and tearing it apart. The whole thing has now turned the full circle. Both sides in the Tory battle lines are predicting the destruction of the Tory party. One side, the ERG, that it would be destroyed if it failed to leave on

October 31 and the other if it did leave on that day. Both sides could well be right.

Remarkably, the debate so far amongst candidates has been even more bizarre than the debate of the past 3 years. We still have the same inane arguments that you have to be prepared to crash out if you want a good deal; which Caroline Lucas interprets as: if you don't do what I say I will blow my brains out. You have to be a hard line Brexiteer to stand a chance of winning

The reality is that it will be no easier to crash out in October as it was in March. Many of the candidates had equivocated even before nominations closed. Most insisted that what they really want is a deal and that they have the formula (stamping their foot even harder) to get one. The problems of the British border in Ireland will evaporate and the EU will be falling over itself to sign up when they see the new negotiating team.

Meanwhile EU leaders made it clear, over and over again, that the deal they negotiated with May is the only one on the table.

The battle in Parliament

Following May's resignation, after concluding that it would be impossible to get her deal through Parliament, the issue of a no deal Brexit is back on the agenda at least as the legally required option if there is no deal by October 31.

There is, however, going to be a fight to the finish over this and we should not assume that it cannot be stopped since a majority of both MPs and the

general public are strongly opposed to it. It is argued that Parliamentary mechanisms precedents will not allow the deadline to be overturned. In the end, however, Parliament is sovereign, and Bercow, who has decided to stay on until the end of the process, has shown that he is prepared to defy precedent if necessary.

Meanwhile the Tory leadership candidates are falling over each other to pledge their troth to crash out with no deal on October 31. Rabb has caused a furore by saying that he would be prepared close Parliament down in order to prevent it frustrating the deadline. It remains a very difficult thing to do, however, since it would destroy the Tory Party in the process.

If it was easy to do May would have done it. It would also be a legacy that would be difficult to live down. To put it another way: It might be easy in the Brexit filled room of an ERG meeting, but hard reality might be a different thing. Never-the-less a new Tory leader intoxicated with the powers of office might do it, and it is a serious danger.

Parliament's intervention in such circumstance would likely be to suspend article 50, the application for a lengthy extension, followed by either a second referendum and a general election, though there might be other ways yet be devised.

The next general election

It is true that the EU vote will not be directly reflected in a general election where the turnout will be higher and Labour will have the advantage of the FPTP system. It is also true that Labour has a trump card, which is a radical manifesto, probably more

radical than the last one. Important as this is, however, it would be rash indeed to bank on this putting Labour into government in an election polarised around Brexit.

If the next general election takes place before Brexit is concluded, in other words before a referendum or a crash out, it will be defined by the Brexit debate with other issues submerged. On the face of it Labour should stand a good chance - particularly if it had a second referendum and a commitment to campaign for remain in its manifesto since the Brexit vote would be split between the Brexit party and the Tories, as happened in Peterborough, and Labour get through the middle.

The question arises, however, as to whether an electoral alliance between the Brexit party and the Tories could take place under their newly elected leader in order to unify the Brexit vote. This would certainly split the Tory party wide open but whether this would rule it out is another matter. The crisis of the Tory party is already so profound that this might be seen as a price worth paying in order to avoid a Corbyn led Labour government. This would depend, however, on whether if Labour was prepared to get off of the fence and clearly back a second referendum on its own terms and campaign for a remain vote.

In this context, if a change of direction does not come from the Labour leadership very quickly it is time to go back to the LP membership to seek a new mandate and then implement their decision. The current policy has collapsed and needs to be replaced. There needs to be a proper framework for consultation, either a membership ballot or a special conference to re-discuss the whole issue.

[Socialist Resistance](#)

The victories - and continuing struggles - of women in Sudan

27 June 2019, by **Nada Mustafa Ali**

One of the most popular images from Sudan's protests that led to the overthrow of Omar al-Bashir is that of Alaa Salah - a young, female university student. The image of her speaking to a crowd highlighted the presence and role women had in the uprising. [7]

While the video challenged narratives prevalent in global media - which sometimes portray African and Muslim women as victims who lack agency - Alaa Salah's courage is but an extension of the roles that women have played throughout Sudan's history.

Warrior queens and queen mothers had crucial power in Sudan's ancient kingdom of Kush and its metropolis, Meroe (circa 1069 BCE to 350 CE). [8] Women, like the poet Mihera Bit Abboud, mobilised men against the Turko-Egyptian colonial invasion of Sudan in the 1920s and Anglo-Egyptian rule in the 1950s. [9]

Women were also major actors in the opposition to Bashir's regime throughout its 30 years of rule, which began when he led a military coup against a democratically elected government in 1989. This resistance was not unusual given the regime's discrimination against women, in both law and practice. [10] This included the use of rape in war and also violence against women activists in youth movements. [11]

Both locally and abroad, Sudanese women led organisations to help women challenge human rights violations, build leadership skills, protest and mobilise. [12] For example, when Bashir's government imposed austerity measures in 2013 and 2016 - causing the prices of basic commodities and medicines to soar - women mobilised civil disobedience. [13]

There were hopes that the overthrow of Bashir would lead to change in the

situation of women. But there are now worries under the Transitional Military Council, which assumed power and has since violently suppressed protesters. [14] The council has created an atmosphere where it is difficult to advocate for broader participation for women, commitment to women's human rights, or gender equality.

These become less of a priority as the situation worsens.

Lessons - good and bad

Sudan must learn from the experiences of neighbouring countries. Take Egypt. The transition to civilian rule, following the Arab Spring in 2011, was accompanied by a backlash in women's human rights and a rise in sexual violence and harassment. [15]

I started teaching about the Uprisings in North Africa (Arab Spring) as the protests were unfolding. As with Sudan, women played a key role in the 2010 and 2011 protests. Initially, Egyptian feminists described Tahrir Square, where Egyptians camped, as a "utopia" where sexual harassment against women in public spaces, for example, disappeared. [16] Unfortunately, women later faced various forms of sexual violence and harassment in the streets. The government also attacked women's organisations. [17]

Leaders in Egypt's women's movement continue to face arrest and detainment. The director of Nazra for women's studies, Mozan Hassan, was unable to travel to New York to attend the United Nations' Commission on the Status of Women this year because of a government-imposed travel ban.

It is possible, however, to also learn

from partial successes in post-conflict countries on the continent. These include Rwanda and Liberia.

Rwanda has one of the highest number of women legislators in the world. The country has also introduced several laws that promote women's rights. [18]

In Liberia, a broad and vibrant women's peace movement played a key role in resisting the oppressive government of Charles Taylor. [19] This ended war and paved the way for Liberia to elect the first woman president in an African country. Former president Ellen J Sirleaf introduced important laws and policies to safeguard women's rights during her presidency.

The way forward

As Sudan mourns for those who have lost their lives in recent crackdowns and massacres, there is an urgent need for immediate action - in the form of independent investigations - against human rights violations. [20] These are crucial for accountability.

Looking to the future, as I argue in my book "Gender, Race, and Sudan's Exile Politics: Do We All Belong to this Country?", Sudan needs to build a strong and independent women's movement that reflects the diverse priorities, realities, and visions of Sudanese women. [21]

And as the country looks to a possible transition, the ruling transitional council must hand power over to a civilian-led government with at least 40% representation of women. It is crucial to ensure that women have meaningful participation at all levels, and that commitments to gender equality and women's human rights permeate constitutional, legal and policy reform.

[The Conversation](#)

The situation in Waziristan - Release Ali Wazeer, Mohsin Dawar and PTM activists!

26 June 2019, by **Farooq Tariq**

The following article presents an update.

After massive protests across Waziristan and on social media, the 11-day-long curfew was lifted on June 17, 2019.

The curfew, imposed on June 6, created an humanitarian crisis. Since media are not allowed to cover this region hence definite information are hard to get. However, social media outlets have reported three deaths caused by starvation and lack of medicine.

Earlier, the district administration had imposed section 144 of the Code of the Criminal Procedure. This is a colonial-era law regulating the maintenance of public order.

Under the Section 144, more than five persons can not gather at any public place. Consequently, public protests, sit-ins, or rallies become illegal.

Post-9/11, Waziristan has been in global headlines as a base-camp for the Taliban and al-Qaida. However, last year a mass social movement: Pashtun Defence Movement (PTM) emerged and transformed the socio-political landscape of the region. The PTM is a non-violent movement that, on the one hand, is anti-Taliban, on the other, challenges the military establishment.

The PTM's main demand is rehabilitation of Waziristan residents uprooted in the wake of anti-Taliban operations launched by the Pakistani state besides an inquiry into extra-judicial killings. Overnight, the PTM

became a platform for the people of Waziristan sandwiched between the Pakistan military and the Taliban.

Two PTM leaders Ali Wazeer and Mohsin Dawar, thanks to PTM popularity, were elected to the National Assembly in last year's general elections.

On May 25, the security forces opened fire on a peaceful protest in a Waziristan village, led by Ali Wazir and Mohsin Dawar. The firing left at least 13 dead while scores were injured.

Ali Wazeer, also on the central committee of The Struggle (a group associated with Fourth International in Pakistan), was arrested on the spot while he was rescuing an injured comrade. He luckily survived the direct fire on him. He has been imprisoned ever since on terrorism charges. There are reports that Ali Wazeer was physically tortured by the security forces.

According to official procedures, when a member of National Assembly is arrested, the speaker of the Assembly issues a production order and the arrested member attends the Assembly session to explain his/her side of the story.

In the case of Ali Wazeer and Mohsin Dawar, despite a demand by the Opposition members, the speaker has refused to issue the production orders of the two.

Ahead of Ali Wazir's arrest on May 25 (Mohsin Dawar courted arrest a week after Ali Wazir's arrest), military

establishment publicly warned the PTM leadership of dire consequences. A high-level military spokesperson, while addressing a press conference, portrayed the PTM leadership as a fifth column. He advised the media not to cover the PTM viewpoint.

Such has been the level of media manipulation that the May 25 tragedy was not reported as a case of military firing on the protestors. On the contrary, mainstream media presented the military firing as a case of self-defence following a violent attack on the military check-post. However, a number of video clips have emerged since which prove that Ali Wazir and his comrades were unarmed and non-violent. However, a scary vilification campaign to malign the PTM leadership, particularly Ali Wazir and Mohsin Dawar, is going on in the mainstream media as well as social media.

It is hard to say if Ali Wazir and Mohsin Dawar will be out soon or not. However, on the one hand, their popularity has sky-rocketed in Pushtoon areas, on the other hand, their arrest under terrorism charges is indeed sinister.

Even if they are released in near future under public pressure, their lives remain threatened. In future, there may also be attempts to revoke their parliamentary mandate through some dirty tricks. It is therefore an urgent matter that an international solidarity campaign is built not merely for their immediate release but also for their secure future.

17 June 2019

Ada Colau remains mayor of Barcelona

25 June 2019, by Josep Bel

A tripartite arrangement with the ten Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya, (ERC, Republican Left) councillors plus the ten of Bcomu and 8 of the PSC would have given an absolute majority of 28 out of 41 councillors. But it became apparent very quickly that this was not feasible because the other two parties rejected it. This left three options, reaching an agreement with just the ERC, reaching an agreement with the PSC alone or going into opposition.

There was no clear discussion of these options. The debate was held in a BComÀ plenary a week before the deadline, in an assembly of 450 activists which agreed to what the leadership proposed: that is to present Ada as mayor in order to be stronger in the negotiations. Only that formula could be put to a vote, with a yes or no in the assembly, without even the option of abstaining.

Thus, other options were eliminated, and the necessary open debate was impossible. The leadership claimed they were seeking a tripartite agreement and that the risks of going into opposition were debated, but nothing could be further from reality. The same people who said this later recognized that opposition was never an option, the only important thing was to be in government, and preferably with the PSC. That is, we discussed whether we wanted Ada to be mayor or not in the abstract (obviously it is normal for everyone in BComÀ to want this), but what should have been discussed in the assembly was if we wanted to agree with the ERC, with the PSC, or go into opposition if there was no tripartite agreement. This was not allowed.

Then, no further debate was possible: you could only vote whether you wanted the pact with the PSC or with the ERC, because this is what the leadership decided would go to a referendum among those registered;

those who have registered on the web, but who do not participate in activities or meetings. The statutes have established two forms of decision making, some things are decided by 500 activists and others by 9,000 registered people. The leadership campaigned all out for a single position, that of the pact with the PSC, without even mentioning in the question that this also involved the support of Manuel Valls, who guaranteed three votes of support to Ada (of the six councillors of Barcelona pel Canvi-Ciutadans) to reach 21 of the absolute majority. So, the debate left much to be desired in terms of a new politics and radical democracy, since the option chosen days ago by the leadership was only one: to have power and the post of mayor.

It was not possible to meet or discuss programmatic content of the discussions with the PSC. No comparisons were made of the ERC and PSC programs. The BComÀ program has much more in common with that of ERC. This is true over the environment, waste, mobility and public transport, the commitment that 30 per cent of new housing will be affordable social housing, the creation of a public funeral service, the possibility of municipalizing water and more.

But it is true that, when governing in the Catalan Parliament, the Generalitat with Junts per Catalunya (JuntsxCat, Together for Catalonia), the practice of ERC across the whole of Catalonia was very much criticized on several issues, such as the over Guaranteed Citizens' Income; not paying the promised â,-664 for thousands of applicants who have no income. It is also true that in the past four years the political attitude of ERC has not been collaborative. At the same time, the neoliberal reality of the state government of the PSOE, without repealing the Mordaza law, or

the employment reform of the PP, and many other things, meant that in Madrid, in the Congress of Deputies, the ERC and Unidos Podemos voted together much more than with the PSOE. [22] In Barcelona, the rupture between BComÀ and the PSC government occurred when article 155 was applied to Catalonia and the PSC supported the repression, but there were also differences on issues such as the municipalization of water, now in the hands of the multinational Agbar, whose lobby has close links with some members of the PSOE. [23]

Remember that ERC won the municipal elections in the city of Barcelona with 5,000 votes more than BComÀ, and that it is very different to decide to addition votes with the PSC to prevent Albiol of the conservative People's Party becoming mayor of Badalona, than to agree with PSC and not with ERC in Barcelona. The ERC has not been involved in any cases of corruption and is as much or more to the left than the PSC, and we have seen in practice how the PSC has included in its electoral lists the people of the ex- Democratic Union of Catalonia of Duran Lleida. On the other hand, the current law makes municipalities very presidential and not very republican, and the mayor's office is key, since many decisions and appointments must be made through it.

But the negotiations with ERC could have allowed creating the position of deputy mayor, delegating powers of the mayor to the government commission, where they would be tied to 10 councillors and avoid arbitrariness or gestures from the PSC's Maragall. The agreement could include distributing everything to the maximum and ample freedom for Ada, sharing 50 per cent of the presence at institutional events or in the media, or that she would always inaugurate what had begun during her term of office, having a voice on national

themes and raising Catalan sovereignty with confederal fraternity and so on. In the end, there was no debate or vote on what ERC offered at the last minute, two years of mayoralty for Ada and two for Maragall.

The benefits of having the mayor's office are totally clear but I do not support the idea of having the mayor's office at any price; a large part of the electorate will pay a heavy price for this manoeuvre. Of course, as always on the old left, for now there is no self-criticism for having lost votes and a councillor; the analysis is closed with a shallow "we have resisted the state pull of the PSOE".

On the other hand, it is not true that to agree with PSC is avoiding the logic of blocs. The PSC is part of a block, that of Article 155 which defends the monarchical regime of 1978. [24] A pact with ERC would be better from at this point of view, since it would at least favour the disengagement of the latter from the current Catalan right of the JuntsxCat in the Generalitat; a JuntsxCat still dominated by the ex-Convergence, now Partit Democràtic Europeu Català (PDeCAT, Catalan European Democratic Party). It would have been an example that would project throughout Catalonia, demonstrating that the Comunes could unite most leftwing voters, from the PSC and ERC, to have a mandate with each.

No matter how fraudulent the institutional procedures of Puigdemont and Junqueras may be, we cannot deny that we are facing an abuse of authority and intolerable violence on the part of the state, and, let's face it, the same thing would happen tomorrow to communists or to Podemos if they obtained 60 per cent in a regional Parliament and disobeyed any law to bring greater social justice in the face of growing inequality imposed by European capitalism. [25] A referendum on taxes on the banks, or on a better minimum wage in Catalonia or on measures for an effective right to housing, when what is voted on is not within the competence of the "autonomous" government, are acts of disobedience that can accumulate forces to change the system and which we cannot give

up practicing. We see other struggles where the idea of direct democracy also predominates, such as the demand of the *gilets jaunes* in France, where they state that proposals for legislation can be made by popular assemblies and that they must be voted on and the result observed. The judgment of the referendum trial held in Catalonia on 1 October will be released in the coming months and when it comes out, it will always be preferable to be on the side of the repressed rather than the 155 jailers.

All options always have risks and the worst thing about ERC is its electoral list, starting with Maragall. This is not because he is 75 years old and has been a political full-timer for 40 years, but because his was the worst stage of the PSC in Barcelona City Council when - during the previous Tripartite of Catalonia with Montilla (PSC-ERC-ICV) - he, as minister of education, introduced a teaching law, the LEC, which provoked big unitary mobilizations. In the end he guaranteed subsidies to private education by law, even those segregated by gender, like the Opus Dei schools. [26] But we must remember that some people left Catalunya en Comú a few months ago to join the ERC lists: Joan Josep Nuet of Esquerra Unida i Alternativa (EUiA, United and Alternative Left) - now only of Comunistes.Cat - was presented by ERC in the state-wide elections and Elisenda Alemany, of Sobiranistes, was second on the ERC municipal list. [27]

It is worrying that in the left debate on these coalitions, the issue of moving into opposition is always omitted, together with the essential debate about building and creating popular unity. It is necessary to debate how to create unitary and democratic organization everywhere, how to involve activists in making all social movements expand and develop so that we have some day a correlation of forces that can change the monarchical and neoliberal regime, with a daily praxis that creates another hegemonic culture, based on solidarity and community against consumerism and individualism.

The practical result of this phrase of one foot inside and one hundred feet

outside the institutions has been a disaster; we are assimilated by the institution because it is prioritized over political organization and the sad reality of our demobilization forces us into this debate. In a metropolis of 2 million people we cannot be only five thousand demonstrators, when a demonstration is called to demand from the PSOE that rents are limited, or to repeal the gag law, while we have no prospect of general strikes against the reduction of wages after 10 years of crisis, and the urgent environmental struggle begins with a few young people and is so limited. This is the main thing that needs to be debated on the left.

The absence of these debates is highly significant, our daily practice in society and in the neighbourhood is not analysed, and when there is a possibility of institutional power, we too often forget what is important. We are reduced to digital voting, to some very oriented questions, where it seems that the decision is made to feel Spanish or Catalan, never knowing what it means to be federalist or what competencies should be decentralized, or worse, we vote for a new kind of leader worship in the case of Ada.

The effects of accepting the votes of Valls and Cs was not debated, nor is how we should fight for the right to decide our future as Catalans, which has widespread (almost 8 per cent) support. Nobody knows how the people of Barcelona in Comú and Podemos will fight for an amnesty for prisoners, all of them, both political prisoners and those repressed for social struggles, but in September-October there will be a bigger general strike. The last general strike, called by a single pro-independence union in Catalonia, on 21 February 2019, was much bigger than that called on 8 March for genuine equality for women.

The final result of the digital voting was 70 per cent in favour of the pact with the PSC and about 30 per cent of the pact with ERC, with a 40 per cent participation (4,040 people). The BComú leadership called a rally in Plaza Sant Jaume to support Ada as mayor with banners, but it was obscured by a mass of pro-independence people fighting for the

freedom of political prisoners, who screamed at Ada and shouted “Not with Valls”, while the PSOE and Pedro Sánchez had to listen to “Not with Rivera”.

The result is that the two opposing blocs will continue, just what was not wanted, and that BCom⁹ is positioned first and foremost next to a

bloc, despite saying again and again that Ada is neither pro nor anti-independence. In short, a socialist republicanism remains to be built, both socially and nationally

Defend Abortion Rights!

24 June 2019, by **Dianne Feeley**

The evangelical right believes it has the votes in the U.S. Supreme Court to enable state legislatures to outlaw abortion and no longer needs to settle for simply setting up roadblocks to reduce women’s access. Like much of the extreme right, it does not base its calculations on whether a majority supports this legal right, but on whether it has the power to impose its viewpoint. Eighteen states have laws severely restricting abortion if *Roe v. Wade* is overturned.

Despite the reality that one out of four women has an abortion at some point during her life, the right demonizes abortion providers and defines the procedure as murder. Today they are empowered by Trump, who nominates judicial candidates based on their opposition to abortion, eliminates funding for family planning programs that even mention abortion and plans to grant exemptions to employers who don’t want to cover contraceptive methods in their insurance policy. In their quest, anti-abortion activists have terrorized and firebombed clinics and murdered medical personnel. Now they believe they are within striking distance of shutting clinics and imprisoning doctors. Six state legislatures have passed bills that outlaw abortion before the woman may realize she is pregnant. The Georgia and Louisiana laws even criminalize women who dare obtain abortion.

**Women have
always relied on**

abortion

It was only with the rise of the medical profession in the post-Civil War period that state and federal laws restricted access to birth control and abortion. Most crucial was the passage of the federal Comstock Law of 1873, which labelled the circulation of this information obscene and banned it from the mail.

Abortion continued underground because women continued to seek knowledge and control over their bodies. They were aided by herbs they knew to be abortifacients, including cottonroot and savin taken from juniper bushes. For women who found a midwife or doctor willing to perform an abortion, and able to come up with the money, there was still a risk. In case of an emergency, the woman needed to go to a hospital, yet the hospital was obligated to report her abortion.

There was a loophole in anti-abortion laws, allowing abortion to save the life of the woman. This route to a legal abortion was only available to women with financial and networking resources.

By the early 1960s, as oral birth control was just being prescribed to married women, it was estimated that probably more than a million abortions were performed each year. The majority took place after the woman was 13 or more weeks pregnant and complications were more likely to occur, particularly when they were “illegal.” According to the Guttmacher Institute, there were almost 200 reported deaths from

“back alley” abortions in 1965. The risk of dying was tied to race and class, with women of color three to four times more likely to die.

The Abortion Rights Movement Begins

The drive to broaden the definition of “therapeutic abortion” was initiated in 1961 by the legal and medical professions. Proposed reforms allowed a licensed physician to perform an abortion for a woman who had medical health reasons or in cases of fetal defects, rape or incest. Within the decade more than a dozen states had reformed their abortion laws.

In 1961 Patricia Maginnis, a San Francisco medical technician, collected petitions to support a proposed California reform bill but quickly realized how limited it would be and established the Association to Repeal Abortion Laws (ARAL). Her organization and its newsletter provided a growing women’s movement with an abolitionist perspective. Like the underground Jane Collective in Chicago, ARAL also helped women obtain abortions. By 1969 it had referred 12,000 women to trustworthy abortionists in Mexico, Japan and Sweden. Meanwhile the Jane Collective not only referred women to abortionists, but began performing them.

In 1970, when Betty Friedan called for women “to get out of the kitchen and into the streets” to celebrate the 50th anniversary of women’s suffrage, local

coalitions overwhelmingly raised demands of equal pay for equal work, affordable and available abortion on demand and free child care. These demands emphasized women's autonomy and government's responsibility to provide necessary services.

As women challenged restrictive abortion laws, they began a larger discussion about access to knowledge about their own bodies, particularly the range of reproductive issues from birth control methods, abortion, and sterilization abuse to child birth—and the discussion began from there. The first edition of the book *Our Bodies, Our Selves* summarizes these issues and stresses the centrality of self-knowledge.

Women's organizations brought class action suits against a range of state abortion laws. In 1970, when it was clear that the New York appeals court would rule the existing New York law void, the state legislature quickly passed a bill that allowed abortion through the 24th week of pregnancy. It had no residency restriction. Along with Washington, DC, women could have safe and legal abortions. By the end of the first year, a report found the majority of abortions were performed within the first 12 weeks of pregnancy and complications were rare. Safe and legal abortion became a reality. Three years later the U.S. Supreme Court issued the *Roe v. Wade* decision.

Throughout the late 1960s and '70s the women's movement was built through testifying about one's experiences. It flourished through conferences, meetings, zap actions, demonstrations and public hearings. It was built through making demands on institutions—schools, colleges, medical boards, courts, legislatures, the media.

From Abortion to Broader Reproductive Rights

Although attempting to speak for all

women, the women's movement developed a growing awareness that women from different social layers experienced sexism differently. Women in professions, poor women, lesbians, Black women, Chicanas, older women, women with disabilities encountered different restrictions. Some were denied basic rights while others were over protected.

This was revealed most clearly around sterilization. Poor women, particularly African-American and Puerto Rican women, were sterilized without their consent, and in some cases, even without their knowledge. But until the 1970s it was difficult to document the abuse. The most widely publicized case was the sterilization of two teenagers whose family received government benefits. In 1973 Alabama authorities had the mother sign for what she thought were routine inoculations and then arranged tubal ligation for her daughters. In the Los Angeles area several Mexican American women sued hospitals where they had given birth. Subsequently, they sought contraception, only to be informed that was unnecessary because they had been sterilized.

In New York City, where one-third of Puerto Rican women of child-bearing age had been sterilized, Dr. Helen Rodriguez-Trias publicized how the hierarchy in society was reproduced in medicine. While sterilization abuse was frequent for women of color, white women who requested sterilization to control their fertility had to meet stiff requirements.

The analysis of the dichotomy in women's access to health became a debate within the women's movement throughout the 1970s. But with the stark evidence of sterilization abuse, the radical end of the women's movement concluded that *the only way to support women's rights was to defend the rights of the most vulnerable*. This realization informed how women fought for the regulation of sterilization as well as for how the women's movement opposed passage of the Hyde Amendment.

In 1983 a conference of more than 1,500 African-American women at Spelman College gave birth to the

National Black Women's Health Project. It stressed autonomous organization by women of color and how contraception and abortion must be seen within a wider context that includes access to services, freedom from violence and economic rights that leads to safe and healthy communities. This was to be the foremother for reproductive justice organizations among women of color.

The Limits of Roe v. Wade

Recently a number of articles examine how the *Roe v. Wade* decision was written on the basis that the Constitution implicitly guaranteed the right to privacy. This right was first developed by the U.S. Supreme Court in the 1965 *Griswold v. Connecticut* decision, when it ruled that a state's ban on the use of contraceptives violated the right to marital privacy. Now that conservative judges are challenging the constitutional right to privacy, commentators suggest that it would have been better had the decision been grounded on the 14th Amendment's equal protection clause.

Equal protection is not inferred, but guaranteed in Section 1 of the 14th amendment:

"No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws."

I do not believe that shifting women's right to abortion to these grounds would make much difference given that several state legislatures have already pronounced that fetuses are persons. Had this route been taken, however, it might have changed public awareness of how the right-wing fight to control women's bodies sets the stage for an appointed representative of fetuses to sue the women carrying them!

The 1973 decision was written when abortion was already legal in New York, Hawaii and Washington, DC and

as many state laws were about to be overturned. Rather than be without a law, the Supreme Court crafted a federal one. It divided a woman's pregnancy into three distinct periods and assigned a growing right of state intervention as the pregnancy progressed.

The reality is that when abortion is legal and accessible, women who decide they do not want to continue their pregnancy immediately schedule their procedure. Today more than 90% have first-trimester abortion; in fact 65% do so within eight weeks. But when there are a variety of obstacles in the way, women are forced to delay, escalating the cost and bringing with it the greater possibility of complication. Of course, some women do not face problems until later in their pregnancy, and only then decide to terminate the fetus they had hoped to bear.

However *Roe v. Wade* asserts the government has certain rights over a woman's pregnancy. Despite its importance in making abortion available, the court has provided a framework that prevents some women from exercising their right to abortion. In fact, the federal government has passed two discriminatory laws that are considered "constitutional":

â€¢ In 1977 Congress passed the Hyde Amendment, which was then signed by President Jimmy Carter. Renewed annually, it prevents women who have Medicaid insurance from using that source to pay for an abortion. (Only 15 states provide alternative payments.) This means poor women are effectively denied their right.

â€¢ In 1993 Congress passed, and President Bill Clinton signed, a bill that prevents women, despite their medical need, from seeking an abortion in the last months of their pregnancy. While this law affects a very small number of abortions, the misnamed law (Partial Birth Abortion Law) disregards the need to terminate the pregnancy and misrepresents the medical needs of these women.

The women's movement protested against passage of the Hyde Amendment by confronting various

politicians, holding demonstrations and supporting the court case that challenged it. We rejoiced when we won in the lower court but it was lost on appeal and we have never been able to overcome that defeat. Even while the majority of the country supports the legalization of abortion, this defeat illustrates how market-based notions of health care and racism are embedded in our society.

The Right Has Successfully Restricted Access to Abortion

Since 1973 states have passed more than 1,000 bills regulating or outlawing abortion. These include requiring providers to give inaccurate information about abortion, mandating that women undergo unnecessary testing, insisting on parental consent for teenage women, requiring doctors perform abortions even though other trained medical personnel are capable of doing so, demanding that clinics meet unnecessary standards and requiring waiting times between when a woman requests and abortion and when she can schedule the procedure, and outlawing the use of telemedicine in the case of abortion. *Although these regulations are justified as medically necessary, they are in fact political restrictions that the right lobbied to secure.*

In its 1992 decision, *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, the Supreme Court established a standard that state laws should not place an "undue burden" on the procedure. However, many of the laws that have been passed both before and since clearly do so.

In 2016 the *Whole Women's Health v. Hellerstedt* decision clarified "undue burden" and set the standard that unless medically necessary, such limitations were a violation of women's reproductive rights. Yet this decision has not deterred right-wing legislators, who feel on a roll because of Trump's election.

Many are shocked to think that

abortion might be deemed illegal once again. *Yet the reality is that abortion has never been available and accessible to all women.* Some states have only one or two clinics or hospitals that perform abortions. In fact *89% of all U.S. counties do not have abortion facilities, yet more than a third of all U.S. women of reproductive age live there!* The barriers are more than some women are able to overcome, yet despite the fact that Medicaid excludes paying for an abortion procedure, 2014 statistics posted on the Guttmacher Institute website show that 48% of women living at or below the federal poverty level obtained an abortion, as did women living at two times the poverty level. Since these women have less access to reliable birth control, they have a greater need for abortion and find a way to obtain one.

Women's Reproductive Rights and Health in Jeopardy

In surveying the range of reproductive rights, it's important to recognize that quality sex education, safe and effective birth control and maternal health are also in jeopardy.

While in most other countries the maternal death rate is falling, in the United States it is on the riseâ€”in 2015 standing at 26.4 per 100,000 live births (Canada stands at 7.3). For the 2007-13 period, in the city I live in, Detroit, which is more than 80% African American, maternal mortality stands at 44.4 per 100,000. Black women have three times the mortality rate of white women. That is particularly true for those living at or below the poverty line and who lack consistent health care. Yet, even the elite African-American tennis superstar, Serena Williams, almost died from blood clots following the birth of her baby.

Wherever we look at the issues of women's reproductive health, we see that the campaign for reproductive justice that women have waged over the years has a long way to go.

However, it's also important to remember there are now close to 50 million women who have had safe, legal abortions since the New York law was enacted in 1970. In most cases their friends and families accompanied them, and continue to support them.

The struggle begins with women's bodily autonomy. It means access to the social institutions that can provide women with health, education, meaningful work and a dignified life. We don't have to tie ourselves to a Supreme Court decision that may have widened the door of women's opportunities but failed to assert the truth of women's full humanity.

Will the U.S. Supreme Court allow right-wing, often gerrymandered and

voter-suppressing state legislatures to outlaw abortion? In some ways, it never opened the door wide. The task is to fight for full control over our reproductive rights and demand the resources we need. That is dependent on the power of our experiences and the breadth of our movement as it defends the rights of all women.

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June 10, 2019

[Against the Current](#)

Argentina in its Labyrinth

23 June 2019, by **Claudio Katz, Nicolas Allen**

"Argentina on the brink . . ." has been a recurring mantra in the financial press since at least the mid-80s. Argentina of 2019 is no different: with news everyday of factory closures and lay-offs, 70% interest rates stifling the already fragile industrial sector, wages plummeting to their lowest level in decades, and inflation approaching 50 percent annually, the specter of debt default has again started to circle over the ravaged landscape of the South American nation.

The doom and gloom of the *Financial Times* and other media outlets is accurate, if disingenuous. Not long ago, the mouthpieces of high finance were jubilant with the 2015 victory of right-wing politician Mauricio Macri, celebrating the arrival of a market-friendly government in the midst of the anti-neoliberal Pink Tide.

Cambiamos "Let's Change" should have been a tip-off: rather than pointing towards a bold new future, Macri's unfortunately named political party has revived the same ersatz

"change" that characterized the neoliberal nineties. Massive overnight devaluations of the national currency, dismemberment of national industry, indiscriminate market deregulation, labor flexibilization, and perhaps most important of all, the effective subsidizing of capital flight through astronomic debt "one could be forgiven for confusing Argentina of 2019 with Argentina of the late nineties.

Several analysts recognized early on how this story would end. Marxist historian and economist Claudio Katz among them has been emphatic in analyzing the underlying structural problems that make Argentina so maladapted to contemporary global capitalism, as the weakest link in a region defined by uneven and combined development. We spoke with Katz in his Buenos Aires home to better understand why Argentina finds itself on the brink, again.

NA : Before discussing Argentina's current economic crisis, I thought it might be useful to backtrack and take the long view. Argentina began the twentieth century in pretty good shape, with a comparative advantage in exports that put it on level with Canada, Australia, and other emerging first world economies. By the twenty-first century liberal economists were comparing it unfavorably to neighboring Chile and Peru. What happened? Why has Argentina throughout its history been so unstable, politically as well as economically?

CK : There are a number of important features that set Argentina apart from most other countries. Few countries have economic cycles that fluctuate so wildly, or that suffer similarly high inflation rates over long periods of time. There are also few countries in

the world with such a high degree of capital flight. The numbers behind these trends suggest that something different is in play in Argentina.

The effects of globalization over the past decades have been particularly decisive for Argentina. Its economy was once relatively independent, at the beginning of the twentieth century when it exported grains and beef around the world. It also experienced a prosperous period of industrialization halfway through the last century. Both these economic structures, however, have eroded in the last decades.

Firstly, because Argentina lost the supremacy it once enjoyed in grains and beef markets. As the value of its products began to fall on the international market, Argentina reverted to supplying primary commodities like soy and minerals. That is, it fell to the lowest rung on the global commodity supply chain.

In terms of industry, Argentina was affected by the global shift in investments towards Asia. The impact was even more dramatic than in Europe or the United States, because the existing industrialization in the country was much more fragile.

Argentina's position, like that of Brazil, is increasingly weak within the global market, although Brazil has suffered less because it has a huge domestic market. Mexico, which was also affected, has an important market to the North. Chile, Peru, and Colombia don't have any industry, so the problem hasn't really hit them in the same way.

As far as politics are concerned, Argentina is characterized by a structural instability that is unlike almost any other country. That instability has to do in large part with the role of the military in the post-1983 period. The armed forces were completely demobilized during the democratic transition, so that, unlike Brazil and other Latin American countries, the domestic role of the military in Argentine society is completely negligible.

What happened was the Argentine military government was defeated in

the Malvinas/Falklands War. No other Latin American country engaged in an armed conflict like Malvinas, or suffered such a resounding military defeat. Adding to that defeat, a powerful democratic movement stood up to the military in a way that no other Latin American populace did. Those two factors deprived the subsequent regime of a key stabilizing factor that other countries "think Bolsonaro's Brazil" can still rely on.

NA: And the weakness of the military has contributed to the country's political instability?

CK: Exactly, the transition could not establish a stable post-dictatorial regime. The structures that could have presided over a stable post-transition period, the military, were dismantled during the transition itself. By contrast, in Mexico or Brazil the army still plays a key role. In Argentina the military is irrelevant.

Ever since, the Argentine ruling classes have only ever managed to contain the country's combative social movements with great difficulty. Just looking at their longevity, these movements have no parallel in the region. In a political context marked by constant instability, it's thanks to the social movements that there has never been a credible threat of a return of the dictatorship; they act as a breakwater, a threat, if you like, against backsliding. But that same level of social mobilization also makes it very difficult for the ruling classes to run the country.

Different from Brazil, Chile, and Mexico, Argentina has one of the most powerful labor movements in the world. There have been forty general strikes since the democratic transition of 1983. There have been five during Macri's presidency. France is the only point of comparison, where the general strike is observed and serious union organization exists.

Another important element is Argentina's human rights movement, which is intensely democratic. In Argentina, democratic rights have been won through struggle "the feminist movement, so important here, can be viewed as part of this same struggle. This was also one of the first

countries to legalize same-sex marriage. Democratic struggles are part of an unbroken history going back to the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, which emerged during the dictatorship.

Another element unique to Argentina is the importance of public education. It's an odd country in that sense, because it's a peripheral nation, structurally like any other Latin American country, but with a system of public education that more closely resembles a developed country.

This is all to say that there is a strange divorce between national history and national reality: the country has been torn apart socially and economically, but it hasn't experienced a comparable deterioration at the political or cultural level.

That incongruence is what part of makes the country so difficult to govern, and one administration after another has tried and failed. Political life in Argentina is incredibly intense and the general level of politicization remains very high.

Meanwhile the local ruling classes are observing all this, deciding between investing locally or moving their money offshore, and they opt for capital flight. The amount of capital held abroad amounts to roughly 75-80 percent of GDP. In other words, there is a whole second Argentina located abroad. The wealth that is created here is immediately transferred abroad, which is why we find ourselves in the current situation and why the country is so unstable.

In theoretical terms, we might say that Argentina is an extreme case of uneven and combined development, and this makes the contradictions here especially intense.

NA : Turning to the current economic crisis, how dire is the current situation?

CK : Argentina is going through a very serious crisis that could very well end in a violent social upheaval. Every day we're on the brink of collapse, and the only plan the government has is to hold tight until general elections in October.

This critical situation will continue on through October and well into the next government. The cause is clear enough: the general impression is that at some point in Argentina's future it will default on its debt, as in fact occurred in the not-so-distant past.

The numbers themselves are alarming, although not so much in terms of scale. Debt servicing accounts for 100 percent of GDP, which comparatively isn't that rare. What is unusual is the speed with which the government has accrued this debt.

When President Macri began his term in 2015, debt repayment stood at 40 percent of GDP. To see that number spike to 100 percent of GDP in just three to four years, it's just not normal. Interest rates, already high, have gone up at a rate that tax revenue can't possibly keep up with.

The underlying problem though is not the debt per se, so much as the uses of that debt. If the country takes on debt and uses it to build bridges, schools, and industry, in some way that debt is justified. The problem is that the bulk of the debt has been used to finance capital flight.

What happens is the state takes on debt, it sells bonds on the market, and Argentine capitalists take out dollars and relocate their money abroad. Argentina is exceptional in terms of the amount of wealth held abroad, and this phenomenon has accelerated dramatically under President Macri. Using debt to finance capital flight is a recipe for a nationwide collapse.

Exactly one year ago, the banks were observing this very situation, seeing that Argentina could not possibly pay off its debts, and they decided not to loan anymore.

NA : In other words, Argentina defaulted on its loans?

CK: It was more like a pre-default, because Argentina continued to accrue debt. But that marked the beginning of the crisis, exactly a year ago, and for a year now we've been going from one failed solution to the next. This is why the government got rid of two finance ministers – first Federico Sturzenegger, then Luis

Caputo.

Finally, the IMF showed up. It issued its first bailout package, which lasted all of two months. The second bailout didn't have much effect either.

The reality that Argentina won't be able to continue servicing its debt is manifested on two levels: in a currency crisis, where the populace starts to buy up US dollars against the expectation that foreign reserves will be emptied.

The second level is a bank run. This hasn't fully come to pass yet, although to a certain extent there is a regular daily run on the banks, and the government's only response is to hike up interest rates to prevent the run on the Argentine peso.

But this is a vicious cycle. Every time there is an interest rate hike it creates the sensation that the government will eventually be unable to service the debt. The response then is more bank runs, leading to higher interest rates, and so on.

These measures have had terrible consequences for the real economy: exorbitant interest rates have plunged the country into recession. The recession, which began small, is now colossal, and the country's industry has been demolished. Unemployment and lay-offs are on the rise.

What we have now is a scenario marked by stagflation; that is, combined stagnation and inflation. When both of these problems are occurring simultaneously, which in classical economic theory shouldn't happen, it means that the economy is being suffocated. And the social costs are extraordinary: salaries and pensions lag way behind inflation, poverty rates skyrocket, children don't have enough to eat in school lunchrooms, in community kitchens, etc.

The social crisis is acute, and there are several possible outcomes: one, as I mentioned, is collapse. Collapse in this case would come in the form of the currency crisis transforming into a full-blown run on the banks. This may or may not happen. It could happen before or after elections.

NA: The international financial press still seems to favor Cambiemos, even if they are willing to recognize that the administration was characterized by "mismanagement." What would you call it?

CK : There may have been mismanagement, but this crisis is the product of a determinate economic policy. It doesn't have to do with any of the causes that local and foreign commentators have alleged: it's not a reflection of the Argentine people, or the last seventy years of Argentine history; it isn't the fault of the previous government, and it isn't the consequence of an external crisis.

The crisis is the result of extreme neoliberal policy. It happened in the 1970s during the military dictatorship, under the stewardship of Minister of Economy José Alfredo Martínez de Hoz, and again in the nineties with President Menem. It happened with the Alianza government eighteen years ago, and again today.

Every time Argentina has implemented free trade policies and deregulated markets the outcome has been the same. After that, one can start to speak of mismanagement, but in that case mismanagement just means doing what one can within an exceedingly narrow range of choices. Everything starts to seem like bad economic policy when there is a structural problem that can't be addressed. When a country is already on the edge of default, there's no such thing as good administration.

NA : With general elections in October, are there any signs of a viable alternative?

CK: Until October we're stuck in a holding pattern. After October, several possibilities may open up.

One, highly unlikely, is that the incumbent Cambiemos party wins the election. It would be truly strange for a government to be re-elected in an economic and social scenario like the current one. But it could happen, and the result will be to pile austerity on top of existing austerity.

Considering the potential economic

and social consequences that this would bring, a victory for Cambiemos is a truly terrifying scenario to contemplate. It would mean, among other things, the total surrender of the country's natural resources, like the Vaca Muerta Oilfields. Again, the deep, structural effects of a victory for Cambiemos would be catastrophic and have to be avoided.

NA: Would the results be something like what Greece experienced at the hands of the troika?

CK: Not exactly, because in Greece austerity was implemented by a left-wing government rather than the right wing. It would be as if Syriza never came to power.

At the same time, some people are expecting positive results, particularly those who remember how Argentina rebuilt itself in 2003 after the 2001 crisis. There's an assumption that a combination of factors will lead towards recovery.

The problem is that the circumstances today are very different. Our position post-2001 was much more favorable: debt payment was postponed for five years, so there was debt relief that allowed the country to recover. Commodity prices were high and the domestic market was able to recuperate, in large part because the "mega-devaluation" of the immediately preceding era allowed for an immediate rebound of the export sector.

Another possibility would be something like Tsipras in Greece, represented in local terms by the "Fernández ticket" of Cristina de Kirchner and Alberto Fernandez. This alternative seems to be on the table.

If one looks at what happened in Greece — unemployment, the collapse of pensions, recession, a full-blown crisis — this is possible. The most important similarity is that where Greece had the troika, Argentina is under the thumb of the IMF. The IMF, like the troika, plays the role of sole interlocutor. This is different from the previous crisis in Argentina: then, debt was spread out among many private lenders. Today,

it's just the IMF.

I don't see the "Portuguese path" as a viable solution either, although some people in Argentina are looking to the Luso-model as a possible fix. I don't see it happening because Portugal was given debt relief and was subject to more lenient treatment than Greece. After austerity in Greece, there was a political decision on the part of the German government to be more benevolent towards Portugal. I don't think this will happen in Argentina, but the possibility is there.

I think we can expect a much more unforgiving version of the IMF, like the troika with Greece, or like the IMF in its treatment of the Ukraine, which suffered from extreme austerity measures in 2015.

What remains to be seen is whether Argentina will follow "the Argentine model": a crisis that builds and builds until it explodes, producing a shift in the country's entire economic and social orientation.

NA : The IMF is already involved in Ecuador and other countries in the region. Would you say that the Fund is looking to make an example of its most unruly Latin American client?

CK : The takeaway idea is that the IMF is the sole authority behind the crisis. The Fund has always had a privileged role in managing international crises, but the debtor relation has never been directly with the IMF. What typically occurs is a country finds itself indebted to many banks and eventually reaches a point where it can't pay. The IMF shows up at that point and assumes the role of guarantor of future payment.

However, Argentina's current debt with the Fund is on par with what is owed to the banks. Argentina has received a historic \$57 billion bailout package from the IMF, which is actually a problem for the IMF. In that sense, the crisis is not only a concern for Argentina but for the IMF itself.

The way this unfolded was unusual: the United States demanded the Fund loan money to Argentina for purely geopolitical reasons — with an eye

on Venezuela, the United States is trying to shore up an important ally in the Southern Cone. This was against the Fund's own wishes, because they knew they were lending to a client that will never pay them back.

When Argentina does reach insolvency, for the first time in history it won't be with the banks but directly with the Fund. Hence international financial analysts are concerned about the effects Argentina could produce within the IMF.

What all this means is that the Fund will assume a hardline stance towards Argentina. In practice that won't mean further repayment demands, but instead a series of deferrals on payments in exchange for deepened austerity.

The International Monetary Fund currently has its own representative set up in Argentina's Central Bank. The minister of economy is essentially IMF director Christine Lagarde.

However, what is especially troubling nowadays is the level of naivety one finds locally with regard to the IMF. People seem to think that the government is the sole culprit and that the IMF is here to lend a helping hand.

Even the Kirchnerist opposition has embraced an image of the IMF as if it were a benevolent institution, like an old friend. The opposition is eager to meet with Fund representatives and send a message that "we are willing to negotiate."

It's alarming to see the opposition rushing off to Washington, rather than raising awareness and encouraging social mobilization. In contrast with other periods, the bulk of the opposition isn't rallying against the IMF. There were some gestures in that direction in May-June 2018, but those efforts were swept under the rug. This is worrying, because sooner or later the Fund will come back and say, "Very well, now it's time for a labor reform bill and a pension reform bill," which is the priority of the IMF.

The IMF wants to impose a labor reform bill like in Brazil, and a pension reform bill like Greece's.

Now more than ever, we need to remember two examples: Greece and Ecuador. In Ecuador, Lenín Moreno campaigned with Rafael Correa on the slogan "I am the anti-right candidate." He beat the right wing as a progressive candidate and then applied the same austerity measures as Macri. It's disheartening to find right-wing economic policy embraced by so-called progressives. A more conservative sector of Kirchnerism is starting to fall in line with this tendency.

NA: Striking too since the Kirchners rose to political prominence based on their opposition to the IMF. Is there no discussion around the legitimacy of the debt?

CK: Only on the Left. Unlike Kirchnerism, the Left has a series of proposals. The first: get our priorities in order. Are we more concerned with the payment of interests or the wellbeing of the population? Should we be building schools, feeding our children, helping pensioners pay for medication, or paying off the IMF?

Many believe that we can do both. Here, we need to avoid idealism: if we can do both then that would be wonderful, but we need to assume the worst possible scenario, starting by looking at our own history with the IMF. Would the IMF accept a different set of terms? This seems unlikely.

Preparing for the worst-case scenario, we need to utilize mass mobilization and start to develop people's consciousness. Failing to do so, the IMF won't leave us with many choices.

The second step is to perform a debt audit. What is it that we're paying for? All of the debt accrued by the Macri government has gone to financing capital flight. We're paying the interest on money that entered the country and was then placed in offshore tax havens by Argentine capitalists.

The people are being forced to pay for a scheme that the capitalists are responsible for. This is inadmissible. So the first step is perform a debt audit: an inquiry into what that debt consisted of, what was it used for, who

received the money, and so on. Let those who profited from these financial operations be the ones that cover the expenses. That's the purpose of a debt inquiry.

Thirdly, regardless of what happens in Argentina, we have to exercise control over the currency. By October there won't be a single US dollar left in the Central Bank. Argentina is buried under a heap of debt and has no reserves to pay it back, since they've been sent offshore. Under such circumstances, taking control of our currency and the banks is vital.

Without these three measures — prioritizing payments, a debt audit, control of the currency and financial system — it will be very difficult to find any way out of the crisis. The Left is proposing these ideas in the midst of an increasingly conservative political climate, where few are willing to listen.

We need to push for a sovereign handling of the debt, one that would put us in the position of paying on our own terms and not those established by the Fund.

NA : You mentioned earlier the "Fernández ticket" — the electoral formula of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner as vice-president and Alberto Fernández as president. Reactions have ranged from celebratory — Cristina seems to have hit on a winning formula that can beat Macri — to more cautious skepticism about the rightward shift of Kirchnerism. How should the Left, broadly construed, regard the "Fernández ticket"?

CK: As I've said, the left and its candidates — the Workers' Left Front and others — are the only political force that is proposing a serious, clearly delineated program to confront the IMF and overcome the crisis. They will need to make their voices heard more than ever during the electoral campaign, which will be dominated by vague promises, and they will need to have members in Congress whose allegiance to the popular cause is unshakeable.

That being said, the Argentine left

struggles with sectarianism and has trouble presenting a common front in elections. That same sectarianism prevents the Left from engaging with other political sectors and social movements, which is what the current conjuncture calls for: a serious engagement with the renewed hope that the "Fernández ticket" awakens among the popular classes.

The Left is of course aware that it is not enough to just have a valid program. The problem is in their diagnosis: they attribute their shortcomings to a lack of social mobilization, when the real problem is political in nature. The rise of the Fernández formula is being propelled by a rejection of Macri and the favorable memory of Kirchnerism. Different from the 2001 crisis, when the leading slogan "Que se vayan todos" was an expression of a wholesale rejection of the political class, voter turnout is extremely high.

This means, among other things, that the Left needs to mature with respect to its position on an eventual second round run-off between Macrismo and "the Fernández ticket." It needs to be categorical in its endorsement of a vote against the Right, which will have the effect of giving left parties greater visibility and more favorable outcomes in legislative elections. This was the strategy adopted by the Brazilian left in endorsing the vote against Bolsonaro.

NA: Where are the social movements in all this? Some voices on the Left have leveled the accusation — perhaps in bad faith — that social organizations have become a tool used by the government to "outsource" the administration of basic services and to effectively pacify the poorest sectors.

CK : No, that's incorrect. The social organizations currently operating among the country's marginalized communities represent one of the biggest achievements of the 2001 and post-2001 period. That period saw an extraordinary level of popular organization, and that organization now forms an essential part of Argentina's social fabric.

Since the government took power, there have been huge marches to guarantee continued social spending and the preservation of social rights. The level of consciousness and organization is superior to previous levels.

It would be a serious mistake to speak, as some do, of the social movements as if they were comparable to the highly bureaucratized General Confederation of Labor (CGT). It's thanks to the organizing efforts of social movements that the more serious regional problems — criminality, social disintegration — have been kept at bay. Social organizations are responsible for what could otherwise have been a complete unraveling of the social fabric, as we've seen in Mexico and Brazil.

NA: Speaking of social disintegration, what about the extreme right? Is there not some risk that the progressives' embrace of austerity could lead to disenchantment and, as happened in Brazil, produce a surge in far-right tendencies?

CK: Not in the immediate. Here, there are some noteworthy differences between Argentina and Brazil. Popular mobilization in Brazil cratered under the Workers' Party (PT). In Argentina there has not been a comparable process of demobilization like what took place under Dilma. Under Dilma the right wing wrested control of the streets away from the Left. In Brazil, Dilma let the people down. Cristina didn't do that, she lost the elections — it's one thing to lose an election, and another to create a generalized sense of disenchantment among the popular classes. Cristina left office with the Plaza de Mayo full of supporters, whereas Dilma left without a single supporter behind her. Dilma had a neoliberal finance minister. Cristina didn't.

In Latin America, whoever holds the streets has the political power. The political force that can exercise its authority over the streets will see that power reflected in the institutions. In that sense, the right wing in Argentina has little presence on the streets, by way of contrast with Brazil: there, the Right won because it won the streets.

That's also why Venezuelan right won't win, because it can't win the streets from the government.

The other issue is that the Argentine right wing bet all its chips on Macri. Macri was the right-wing government of choice, and now the verdict is in. There are some more far-right formations, like Alfredo Olmedo or Espert with the Libertarian Party, but they are marginal to the main political currents.

NA: Beyond the generalities of the "Pink Tide" — widely understood to be receding — can you identify any particular sites of resistance or even emergent left-wing forces on the continent?

CK: The decade-long progressive cycle was the result of popular rebellions that triumphed over neoliberal governments, shifting the "relations of force" and providing a sense of political relief. These triumphs ushered in a democratic resurgence.

Soon enough, conservatism was reinstated. Reaction has taken hold at various points in the region, but the future development of the conservative restoration is still uncertain. The restoration hasn't been consolidated, and the progressive cycle hasn't returned.

Amid such uncertainty, I think developments in three countries will be decisive. The first big test is what will happen in Venezuela. Depending on how the situation in Venezuela is played out, the reality in Latin America will follow a determinate path. The country possesses a strategic centrality — if the Venezuelan right wing and the United States triumph there, Venezuela will become a pillar for a lasting conservative restoration. The coup attempt led by the faux-president Guaidó has failed. For the time being there's no sign of military intervention. If the Right loses in Venezuela, there will be an opening for a resurgence of the progressive cycle.

The second test is Brazil. Brazil is currently in the midst of a deeply conservative phase, with potentially fascist components. However, in terms

of the right wing consolidating power, Bolsonaro has failed in every way imaginable. He acts like a buffoon, the military distrusts him, and now, most recently, an important social struggle has reemerged in the form of the student movement. If Bolsonaro's power erodes, that would be a strong signal of a progressive resurgence.

In Mexico, with AMLO, the verdict is still out — we've yet to see if there will be substantial political change. For the time being it seems unlikely.

The third big test is Argentina. This will be an electoral test — whether Macri or the opposition wins the elections, these are two totally different scenarios. Macri's reelection would mean the consolidation of the conservative restoration, whereas the Kirchnerist sector could potentially mean the re-launching of the progressive cycle.

We haven't yet seen popular rebellions like those taking place in Argentina, Bolivia, and Venezuela at the beginning of the nineties, but I would say that the possibilities in Latin America remain open.

NA: And a last question: as one of the most prominent living exponents of dependency theory, what can that approach tell us about contemporary capitalism?

CK: Dependency theory is experiencing a resurgence in Latin America for three reasons. The first is economic: the enduring underdevelopment of the region and the extraction of its resources have been central elements in the analysis of dependency theory. A country is dependent because it's underdeveloped, and is unable to develop because its wealth is drawn out of it. This was especially prevalent in Latin America during the last decade: through its reversion to primary commodity production and extractivism, industrial regression, crises, social deterioration, and so on.

The dynamics of dependency have become especially characteristic of Latin America in the last decade, more so than in other regions. For example, I study the contrast between Latin America and South and Southeast

Asia. In Latin America, the tendency towards dependency has become more pronounced than in other regions.

Dependency theory is also important for grasping the importance of political sovereignty. Latin America lacks sovereignty because of US imperialism. Latin America is still North America's backyard " with Trump, more than ever " but the dispute between the United States and China over the region's resources has become central. The proprietary

interests of US imperialism are being challenged by the continental presence and investment of the Chinese government.

Lastly, there is an ideological dimension. Dependency theory as an idea ties back to a resurgent interest in Latin American Marxism. A half century after the Cuban revolution, there's a renewed interest in a particular brand of Marxist thought that is unique to the region, and dependency theory is part of that

tradition.

This revival we're seeing is not just a fascination with radical ideas in Latin America, or with more heterodox versions of Marxism. The resurgence responds to the possibility of formulating a unique synthesis of Latin American concerns and Marxist theory, and dependency theory is one expression of that synthesis.

Translation by Joel Ruggi

[Jacobin](#)

South Africa: Something's got to give

23 June 2019, by **Amandla!**

Behind this disaffection lies a wasteland. Instead of a flourishing society freed from racism, division and violence, post-Apartheid South Africa is a society of social decay. Most of us have become numbed to its everyday violence and brutality. Incidents like these scarcely register:

â€¢ Three children hanged by their father, after which he hangs himself;

â€¢ Four children found burnt to death by their mother, who left them unattended and locked up in their home;

â€¢ School student stabbed to death by a fellow student who had waited patiently outside the school for him to finish his exams; two other students left with serious stab wounds;

â€¢ Church services commonly attacked and congregants robbed.

Underlying this depth of social decay is a frightening level of unemployment. More than 10 million people are unemployed. This translates into an unemployment rate close to 40%.

And there is no sign that things will get better. Quite the reverse. The economy is weakening rather than strengthening. The first quarter of this year saw the biggest drop in what the

South Africa economy produces (GDP) since the financial crash more than ten years ago. And this is getting on for a year and a half since Ramaphosa took office as president, promising a new dawn on the back of economic growth.

With an economy teetering on another recession, debt levels rising, credit rating agencies banging at the door, something has got to give. The last time we were in such a situation, the newly elected Mandela government gave us GEAR - a home-grown structural adjustment programme, that effectively crushed the dream of a new South Africa, for the millions made poor by Apartheid. Are we headed for a new wave of austerity, privatisation, retrenchments and wage cuts?

ESKOM will be decisive

What happens with Eskom will be a clear indication of the role and nature of Ramaphosa's government and signal the likely direction of its macro-economic policy. [28]. Will Ramaphosa, and now his new man overseeing the energy sector, Gwede Mantashe, be able to break the resistance of NUM and Numsa to the

restructuring of this key state-owned enterprise at the engine room of South Africa's economy? It is clear that the unbundling of Eskom will result in retrenchments and privatisation of parts of the electricity sector. NUM and Numsa have sworn they will resist this at all costs.

Big capital sees Eskom as a testing ground. Can Ramaphosa finally rise above the factional battles in the ANC and deliver the market reforms they insist on before they will open the investment flows? A recent IMF report on South Africa was very clear on this:

"Public enterprise efficiency needs to be improved with measures that strengthen their finances and harden the budget constraints they face. In particular, Eskom will require bold action to redefine its business model so that it becomes self-sustained and ensures affordable and reliable electricity supply. Without fundamental reforms in Eskom's finances and operations, continued budget transfers or assumption of its debt by the government will not resolve the company's issues. Postponing the needed adjustment of the entity will only force greater difficulties down the road."

And here lies the rub. This will entail pushing through a harsh anti-poor and

anti-working-class agenda. This is why, for the IMF and capital, Ramaphosa is their man. He has the ability to be all things to all people. His mastering of the politics of social compacting will be used to obscure the coming assault on the poor and working class. We have already seen him at work. It was Ramaphosa who oversaw the adoption of a minimum wage proposal while placing curbs on the right to strike. It was Ramaphosa who sold the Investment Summit to the unions with a meaningless jobs summit. His ability to paper over acute class differences can also be seen in the way he has taken the sting out of the land expropriation debate.

Eskom would not, one imagines, have been Ramaphosa's choice as his first protagonist. He takes on all the key organised components of the labour movement - Cosatu, Saftu and Fedusa. In particular he needs to neutralise the resistance of NUM, the very union where he comes from. It probably explains why he put NUM's other former General Secretary, Gwede Mantashe, in charge of the energy portfolio.

Breaking the resistance of the unions, to Eskom's restructuring will entail dividing NUM and Numsa, which up to now have been working very closely at Eskom, in spite of the previous antagonism between them. Somehow, Ramaphosa and Mantashe need to break this collaboration, otherwise they can expect a long, hard battle to unfold. Eskom is designated an essential service, which means strike action is illegal. But that did not prevent NUM and Numsa from striking together against the zero wage increase that the ESKOM management first offered in 2018.

And although the labour movement has been substantially weakened over the years, NUM and Numsa were able to win a credible wage increase of 7.5%. Can the NUM leadership be persuaded to retreat and support Eskom unbundling, in the face of fierce opposition from Numsa? This would almost certainly lead to them losing a large number of members, something they can hardly afford after the Marikana debacle.

Given the pressures from foreign investors, who Ramaphosa courts, and the influence of the credit rating agencies, it is likely that the interests of big capital will prevail. His strategy is rooted in foreign investment, and he knows full well that he must satisfy their needs if they are going to come to South Africa. That's why his victory at Nasrec was so celebrated, and why his election victory was both promoted and celebrated by such mouthpieces of big capital as Business Day and Sunday Times journalist, Peter Bruce, and The Economist. They have invested in Ramaphosa to pull the economy out of crisis. Dealing with state capture and the Zuptas is just the first and easy part of what he is expected to deliver. Now he must take on the public sector, restructure state owned enterprises, contain state debt and reduce the public sector wage bill.

It all begins with ESKOM.

Resisting the break-up ESKOM will need more than the labour movement standing together. It will require alliances with social movements and the broader public. A successful strategy to defend ESKOM from

unbundling and privatisation will require that the unions go beyond a defensive posture. They will need to re-imagine a public utility able to serve the interests of the vast majority, who suffer energy poverty. For this reason, it will be necessary to develop a vision of Eskom as an efficient public utility, at the centre of a transition to clean, affordable and democratically run energy production and distribution. The unions must develop a programme capable of forging a broad and progressive alliance of social forces.

For this reason, it will be necessary for NUM and Numsa to clearly articulate a commitment to drive the transition in Eskom to a public utility that serves the interests of the poor. It will entail the reform of Eskom from top to bottom, with transparent and effective governance structures introduced that give decision making powers to workers, middle management, and representatives of communities and municipalities. Such a vision would include expanded provision of free electricity for the poor, the rapid development of socially owned renewable energy through Eskom and a low carbon industrial strategy to create decent jobs.

Such a strategy would provide a model for the type of alliance and programmes needed to resist the coming Gear 2019 programme of the new Ramaphosa government. Defensive piecemeal struggles will not cut it. Without a vision of social justice, the unions will be isolated, divided and defeated and we will all suffer at the expense of the corporate elite.

[Amandla](#)

Success of the general strike of 14 June

21 June 2019, by Esquerdaonline

Strikes, stoppages, shift delays and street demonstrations occurred in all states and the Federal District.

Mainly, in the capitals and in the big cities we saw the resistance expressed by the trade union federations, the

Frente Brasil Popular (Brazil Popular Front), the Frente Pueblo Sin Miedo (People's Front Without Fear), the

student movement and the popular movements, among others.

The size of the demonstrations was unequal. In some regions the functioning of the cities was significantly affected, mainly where public transport workers stopped work. In most cities, in practice, a significant national day of struggles and stoppages occurred. In eleven capital cities and in dozens of major cities, the banking system was paralysed.

In the city of São Paulo, the rail unions (affiliated to the UGT-General Union of Workers) and the workers on the trains ended up backing down from strike action, a serious error. But we should highlight the heroic strike of the subway workers, which impacted part of the transport in the largest Brazilian city.

Once again the movements linked to the defence of public education were at the forefront of the paralysis and protests. There was a strong national strike by teachers in the elementary network, in most states and large cities. The federal education workers also struck with force. The student movement was present in all these actions, unifying their struggle with that of the workers. Whether in the roadblocks, or in the big marches, the strength of youth fighting for their right to a future was felt once again.

The MTST (Movement of Homeless Workers) and the MST (Movement of the Landless) also played a prominent role, building basic actions to guarantee the interruption of traffic in several regions of the country. With more difficulty, the workers' sectors also staged strikes, stoppages and demonstrations, especially in some branches and regions: the oil tankers nationwide, the metallurgists of the ABC of São Paulo, Paraná and the Paraíba Valley (São Paulo), civil construction workers in Fortaleza, among other categories.

Another feature of the day was the big unitary street demonstrations, at the end of the morning and at the end of the afternoon. Again, hundreds of thousands took to the streets for the right to work, to study, to retire. Particularly in Porto Alegre, Rio de

Janeiro and São Paulo, there was also repression, violent and criminal, carried out by the military police against legitimate popular demonstrations. Some activists remain imprisoned: we must demand they are immediately released and not criminalized.

We must not exaggerate our strength, we know the obstacles in this war and the strength of the enemy, but we still believe in the fighting capacity of this resistance movement. Overall, nationally, it was a very expressive day of mobilization, a step forward in the resistance struggles against the Bolsonaro government attacks. It is time to continue betting on the strengthening of our mobilizations: we can have no confidence in closed-door negotiations with the government and Congress.

The contradictions of the enemy

The week began on Sunday night (9 June), when the explosive denunciations of the portal "The Intercept" revealed the intrigue of Lava-Jato, especially with the illegal and illegitimate relations between Sérgio Moro, the ex-judge of the operation and current Minister of Justice, and Attorney Deltan Dallagnol.

These denunciations prove, once again, the illegality of the process that condemned Lula. The former president is a political prisoner, whose presidential candidacy was impeded by the intrigue of Lava-Jato. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the #Lulalivre campaign, which will have an important moment on 25 June, with a trial in the STF (Supreme Federal Court), and promote the campaign by #ForaMoro, as he has no legitimacy to remain at the head of the Ministry of Justice and coordinate the investigation against himself.

Also, on the eve of the general strike, the rapporteur on social security reform in the Chamber of Deputies, Samuel Moreira (Party of Brazilian Social Democracy, PSDB) read his report to the Special Commission. In it, we saw a retreat from points the

Bolsonaro government proposal presented previously. Despite these changes, which are explained by the conflictive relationship between the Bolsonaro government and its allies in Congress and the growing strength of the mobilizations in defence of Social Security, the report is far from representing a victory of our movement.

In the end, the project continues to represent a strong attack on retirees. The combination of increasing the minimum age and increasing the time of contribution, will mean that millions of Brazilian workers will have the right to retire denied or, at least, hampered.

In that sense, the role of the governors was extremely reactionary, including the governments of the PT and other opposition parties. PT governors and the opposition scored an "own goal" in the week of the general strike, supporting the reforms of Guedes and Bolsonaro, just criticizing four points, which were precisely those that were taken from the report by Samuel Moreira. And they are still going to try to reincorporate in the current reform the attacks on state and municipal public officials.

The proposal for reform, now altered by the report presented in the Special Commission, is entering the decisive time of its progress through the Chamber of Deputies. To move forward, it needs to be approved, first in the commission, and then by the plenary of the Chamber in two rounds, with a minimum vote of 308 of the 513 deputies.

We know that an agreement between the government and its allies opens the possibility of approval of this reactionary reform in Congress. But we are in the middle of the fight, nothing is decided yet. The defeat of this unacceptable pension reform of Bolsonaro, Guedes, their parliamentary allies and the governors, will not be conquered behind closed doors within the palaces and Congress.

The only way to defeat it is to continue investing more and more in a unitary and grassroots national movement that resists the brutal attacks on social

and democratic rights launched by this far-right government.

A proposal for continuing mobilization

The Trade Unions, fronts of struggle, the student movement and the opposition parties will meet again next week. In these meetings, the discussion must be the strategy for fighting the Bolsonaro government and its attacks. The meeting should

begin by repudiating the policy of collaboration with the reform, with only occasional criticism, which has been applied by the governors of the PT and other parties. Our path must be the opposite.

We must rely on mobilization to defeat the reform, the cuts in public education and other attacks of this far-right government. Therefore, it is essential that a new national day of struggle and paralyzes be scheduled, especially when the reform vote is near. Mainly, it is necessary to mark a new day to hold big demonstrations in

the streets, which expressively marked the 15M, and the 30M and, now, the 14J.

A first step in this continuity could be the holding of a demonstration attached to the Congress of the UNE (National Union of Students), which happens next month in Brasilia. These large demonstrations have become an important counterpoint to the reactionary acts of the right and the extreme right, who threaten to return to the streets on June 30. Our priority task continues to be to intensify the mobilizations to defeat the Bolsonaro government in the streets.

Women's strike in Switzerland with more than 500 000 women participating

20 June 2019, by BFS/MPS

Switzerland may be known for many things and even though many believe that it may be a progressive country, as far as women's rights are concerned, Switzerland is a particularly drastic example of how a highly globalized, neoliberal economy, the free flow of goods, capital, labour and patriarchal structures can coexist.

In Appenzell, a small canton, women's voting rights were only introduced in 1990. But only after being forced to do so by federal authorities. On the national level, the right for women to vote also only exists since 1971. Until 2004, rape in the bond of matrimony wasn't a criminal offence that the state would have to prosecute (on its own initiative), and maternity protection has only been in place since 2006 - but still only lasts 14 weeks. Paternity leave doesn't exist - men get one day off after the birth of their child. At the same time, Switzerland has one of the most expensive childcare systems in the world: childcare for a child, five days a week costs up to half of an average wage. Additional to that the working conditions for the caregivers at day-care centres are catastrophic.

Moreover, the gender wage gap is immense. In terms of wages there can be a difference determined which goes up to 30%, even if this difference is often concealed by the statistics and reduced to 10-20%. In addition, there is a shocking number of women who have experienced sexualized violence, assaults, harassment and psychological violence. In Switzerland, a femicide occurs every two weeks. All those reasons and many more build the basis for the women's strike 2019.

Why the 14th of June, 2019?

On the 14th of June 1981, a so-called "equality article" was included in the Swiss constitution. This article was intended to provide the legal basis to promote gender equality. But it was of little use. For a long time, the constitutional article only remained a piece of paper until women had enough. On the tenth anniversary of the article, they called out the first nationwide women's strike on the 14th of June 1991. It was supposed to finally add authority to the women's

demands for real equality.

Many women's organizations joined this call. Throughout the country on June 14th, women took part in various strike actions and transformed streets and squares into a sea of purple - the color of the women's movement. In Bern, the closed-off Bundesplatz was stormed whilst whistles were blown, the place where political celebrities had gathered for a celebration of the 700-year-old Swiss Confederation.

The idea for the women's strike came from female watch workers in the remote Vallée de Joux who were outraged by the unequal wages in their industry that still hadn't changed (some of them earned only half of their male colleagues!). In October 1990, the Congress of the Swiss Confederation of Trade Unions also decided to join the call and participate at the national women's strike.

The strike day oriented itself at foreign examples: On 26th of August in 1970, a year before Swiss women were granted the right to vote, a "Women's Strike for Equality" was held to mark the 50th anniversary of

the introduction of women's voting rights in the United States. The strike focused mainly on New York, but there were also actions in other parts of the country involving a total of about 20,000 women. Even more impressive was the Icelandic women's strike on October 24th, 1975, in which about 90 percent of the female population stopped working for one day.

The second women's strike in the history of Switzerland

Many of the problems mentioned in 1991 have not been solved in the last 28 years. Neoliberal restructuring, attacks on the public service sector and the precarisation of entire fields of work have in some cases exacerbated the problems of feminized occupations. For this reason, in the spring of 2018, the idea of calling another nationwide women's strike was born in the west of Switzerland.

Soon this idea was taken up in various cities and women's strike collectives were formed. In autumn 2018, the Congress of the Swiss Confederation of Trade Unions joined the call for the women's strike. national meeting of the women's strike collectives in April 2019

In the preparations for the women's strike on the 14th of June 2019, women, trans-, inter- and queer people have networked, exchanged and organized in countless committees, working groups, associations, organizations; in daycare centers, neighbourhoods, offices, shops, educational institutions, hospitals and many other social spaces for over a year.

Unlike in 1991, there was no central leadership of the strike preparations. Instead, the main work was carried out locally in the collectives and the various projects were coordinated at national level.

The women's strike and its demands were intensively discussed in advance.

It became apparent that the strike and the problem areas addressed were of great social importance and that many people would join the strike. But nobody could have guessed how big it would actually become.

Well over half a million people participated in the strike. Almost half a million people, mostly women took part at the demonstrations in the various cities and towns, others struck at home or showed their solidarity in a different way. Many larger cities experienced the most massive demonstrations in their recent history. For a country with a population of 8 million inhabitants, this was huge.

An extraordinary day

What happened in Switzerland at the women's strike day is extraordinary in many ways. It is extraordinary because in recent years there have hardly been any major social movements in this country, which is characterised by working peace agreements and concordance. It is extraordinary because we can observe a worrying rise of right-wing extremist parties around Switzerland - as the European elections at the end of May 2019 once again have confirmed. In virtually all European countries (and beyond) racist, anti-social and anti-feminist parties and organizations are on the rise. In Italy, Hungary and possibly soon again in Austria they are already in government and a change of power is not foreseeable in the near future. Many of these parties openly refer to the Swiss People's Party (SVP, a far-right populist party) as their role model, which has been the strongest party in Switzerland for years. So, in conclusion, Switzerland is not only far behind in terms of equality but also leads in terms of strong right-wing parties.

It is precisely in this historical situation that Switzerland is experiencing one of the strongest social mobilizations in its recent history. Only rarely before - not even during the women's strike in 1991 - was a social movement as present in society as the current feminist movement. The women's strike is of

immeasurable value, not only for the political and media discourse to shift to the left. It also has the potential to bring about a lasting change to the balance of power in one of the most stable countries in the world and to contribute to the long-term self-organization of wage-dependent women.

The Swiss women's strike was embedded in the worldwide upswing of feminist struggles from the very beginning. The Argentinean and Polish feminists, the Women's Marches in the USA, the "Ni una di meno" movement in Italy and above all the million-strong women's strikes in the Spanish state in 2018/19 - they all exerted a direct influence on the feminist movement in Switzerland. And these international links are also the great strength of the movement: knowing that women in Switzerland - in contrast to the women's strike in 1991 - aren't striking alone and aren't detached from the rest of the world can be of crucial importance for its further developments.

Beyond June 14th

The map on 1406.ch shows the incredible variety and extent of the strike activities that took place on the 14th of June. In all major cities and dozens of smaller towns there were work interruptions and extended breaks, walkouts, city strolls, lectures, meetings, blockades and demonstrations.

But the feminist collectives throughout Switzerland have been saying for months that the 14th of June 2019 will not be the end, but the starting signal for a broad feminist network in Switzerland and beyond. Together with the climate strike movement, Switzerland is currently experiencing an upswing in social movements that is supported by hundreds of thousands of activists and is unique in its self-organized form. For the first time years the anti-capitalist, feminist and ecological left has a reason to look forward to the upcoming months.

Source : bfSozialismus.ch.

Pictures in original article and [here](#).

Everything You Need to Know About the Hong Kong Protests

20 June 2019, by **Alexa, Au Loong-Yu, Chris Chan, Chun-Wing Lee, Kevin Lin, Lam Chi Leung, Student Labour Action Coalition**

On June 9, Hong Kong was convulsed by a million-strong march against a proposed amendment that would allow suspects to be extradited from the former British colony to mainland China, along with other countries. The government “chaired by the Beijing-approved chief executive Carrie Lim” insists that political dissidents and activists would be unaffected by the amendment. But the measure set off a firestorm, igniting public anger even as the government rushed to push it through the Legislative Council by July.

Last Friday, following days of protests and clashes with the police, and amid growing calls for political strikes, Lam tabled the amendment. [29] And on Saturday, hours into another massive demonstration “said to number over two million out of a population of seven million, with protesters demanding the amendment’s complete withdrawal and Lam’s resignation” the Hong Kong government issued an apology. [30]

Why has the amendment aroused such indignation? How did the legacy of the 2014 Umbrella Movement, Hong Kong’s last major wave of demonstrations, shape the current protests? What are the politics of the protesters? And what are the prospects for democratic movements in Hong Kong and China going forward?

To shed light on all of these questions and more, Jacobin contributor Kevin Lin talked to a range of activists and scholars: Chris Chan, a sociologist at the Chinese University of Hong Kong and a student and labor activist; Lam Chi Leung, a socialist in Hong Kong

and a member of Left21; Chun-Wing Lee, a socialist, member of Left 21, and editor of The Owl, a left-wing website in Hong Kong [31]; and Au Loong Yu, a writer and activist. Lin also solicited comments from Alexa, a Hong Kong-based activist, and the Student Labour Action Coalition, a distinctly left-wing group in a place with few of them. The interview has been condensed and lightly edited for clarity.

The Protests

KL: What is the significance of the extradition amendment? Why has it garnered so much opposition in Hong Kong?

ALY: Hong Kong has extradition agreements with twenty countries, including the UK and the US, but not with mainland China. The pro-Beijing camp, here in Hong Kong and overseas, argues that since Hong Kong has extradition agreements with the West, why can’t it have an agreement with mainland China?

Under the “one country, two systems” arrangement, Article 8 of the Basic Law stipulates that “the laws previously in force in Hong Kong . . . shall be maintained,” which means that Hong Kong is insulated from China’s legal system. [32] Hong Kong, as a special region of China, does not have the necessary power and strength to resist the Chinese central government’s legal persecution if Hong Kong’s legal system is not insulated. China is not only disdainful of basic due process but also of judicial independence. An extradition agreement between China and Hong

Kong necessarily undermines “one country, two systems.”

LCL: The amendment to the Extradition Law touched the nerve of most Hong Kong citizens. Under the rule of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), citizens often do not have due process, resulting regularly in wrongful convictions.

Those who have criticized the CCP, those who organize the Tiananmen vigil each year in Hong Kong, those who have helped Chinese dissidents, or even those Hong Kong activists who have supported labor and other rights organizations in mainland China could be considered “endangering national security” and extradited to mainland China. [33] Ordinary citizens are concerned that Hong Kong will be like any other mainland Chinese city, where the freedom of citizens could be at risk.

ALY: Hong Kong people have the bitter memory of the Bookshop Five incident. [34] Between October and December 2015, five owners and staff from Causeway Bay Books went missing. They were believed to have been arrested for publishing books about the private life of Chinese president Xi Jinping.

What is alarming is not only that this violates the “one country, two systems” principle, but also that two of the arrests were extrajudicial arrests. Two of the booksellers, Gui Minhai and Lee Bo, were abducted by Chinese agents in Thailand and Hong Kong, respectively. If China’s legal system improved significantly then it would be possible to discuss an extradition agreement with China. But

in reality it has gone from bad to worse.

CWL: The turnout has been so large because even those who can be considered allies of the Hong Kong government do not support the amendment bill. [35] Since 1997, when Hong Kong reverted to Chinese rule, the Chinese government has been ruling Hong Kong by forging an alliance with the big capitalists and the middle class in Hong Kong. [36] This strategy is understandable because they, as the major beneficiaries of Hong Kong's capitalist development, are inclined to support the status quo.

But throughout these twenty-two years, the younger middle class, especially professionals, has become quite discontented with the government. While the fear that the relatively liberal lifestyle in Hong Kong is under threat is a major reason, it is undeniable that rising living costs, especially housing, is another factor. [37]

Since 2003, the Chinese government has tried to stabilize this alliance by increasing asset values in Hong Kong. Capital from mainland China is one of the causes of the growth of the property market and the stock market. But this governing strategy has clearly backfired, as it has become increasingly difficult for young people to purchase their own homes. The young middle class and students have become the cornerstone of the opposition forces in Hong Kong.

KL: Alexa, you've been at the demonstrations. Can you describe what you have seen? Who are the protesters, and how are the protests organized?

A: The protesters are people from all walks of life, high in spirit and hopeful. There are no longer just young students.

While there are no [formal] leaders in the protests, people have self-organized, mainly through Facebook, Telegram groups, and lihkg [an online forum like reddit]. They are super creative, making memes mimicking the pro-Beijing propaganda to appeal to the older generation in Hong Kong

for support. They have created "meditation" and "picnic" events on Facebook to call on people to gather at Tamar Park. [38] Some people also established a page to call people to go to the MTR [Hong Kong's metro system] for actions too.

At the scene of the mass protests, people are organized, and they know what resources they need. I think all these were learnt from the Umbrella Movement in 2014. [39] The high level of civic participation and the concerns for Hong Kong's development, human rights, and rule of law are at the highest point since 1997.

It is also the first time in my life seeing people, who have been mostly silent, express anger towards the government. They are disgusted by what the police force has done to peaceful protesters. [40] The police force has obviously violated the United Nations conventions in its use of excessive force.

KL: While the Civil Human Rights Front (a coalition of civil society organizations) formally called for the June 9 demonstration, the current movement, as Alexa noted, appears to be horizontal and leaderless. What are your thoughts on this aspect of the protests?

ALY: While the 2014 Umbrella Movement was largely spontaneous, the HKFS ("Hong Kong Federation of Students") was still instrumental in making that happen. The student organizations are now much smaller and very fragmented. Political parties, willingly or unwillingly, have also been marginalized in the mobilization.

The Civil Human Rights Front was instrumental in making the June 9 and the June 12 actions happen by getting the licenses to march and assemble in the first place. But it simply does not have the organizational capacity to lead massive civil disobedience.

In this 2019 movement, we are witnessing the continuation of a trend already very visible in 2014 – namely, the strong feeling in favor of decentralized and leaderless actions. The communication revolution makes coordination much easier now and rigid organization less necessary.

Yet there is a kind of fetishism of spontaneity among young activists. Many simply see organization as superfluous or necessarily authoritarian. Even the relatively new Demosist?, founded and led by Joshua Wong [a twenty-two-year-old activist who came to prominence during the Umbrella Revolution], seems not to be attractive enough to the current youngsters. [41]

Today anyone can be a temporary leader and call for radical actions without weighing the pros and cons. For instance, on June 11, certain small pro-independence localists called for "proportional violence against the government" and for people to break into the legislature and the government headquarters the next day to block the amendment bill from being introduced. Eventually hundreds of youngsters did try to break into the legislature on June 12, despite the fact that by then the legislature hall was empty, as there was no meeting at all. This was also the moment when the police began to fire rubber bullets, causing injuries.

Leaderless struggles, however great, are also less able to have careful deliberation before taking drastic actions, let alone able to fight against provocateurs and agents from both the Hong Kong and the Beijing governments. [42] That said, one must also recognize that the controversial attempt to break into the legislature was, for the first time in decades, positively received by many in Hong Kong.

KL: Despite the weakening of university student associations, other new groups have emerged. One of the more radical left groups, the Student Labour Action Coalition, seeks to link up student and workers' movements and has taken direct actions. Would you tell us about your coalition, and how you have participated in the protest movement?

SLAC: We are a coalition of concerned labor and social groups and unions founded in 2017. We believe that worker and student movements cannot be separated, and we focus on improving workers' conditions at universities by linking up students and

workers.

We have been supporting the protest movement by taking direct action. On June 8, we joined with the Hong Kong Federation of Social Work Students to march on the street to rally Hong Kong citizens to participate in the demonstration the next day. We participated in the demonstration with college students on June 9.

After the march, we joined the picket line and mobilized support for strike actions planned for June 12, and surrounded the Legislative Council. Because the Legislative Council is not democratic and most members are puppets of the Beijing government, we needed to surround the Legislative Council to stop the meetings.

KL: There are often accusations of foreign powers instigating Hong Kong's social movements, whether it's the Umbrella Movement or the current protests. What is your response to such accusations?

ALY: The Beijing and Hong Kong governments have said that the protests are funded by the American NED [National Endowment for Democracy]. [43]

It is true that most pan-democrat [pro-democracy] parties have received funding from the NED. But it is also undeniable that both the big protests and clashes on June 9 and 12 were not called by these parties. The Civil Human Rights Front is a coalition of more than fifty organizations, most of which are civil associations and trade unions. The main pan-democrat parties are part of it, but only constitute a minority.

The Front was founded in 2002, in a moment when the main pan-democrat parties were afraid to take the lead in mobilizing people. Precisely because of this history, the main pan-democrats have not been dominant within the Front.

Not to mention the fact that the Front possesses no authority over the people who come to their rally. Often the young people just do what they want upon joining.

Hong Kong Since the Umbrella Movement

KL: Many compare the current demonstrations with the Umbrella Movement, in which tens of thousands of people occupied key roads for seventy-nine days to protest the Chinese government's refusal to allow universal suffrage in Hong Kong's chief executive election. Five years later, what is your assessment of the Umbrella Movement?

CWL: The Umbrella Movement is a very complex story. Before 2014, the leaders of the opposition forces (the so-called pan-democrats) in elections were liberals. On the streets, social movement leaders could be understood as people embracing center-left policies.

To simplify an extremely complex story, the emergence of a huge number of "new" social movement participants overwhelmed the organizational capacity of the established political parties and social movement organizations/networks. From the perspective of many new and young protest participants, the established figures and organizations lacked legitimacy. Many of them therefore embraced what we call "localism" and/or oppose the idea that collective action should be led or coordinated by organizations.

The rise of localism and the distrust of organizations, from my point of view, are the major negative consequences of the Umbrella Movement. But the experience of confronting the police in the streets in 2014 clearly empowered many activists, and more people have become receptive to radical actions in the streets. Without such a change, which is partly a legacy of the Umbrella Movement, the protesters probably would not have been able to occupy the areas outside the Legislative Council, forcing the cancellation of the Legislative Council Meeting.

ALY: Soon after the end of the Umbrella Movement a wave of

demoralization swept through the young people, even though it was they who had made the occupation possible. Most loose organizations set up by young people in the previous years crumbled. The Hong Kong Federation of Students (HKFS) was attacked and then taken over by xenophobic localists, only to be dismantled later. And then the government started to take revenge and began putting a lot of activists in jail, which further exacerbated the demoralization.

Thanks to the Hong Kong government, a new round of resistance has been reignited, this time by an even younger generation. For a week, even middle school students mobilized in the hundreds to oppose the extradition bill.

The Umbrella generation represents a rupture with the older generation in terms of cultural identity: they are now more likely to identify themselves as Hong Kongers than Chinese, and behind this is the emotional link to Hong Kong which the older generation lacks. What makes the Umbrella generation special is that they began to develop such commitments and were politicized when their demand for universal suffrage was refused by the government. This year the China extradition bill further politicized an even younger generation.

I remember on the last day of the Umbrella Movement, people hung out a huge banner which read: "We will be back." This prophecy came true.

KL: As Au Loong Yu notes, since the Umbrella Movement, Hong Kong has seen a new generation of young activists and leaders emerge. Who is in this new generation of young leaders, and what are their political demands and strategies?

ALY: The pan-democrat parties were discredited for their timid attitude during the Umbrella Movement. The political vacuum was soon filled by two new forces, namely those who are for self-determination and those for independence. They mostly consist of young people.

The 2016 legislative election saw the

electoral victory of five new hands in politics from the above two currents, at the expense of the pan-democrat camp, including Lee Cheuk Yan, the leader of both the Labour Party and Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions. [44] The success of the latter two currents shows that many voters, especially the new generation, no longer accept the excessively moderate policy of the pan-democrats in their dealing with Beijing.

While Yau Wai-ching of Youngspiration and Cheng Chung-tai from Civil Passion are either right wing or far-right localists, Eddie Chu Hoi Dick, Lau Siu Lai, and Nathan Law Kwun-chung (representing Demosisto) are slightly left leaning. The former wing uses a lot of racist and xenophobic language, not just against the CCP but against all Chinese people. Youngspiration's program explicitly demands those who cannot speak either Cantonese or English be excluded from citizenship. (This is especially ridiculous, as many senior Hong Kong residents cannot speak either of the two languages but rather speak Hakka or Chaochou dialects.) They also aim at excluding mainland Chinese immigrants from enjoying basic benefits in Hong Kong. Civic Passion is well known for inciting violence against Chinese people. It is no accident that they have little interest in promoting labor rights and social security for marginalized groups and minorities. If these people are radical, they are radically conservative.

The latter wing's call for self-determination has not been linked to any anti-Chinese sentiment. Eddie Chu claims that he is for democratic self-determination, which includes rather than excludes Chinese people and other marginalized groups. Their political vision is wedded to a social platform which includes labor rights, gender rights, and the rights of minorities. The politics of these self-determination advocates are not always so clear cut, however, and may bend towards the localists when pressed hard by the latter. One must also add the League of Social Democrats to this camp of center-left self-determination advocates. Together the center-left camp garnered 15.2 percent of the vote in

2016.

LCL: Since the Umbrella Movement, the laissez-faire capitalism of Hong Kong has further increased poverty and economic inequality. One in five Hong Kong citizens, or 1.38 million, live under the poverty line. Its Gini coefficient of 0.539 is higher than that of the US and Singapore.

Hong Kong desperately needs a socialist force that opposes both authoritarianism and capitalism. But individuals and networks in Hong Kong who hold socialist views, such as Left21 and a few revolutionary socialist networks, are very weak, and have become more marginalized against the wave of localist sentiments.

KL: Social movement activists in Hong Kong have played a crucial role in supporting mainland Chinese activists in recent decades, at least partially motivated by the idea that Hong Kong's democratic future will depend on the democratic development of mainland China. [45] Can you talk about the ways in which Hong Kong activists have supported activists in China, and whether the political developments in Hong Kong will undermine this support?

LCL: Since the 1990s, Hong Kong activists have consistently supported labor, human rights, gender rights, LGBT rights, and environmental activists in China and contributed to the development of Chinese social movements and civil society.

The civil freedom of Hong Kong enables it to spread knowledge and literature of social movements to China, promote intellectual exchanges among mainland Chinese and Hong Kong activists, and organize solidarity for social resistance in mainland China. Many books that could only be published in Hong Kong have been brought to mainland China, including writings by mainland Chinese authors, while discussions about social movements have also been carried out in Hong Kong.

With the Chinese government's growing political control over Hong

Kong, this role is likely to be diminished. As China's social contradictions intensify, the Chinese government will be even more on guard about Hong Kong's influence on Chinese social movements.

CWL: One of the problems brought about by the rise of localism is that among the young activists in Hong Kong, supporting activism in mainland China may no longer be seen as necessary. The extreme faction of the localist camp even argues that offering support to the democratic movement in mainland China is a waste of time since "Hongkongers" should care about the problems in Hong Kong first.

Another worrying development is that, in mainland China, the official media portray a picture that most, if not all, activists in Hong Kong favor Hong Kong's independence or look down on the mainland Chinese. Although it is impossible to know what the public genuinely thinks in mainland China, what we have been seeing on social media nowadays is that struggles in Hong Kong are winning little sympathy among the netzines in mainland China. Since the suppression in mainland China has become more severe, communications and discussions between Hong Kong-based and mainland-based activities are becoming more difficult.

The Future

KL :What do you make of Hong Kong's chief executive shelving the extradition bill? To what extent is it a victory?

ALY: Carrie Lam only suspended the bill "she didn't withdraw the bill, as demanded by the protestors. It is not a full victory, but is still a partial victory. Temporarily suspending the bill is already a big defeat for Carrie Lam, and this also gives the opposition more time to build up the movement. And since she added that there is no timetable to reintroduce the bill, the length of the suspension will not be short.

What is more, this year and next year are both election years, so it is improbable that she will allow the pro-

Beijing parties to risk losing election by reintroducing the bill during these two years. And the third year is also not ideal because it is the last year of her term. The task of reintroducing the bill, if it happens, will likely be that of the next chief executive.

KL: What, then, is the future of Hong Kong and movements for democracy and economic justice?

CC: From the Umbrella Movement to the Anti-Extradition protests, people increasingly accept militant actions because they recognize that demonstrations and occupations cannot disrupt capitalist production. One outcome is important to the Left: after these two movements, people see the importance of strikes and the role of trade unions in political struggles.

During the Umbrella Movement, only some student leaders called on trade unions to strike. But during the anti-Extradition movement, thousands of workers asked their unions to organize strikes. The political struggles will continue in Hong Kong. If the young generation could engage in workplace actions, it would be very significant for the Left.

ALY: The rise of the above-mentioned, two new currents of young people, plus the not-so-young League of Social Democrats, were dealt a big blow when government disqualified their lawmakers [in 2017]. [46] Luckily, another new generation is now rising, and it is taking matters into its own hands. The street mobilization against the China extradition bill is chiefly

their work. However if they cannot develop their politics in a democratic left direction, and overcome their fragmentation, they may not be able to consolidate into a strong progressive force.

Secondly, the emphasis on media-oriented actions, a legacy of the pan-democrats, still largely dominates among the young activists, to the extent that not only are long-term organizational efforts often neglected, but also there is an indifference toward the dire situation of working people. Many people are now calling for workers to go on strike, but this has not been successful. They simply treat workers as a kind of instant noodle “all you need is to make an order for it and the waiter will deliver it right away.

Hong Kong’s historical trajectory makes it a city hostile toward leftist values of solidarity, fraternity, and equality. A Social Darwinian culture, the result of being a free port for over 150 years, has penetrated the population so much so that it is hard for left forces to grow. To make that happen, young activists will have to begin to address the class issue.

LCL: Looking ahead, the political environment in Hong Kong will become more challenging. The relatively liberal period between 1997 and 2008 has come to an end. The Hong Kong government will handle democratic and social movements more harshly, especially those that insist on direct actions outside of the

Legislative Council.

The Hong Kong government sides with the capitalist class and conservative forces, who are always hostile to labor rights, the rights of women, and LGBT rights as well as equitable wealth distribution. The Hong Kong public is under the dual oppression of Chinese bureaucratic capital and Hong Kong’s monopoly capital. Any social and economic reform has to confront the reality of authoritarian capitalism.

However, after the anti-WTO protest in 2005, the construction workers’ strike in 2007, and dock workers’ strike in 2013, more activists have moved away from the fragmented models of struggle popular in the 1990s, and recognized the class politics necessary for challenging neoliberalism. [47] [48] [49] To develop this left politics, we need to deepen the discussion around questions like “what is left politics” and “what is to done,” clarifying the differences between the socialist left and far-right localism and nationalism.

We also need a broad China perspective and to increase exchanges with social movements and left activists in mainland China. Only through more collaboration with Chinese civil society and social movements that confront China’s authoritarian capitalism can the Hong Kong public secure true democracy and social equality.

18 June 2019

[Jacobin](#)

“They are intent on demeaning and misrepresenting Trotsky himself because his ideas are still very relevant”

19 June 2019, by Raul Camargo

That “midnight in the century”, in the words of Victor Serge, which was the 1930s and 1940s, saw Frida Kahlo,

Diego Rivera, Malcolm Lowry, Andre Breton, Tina Modotti and Trotsky living in Mexico City. President Lázaro

Cárdenas made of that time and place a singular meeting point of some of the finest minds of the time. And

among all of them, Trotsky stood out, one of the last giants of the 20th century, assassinated by order of Stalin in his own house in the neighbourhood of Coyoacán.

In that same place, we met up a few weeks ago with Esteban Volkov, "Sieva", the grandson of Trotsky, son of Zina Bronstein and Platon Volkov. At 94, he is one of the last living people who lived with Trotsky and suffered the last years of his tragic destiny and that of his family. Esteban retains an enviable lucidity despite his advanced age. This meeting would not have been possible without the kind efforts of José Luis Hernández Ayala and Danny Laird, whom I thank with all my heart for allowing me to arrange it.

A few weeks ago, you promoted an international manifesto against the falsehoods contained in the Netflix series about your grandfather's life. Why do you think that 80 years after his assassination, people are still trying to tarnish Trotsky's image, in this case the Russian government of Vladimir Putin, owner of the channel that produced and issued it?

The Trotsky that emerges in that series is a mess, using a Mexican word, a "marihuanada". Alexander Kott and Konstantin Statsky (directors of the series) have shown a character that is millions of light years away from who my grandfather was. He was not at all as bland and mediocre a character as they paint there.

I remember him as a revolutionary dedicated entirely to the struggle for socialism. He was attentive, cordial, always ready to teach the young comrades Marxist ideology; he created a very warm and welcoming atmosphere around himself. He had a great sense of humour.

There is no doubt that the fact that they try to revile Leon Trotsky is a sign that his ideas are still very valid and for that reason they distort history. It is well known that one of the ways to dominate the exploited masses is to destroy and assassinate their leaders and discredit ideological weapons, such as Marxism. Marxism

has been buried, I do not know how many times by bourgeois ideologists, but every time it resurfaces and emerges from the grave with more life.

The proof of what happens with this series is that Trotsky's ideas still weigh heavily. These two directors, Kott and Statsky, filmed my grandfather's murder in a gross and absurd way. Few events have been so perfectly settled after investigation by the Mexican government of the time as the assassination. A few days after the murder a reconstruction of the crime took place in the garden of this house where the renowned detective Jesús Vázquez, one of the chiefs of the secret police, played the role of Trotsky sitting in a chair and Mercader/Jackson personally shows him with a rolled up newspaper how he hit him from behind in the head I really cannot understand how Netflix can lend itself to this kind of "fake history".

The curious thing is that after the murder, one of Dzhughashvili's (Stalin's) greatest obsessions was to present the murder as a hand-to-hand fight between Trotsky and a discouraged supporter, disappointed with his leader. At that time, the Russian ambassador to Mexico, Konstantin Umansky had the assignment, the "mission impossible", of bribing the Mexican government to accept Stalin's version that the murder had been the result of a quarrel. Obviously, Umansky did not succeed in fulfilling Stalin's wishes because the Mexican government did not agree to be corrupted and impose that version. The strange thing is that Umansky was dismissed from his position as Ambassador in Mexico and sent to a second order embassy in Central America, to Costa Rica, where he never arrived because on January 25, 1945, the military plane that was taking him from Mexico City strangely exploded, killing poor Umansky with all his family and colleagues.

But it turns out that these two directors, Kott and Statsky, unbeaten champions of historical falsification, revive the version that Stalin wanted to impose and present the murder as a situation of a struggle between Trotsky and his murderer and also add

a few other absurd things. What we all ask is how a company like Netflix lends itself to divulge this totally falsified story. Today we are in an era of "fake news" and now we also have "fake history". But not everything has been bad. This series has brought many visitors to the Leon Trotsky House-Museum (laughs).

The figure of Trotsky has been the subject of much historical controversy and multiple interpretations. He was a figure embodying many qualities that made him qualify as one of the "giants" of the 20th century. He was a great revolutionary politician, an exceptional writer, a great journalist, scholar and expert in art and culture and also one of the main political leaders of the Russian Revolution and the organizer of the Red Army who, after reaching the top, suffered persecution, exile and finally murder. What do you think was the most outstanding quality of your grandfather so that, 80 years after his murder, he remains an icon and a political reference within the world's left?

What stands out most about Trotsky was his certainty and his absolute confidence in the socialist future of humanity. There is no doubt that he is one of the great Marxist theorists. He was the one who best analysed and studied the illegitimate bureaucratic regime led by Joe Stalin.

Today we see the analogy and dynamics of all revolutions. After advance and triumph comes setbacks and retreat. In the French Revolution this was "Thermidor". And in the Russian Revolution this was much bloodier and devastating.

Many times, I am asked, what would have happened if Trotsky had stayed in power instead of Stalin? It is a question that Trotsky himself once answered: "With the army behind me I could have taken power in a few hours. But that would have betrayed the Revolution as much as Stalin. Only instead of a bureaucratic dictatorship a military-bureaucratic dictatorship would have been established."

We also know that Trotsky considered

his last stage as the most important in his life. When already in exile he tried to create a new revolutionary vanguard with the foundation of the Fourth International, after the debacle and the destruction of the Second and Third Internationals. But very soon he suffered the first attack, on May 24, 1940, which he miraculously survived, thanks to Natalia Sedova, who quickly threw him under the bed and cornered him, protecting him with her own body in the darkest corner of the room.

But Trotsky knew perfectly well that they had only given him a small respite and that in a short time another attack would come. The question was where and how his murder would come. And so it was that when the final attack occurred, he was standing in the doorway to the dining room from his office and, his face bloodied and with broken teeth, he approached Natalia pointing to the murderer, who had been immobilized by one of the guards, and he said "Jackson", indicating that that's where it came from.

The young comrades were criticized a lot for not taking enough precautions

and perhaps they could have extended the life of grandfather a little while being more vigilant. But invariably the Russian state and the GPU with Stalin behind it would have ended up murdering grandfather.

And what hastened his murder indisputably was that at that time he began to write the biography of Stalin. At the request of an American publisher and given the precariousness and the shortcomings in which the family lived; those royalty payments could not be disregarded. But he did not have much interest in writing that biography since his main interest was to finish with Lenin's, of which he had already finished the part referring to his youth. There is no doubt that the writing of Stalin's biography hastened his murder. One of the guards, who had entered a month before May 24, Robert Sheldon Harte, continually asked my grandfather's secretary how the biography was going, to immediately transmit the information to the Kremlin.

The political movement that identifies with "Trotskyism" is

quite divided. It is no novelty and certainly the difficult origins of the Fourth International have influenced this situation, since it was created at a time of ebb of the revolutionary wave and was doubly persecuted by both the capitalist countries and Stalinism. There are currents that identify with this tradition that have reached considerable relevance in European countries and in Latin America. Do you think that, the construction of a mass revolutionary International remains an essential objective, as your grandfather thought?

According to the American Trotskyist Joe Hansen, one of the last phrases of Leon Trotsky was "I am sure of the triumph of the Fourth International." That task is still pending of course ... And yes, to have some influence and weight today we must participate in the movements that are in struggle and not lock ourselves in an office and make very brilliant Marxist analyses, as many groups do, to comfort themselves. Participation in the real fight is very important.

Sudan - women at the heart of mobilizations

18 June 2019, by Joseph Daher

The level of women's participation and their role in organizing daily struggles is unprecedented in the country's history. The presence of women on the streets and on demonstrations is massive. They are also involved in workers' organizations, including the Sudanese Professional Association, and opposition parties within the Coalition of Forces for the Declaration of Freedom and Change (FDLC) that are leading negotiations with senior military officials.

Two feminist groups are also involved: the No to the Oppression of Women initiative and the Civil and Political Feminist Groups, whose influence is clearly visible in the coalition's agenda. It is reflected, for example, in

the presence, among the coalition's main demands, of a demand for a 40% quota reserved for women in the legislative assembly and an end to all discrimination against women and equality.

We should remember that the regime, combining military and Islamic fundamentalism, has targeted women in particular in recent decades and since the beginning of the popular uprising. Under the Bashir regime, Sharia, or Islamic law, was the source of legislation leading to, inter alia, the flogging of women for "indecent behaviour", prison sentences or fines for women accused of wearing "indecent clothing" or "immoral behaviour". Sudanese women's rights

NGOs report that more than 15,000 women were sentenced to flogging in 2016 in Sudan. The objective of the regime was to limit and control the presence of women in the public sphere by strengthening moral and criminal laws against them.

Since the beginning of the mobilizations in December, women have been specifically targeted by the security services, who have not hesitated to imprison, intimidate and sexually harass them. Detained demonstrators also had their hair completely shaved. Sexual repression and assault measures are a weapon intentionally used against women demonstrators to weaken mobilization.

Sudan has a long history of women's activism, but the current revolutionary process goes beyond the women's mobilizations of the past. The massive participation of women in the organization of popular struggles sheds light on the depth and radical nature of this popular uprising, which is far from having said its last word.

On 3 June 2019, the Sudanese regime launched a deadly crackdown on demonstrators who had been occupying the square in front of the headquarters of the Transitional Military Council for several weeks, killing more than 100 people and

injuring hundreds. In response, the Alliance for Freedom and Change (ALC), the spearhead of the protest movement, called for "a total and indefinite strike and civil disobedience", "peaceful marches and processions in neighbourhoods, cities and villages", and "the overthrow of the Military Council".

Brazil: The battle over pensions

17 June 2019, by Israel Dutra, Thiago Aguiar

The government's difficulties are emerging clearly, with the weakness of its parliamentary group, stuck between the unpopularity of the reform and the clientelist pressures of the parties of the centre, unable to show their support for Guedes' proposal. So, the visit of the minister ended in noisy confusion and an exchange of insults. The embarrassment of the minister representing the banking sector in the Commission led to a fall in capital markets.

The next day was marked by the frenetic search for an agreement between Bolsonaro and party leaders, showing the need to deal with those whom Bolsonarism has called the representatives of the "old politics". The press reported apologies from Bolsonaro for having "singled out" personalities such as Romero Jucá (MDB) and Ciro Nogueira (PP). In a pathetic moment, addressing Gilberto Kassab (PSD), entangled in investigations into corruption cases, Bolsonaro apologized for having previously described him as "manure".

After the crisis of the preceding week with the deputies and the president of the assembly Rodrigo Maia, after the arrests of Temer and Moreira Franco and the remonstrances of the financial and business press, the government is organizing its ranks. It wants to put its troops in marching order in defence of the reform of the pension system and to overcome the difficulties so far, demonstrated by their flagrant lack of

preparation and their incompetence.

While the government gives pledges its unending commitment to reform to the bourgeoisie, new data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) - immediately refuted by the President of the Republic - show that 13 million people are without employment and more than 7.4 million Brazilians have been reduced to poverty. The enthusiasm of the employers and the bourgeois press with the resumption of economic growth in 2019, as a result of the investiture of the pro-market government of Bolsonaro, has well and truly receded and analysts expect another year of economic stagnation. The recovery will only come, as they have been repeating since 2016, after the approval of unpopular and anti-national "reforms" and a new wave of dismantling of the national state.

"Pension reform or death"

The bourgeoisie will redouble its efforts to approve the reform and restore the financial equilibrium. As the businessman Flávio Rocha, a longstanding Bolsonarist, has declared, the slogan of the capitalists is: "pension reform or death". Despite the speech by Guedes before the Commission, where he denounced "privileges", the proposed reform is aimed first and foremost at attacking the rights of workers in the private

sector, civil servants, peasants and disabled people. The transitional proposals involve many years of additional contributions to obtain the right to retirement, as well as drastic reductions in the value of payments, making it virtually impossible to completely retire. The attack on the poorest sectors of the population, who survive on welfare benefits, is a scandalous example of the very essence of the Bolsonaro-Guedes reform: it is expected that the elderly poor will live on 400 reais (90 , -) per month.

In addition to the attacks on the retirement of women - who suffer a double or triple working day - and categories such as teachers, the transition period for new rules, in the event that the minimum retirement age is approved, would seriously worsen an already distressing situation. It would be the basis of the destruction of the present distributive model, which has been considerably weakened by the reforms of Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Lula, in which active workers guarantee, with the contributions of the employers and the government, the pension system.

Paulo Guedes' inspiration comes from Chile, where he worked during the bloody dictatorship of Pinochet (1973-1990). At that time, Chile had become a neoliberal laboratory under the economic leadership of ultraliberal economists of the "Chicago School". That is how Paulo Guedes and his team were trained. As a

representative of the interests of financial capital and the transnational capitalist class, Guedes intends to liquidate the Brazilian social security system and set up a capitalization scheme similar to that of Chile, according to which access to retirement depends on individual contributions - exempting employers - to investment funds. This is the financialization of the right to retirement, which depends on the uncertain and fluctuating remuneration of the capital invested by the workers. Bankers and investment funds are giving thanks and salivating at the prospect of managing portfolios worth billions by speculating on the future savings and the lives of Brazilian workers.

Faced with such an attack - adding to the daily idiocies of the president and the incompetents whom he appointed as ministers - the popularity of the government is melting quickly. Declaring that the capitalization proposals could be dropped during discussions in Congress, Bolsonaro is proving that the discontent and the resistance of the population weigh in the scales.

For a broad popular campaign

The necessary response is the organization of resistance, taking advantage of the contradictions of those above and the loss of prestige of Bolsonaro. The demonstrations on March 22nd gave a signal that sparked off the debate among the workers. Faced with the unity of the bourgeoisie for the reform and the daily bombardment by the press, attached to the interests of the banking system, it will require many more debates, organization and struggle to put an end to this unprecedented attack against the Brazilian people. For our part, in the framework of the parliamentary mandates of Samia Bomfim and Fernanda Melchionna, we have encouraged the formation of national committees in hundreds of cities, with the aim of preparing a popular grassroots campaign to solve this problem. On the site of Sãmia alone, there are more than 1,200 committees registered.

Combat and defeat the reform

Another important example, in São Paulo, was the seminar on pension reform of the PSOL-SP, with the presence of the Chilean deputy Diego Ibañez of the Frente Amplio, as well as of Sãmia Bomfim, Ivan Valente and other political leaders.

In addition to these debates and initiatives, we must encourage broad unity of action to confront the reform of Bolsonaro and Guedes. Following the example of March 22nd, when workers of the education sector were the category that led the struggle, a new national day of action has been called by the Confederation of Workers in Education (CNTE), on April 24th. The unified mobilizations by union confederations that are expected on May 1st - which would be an unprecedented event - would give a new impetus to the building of a central day of strikes and action, a vigorous stance of the working class and the people against the reform.

April 6th, 2019

The feminist strike of 14 June 2019, towards a mass movement in Switzerland

16 June 2019, by Tamara Knežević

A feminist strike of an unprecedented scale is being prepared in Switzerland. On the eve of the event, it may be useful to retrace some of the contours of this already historic movement. In a country where the reactionary right is the first party and where "labour peace" is sealed by agreements between dominant unions and employers, the feminist movement is strengthening and rehabilitating the strike as a means of struggle.

At the origins of the movement

On 14 June 1991, a first "Women's Strike" took place, bringing together more than 500,000 people across the country. Their demand? That the principle of equality enshrined in the Federal Constitution 10 years ago should finally be implemented. While some social gains such as maternity leave, the legal right to abortion and the revision of the Equality Act prohibiting all forms of gender discrimination in the workplace were

won in the decade that followed, substantive and substantive equality still remains to be achieved.

Women's real material and social conditions are not improving. Living in a country where women are sacked overnight because of their pregnancy, where they lose their residence status by divorcing an abusive partner, where some have to work at more than one job because their full time job is underpaid, where they are subject to discrimination and harassment in their training places, where they spend an average of 53

hours a week doing domestic work that is still not recognized and shared... The reality faced by the majority of women in Switzerland is such that it seems legitimate for a large part of the population to gather for a broad political protest since what seemed to have been achieved yesterday is not being achieved today.

The current movement is on an unprecedented scale, as the activists who built and participated in the 1991 strike confirm. It is anchored both in the continuity of this historic event and in an internationalist logic that echoes the multiple feminist strike movements of 8 March. With the support of more than 65% of the population [50], participation in the mobilizations is expected to be massive.

The movement originated with a battle against a parliamentary pension reform project defended by the right, the Swiss Socialist Party and the Swiss Trade Union Confederation (Union Syndicale Suisse), which called for women's retirement age to be raised to 65. The battle was fought and won by a front composed of dissident feminist trade unionists, radical left organizations and various associations. The same coalition has remained active on other fronts, including broad corporate tax reforms. And when it came to discussing equal pay at parliamentary level, we decided to use this opportunity to put an end to institutional discussions without any real concrete measures to combat sexism.

In June 2018, we organized the Assises féministes, a first women-only meeting, without cisgender men, to see if there was also a desire among the population to build a broad feminist movement. To our surprise, the conference brought together nearly 200 women from different regions of Switzerland, all of whom voted to organize a feminist strike on 14 June 2019!

Different ways of challenging the

social order

The assemblies that followed made it possible to draft a manifesto and a national call for a strike [51], which anchored the movement in a critique of capitalism and the cisheterosexual system, in the recognition of productive and reproductive work, in the fight against multiple discrimination, for the right to dispose of one's body, and in a critique of the school system reflecting the patriarchal model.

The reasons for striking in 2019 are diverse and multiple because each life course is unique, at the crossroads of different oppression, exploitation and discrimination. Hence the broad and diverse nature of the manifesto's demands, which affect different spheres of life.

It was also important to make visible the fact that the formal rights acquired so far have been recuperated by the existing system, which is capitalist, racist and sexist, and which benefits the 1% of privileged people. Thus, our strike movement, as it is being built, wants to be part of this break with the institutions, by pointing out everything that keeps them going. What our movement is aiming for is a profound social change! This change is achieved by choosing strikes as a central and necessary tool for political action.

Nevertheless, given that this movement was built with the idea that it should be as broad as possible, many forms of action coexist and the demands put forward by the future participants do not all have the same potential to challenge the patriarchal order. It is interesting in this respect to highlight the role played by the media: to a large extent, the legitimacy of the movement has been built by the echo throughout the media, thus contributing to the democratization of this struggle by making it more widely accessible. However, it was the less subversive themes that were given the most coverage, such as equal pay or the representation of women in institutional politics - with the exception of the major controversies surrounding the legality of the

political strike or the question of non-mixed representation as a way of organizing collectives.

As anti-capitalist feminist activists, we must challenge liberal feminism, that is useful only to a handful of already privileged people. What is the point of equal pay if wages remain low? What is the point of promoting women to high positions of responsibility, if precarious women are increasingly precarious? As the authors of the Feminism for the 99% - A Manifesto remind us: "We have no interest in breaking the glass ceiling while leaving the vast majority of women continue to clean up the shards!" . [52]

We must also refute law and order policies as a means of combating gender-based violence, which disproportionately target non-white and/or poor men and seek to criminalize - under the guise of protection - activities carried out by certain women, such as sex work. We must fight for reproductive, non-essentializing justice that gives everyone the same opportunities, regardless of their legal status, financial means, gender identity and sexual orientation, to have access to a universal health system, to free and unrestricted abortion, to the possibility of having children.

We must fight for anti-racist feminism, at a time when Islamophobia is intensifying every day, when the Roma population that is often forced to beg in order to survive is criminalized, when non-white women are invisible in the media, political and feminist spaces (including ours), and who continue to be discriminated against in hiring and over-exploited when they find a job.

Thus, the slogan "If you recognize yourself in one chapter of the manifesto, then be with us on June 14" is not a strategy that we must be satisfied with as anti-capitalist feminist activists. While it has indeed brought together a large number of women in Switzerland, we must be critical of its political significance. Our role is to fight for a feminism of the totality and a feminism that fights against all other oppressions.

It is in this sense that the activists of the strike movement, if they really advocate a change in society, must seize all the demands, without hierarchy, under penalty of preventing a real awareness of the systemic and intertwined nature of oppression, but also of the solidarity and struggles that we must build.

As expressed in our national call for a strike, substantive equality cannot be achieved in a world where only the profits and interests of a privileged minority truly matter. It is because we challenge the system as a whole that we must make broad and inclusive, anti-racist and anti-capitalist demands. These demands must go against a conservative feminism that supports society as it is because it defends the interests of a handful of women, if we want this feminist strike to initiate a real emancipation movement for all.

Local collectives for internationalist feminism

To create a broad movement, what was decisive was the desire to be based on a great number of small, local collectives. These have been built by region or neighbourhood, by workplace and educational

establishment, or around certain political themes such as culture, migration, motherhood, old age, wearing a headscarf, etc.

This method has made it possible to build a feminist practice that is close to people, who collectively think about the issues that concern them and together develop demands and the ways to make them visible. While the number of participants who will strike in the true sense of the word will probably not be as massive, the demands expressed will be truly entrenched and supported by the participants.

Beyond the fact that our demands come from the grassroots, our movement is by definition part of the continuity of feminist movements such as we have seen in Poland, the Spanish State, Argentina, Italy, India, Chile, the United States, etc. All over the world, women are at the forefront of the struggle for a better world.

It is also the role of anti-capitalist, feminist, anti-racist and ecosocialist activists to bring these struggles to life and politicize them. Our solidarity must be part of a global rejection of the system that today is degrading human life and the planet, in a context of rising reactionary ideas, wars and dispossessions, the spread of racism and state violence. It is only in the

process of building mass movements, from below and from an internationalist perspective, that the beginning of real change is possible.

The year-long process of building the strike in Switzerland was not easy, but it nevertheless tried to show that a different society is imaginable and possible. This strike seeks to include both politicised women and those who have become politicised within the movement. The latter has also brought together different social categories, generations, or even various political, trade union and associative parties. However, the movement still struggles to ensure that the “margin is at the centre” [53], a condition for a truly revolutionary feminism.

However, what we are living and building in Switzerland is historic and opens the way for a renewal of feminism. This strike is more a process than a symbolic day and we know very well that this date is not an end in itself but the first step towards building a mass feminist movement. The 14 June 2019 will show us what we are capable of when we join forces, but it will be up to us, anti-capitalist feminists, to take on board the criticisms to continue working towards a sustainable, inclusive and total movement because everything remains to be done!

Translated from [Contretemps](#).

Stop police brutality in Hong Kong! No extradition to China!

15 June 2019

We condemn the use of unprecedented excessive force by the Hong Kong police in dispersing and arresting protesters. The use of tear gas, pepper spray, rubber bullets and bean bag rounds, as well as beating up unarmed protesters have caused injuries to many. Such brutality is unacceptable.

Despite the massive peaceful demonstration on 9 June, the largest since the handover of Hong Kong to China, the Hong Kong government led by Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor continues to ignore the demands of the people. In fact, the refusal of the Hong Kong government to listen to the people's demands and its insistence in pushing the extradition

bill has ignited and expanded the protests.

In recent years, the shrinking of political space and the Hong Kong government's increasingly aggressive behaviour in curtailing civil and political freedom has become a worrying trend in Hong Kong. Many political dissidents and activists have

been targeted for arrests and selected prosecution with various allegations. The erosion of democratic freedom in Hong Kong also instils the fear that Hong Kong is losing its unique autonomy with the expansion of Beijing's political control over the city. Deterioration of political freedom will definitely hinder efforts to tackle social inequalities in a city with a widening wealth gap.

Hong Kong is the only city in China which can still freely commemorate the June Fourth massacre. To protect Hong Kong autonomy is thus not only the concern of the people of Hong Kong but also of all the people of China.

We urge the government of Hong Kong to:

withdraw the proposed extradition bill;

stop the violence against peaceful protesters;

stop the repression and persecution of political activists.

We stand with the people of Hong Kong and express our solidarity with their fight to defend their political freedom and autonomy.

Signed by,

1. Socialist Party of Malaysia (PSM)
2. Persatuan Sahabat Wanita Selangor, Malaysia
3. North South Initiative, Malaysia
4. Agora Society, Malaysia
5. Jaringan Rakyat Tertindas (JERIT), Malaysia
6. Liberasi, Malaysia
7. Socialist Alliance, Australia

8. Australia Asia Workers Link
9. Fightback Aotearoa/Australia
10. Cambodian Alliance of Trade Unions (CATU), Cambodia
11. Europe solidaire sans frontières (ESSF), France
12. Forum Arbeitswelten - Forum Worlds of Labour, Germany
13. Centre for Workers Education, India
14. Worker's Initiative, Kolkata, India
15. Radical Socialist, India
16. Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation, India
17. Working People Party (Partai Rakyat Pekerja), Indonesia
18. People's Liberation Party (PPR), Indonesia
19. Lembaga Informasi Perburuhan Sedane (LIPS), Indonesia
20. Confederation of National Union (Konfederasi Serikat Nasional), Indonesia
21. Konfederasi Pergerakan Rakyat Indonesia (KPRI), Indonesia
22. Konfederasi Persatuan Buruh Indonesia (KPBI), Indonesia
23. National Network for Domestic Workers Advocacy (Jala PRT), Indonesia
24. RUMPUN, Indonesia
25. Korea House for International Solidarity, Korea
26. Labour Education Foundation, Pakistan

27. Partido Lakas ng Masa (PLM), Philippines
28. Sentro ng mga Nagkakaisa at Progresibong Manggagawa (SENTRO), Philippines
29. Labor Education and Research Network (LEARN), Philippines
30. Kalipunan ng mga Kilusang Masa (KALIPUNAN) / Social Movements' Coalition, Philippines
31. Coalition Against Trafficking in Women - Asia Pacific (CATW-AP)
32. Action for Democracy in Thailand (ACT4DEM)
33. Just Economy and Labor Institute, Thailand
34. New Isan Movement, Thailand
35. Socialist Resistance, UK
36. RS21, UK
37. TheOwl, Hong Kong
38. Borderless Movement, Hong Kong
39. League of Social Democrats, Hong Kong

This joint statement is initiated by Socialist Party of Malaysia (PSM) and still open for endorsement. The list will be updated from time to time here:

<https://thinkleft.net/2019/06/14/joint-solidarity-statement-stop-police-brutality-in-hong-kong-no-extradition-to-china/>

If your organisation would like to sign the joint solidarity statement, please e-mail: int.psm@gmail.com

Mexico's President Knuckles Under to Trump, Woos Mexico's Business Class

14 June 2019, by **Dan La Botz**

Trump's threat of increased tariffs has led the Republican Party to take its strongest stand so far against the Republican president, while U.S. industrialists, especially auto industry CEOs, have also opposed the tariff. Yet Trump has refused to back down, no doubt seeing his battle with AMLO as a demonstration to the white working class part of his base of his commitment to protect American jobs from foreign workers. Vice-President Pence is now meeting with Marcelo Ebrard in an attempt to reach an agreement on Trump's terms. Trump wants Mexico to hold asylum seekers in its territory while the U.S. processes their requests.

While AMLO speaks sympathetically about the Central Americans who "migrate because of necessity, because of hunger, poverty, and violence" and says his government will not use force, in fact the police and army have been mobilized along Mexico's southern border and leading figures of the migration movement have been arrested. [54] AMLO called at his June 6 press conference for all Mexican political leaders, government officials, church leaders, and business figures, and Mexican people in general to join him in Tijuana for a national unity rally for "Mexico's dignity" on Saturday, June 8.

Populist Politics" Ambivalent Policies

Disgusted with the corruption of Mexico's historic ruling party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party and of the conservative and pro-business National Action Party, a year ago the Mexican people voted for change. AMLO won the July 1, 2018 presidential election with 53 percent of the vote and carried 31 of 32 states. It was a landslide.

The party that he himself founded and led, the Movement for National Regeneration (MORENA), also won a

majority in the Senate and a large plurality in the lower house, representing a complete break with Mexico's recent political party history. Shortly after he took office, AMLO's popularity reached an astounding 85 percent approval, and today he remains incredibly popular, with an 80 percent approval rating. He took office promising to restore democracy, to end corruption, and to improve the lives of the Mexican people, but does he really intend to do so? And will he be able to do so?

Since taking office he has pursued policies that are at best ambivalent and at worst a capitulation to the powerful foreign and domestic banks and corporations that rule Mexico. And, his attempts to deal with the country's most important problems—the economy and criminal violence—have not proven successful, at least in his first six months in office. While his election has encouraged some progressive social struggles, for example among maquiladora workers and the union at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, there is not yet any major shift in social power toward the country's underdogs.

A Friend of the Banks" But a Stumbling Economy

As The Wall Street Journal recently wrote, "Mexico's Leftist President Emerges as Unlikely Friend to Big Banks." He meets regularly with the bankers and he calls for reductions in banking regulations, while working with the banks to reduce customers' fees. Many of Mexico's banks are foreign owned, among them U.S. banks such as Citigroup. In a recent speech to bankers, he said that the banks should regulate themselves just like the press regulates itself. [55] Need I say that the bankers applauded?

While he AMLO has been favoring the banks, so far his friendship with the financiers has not resulted in any improvement in the Mexican economy. On the contrary, the most recent economic reports indicate that Mexico's economy grew by only 1.3 percent in the first quarter of this year, compared to 1.7 percent in the fourth quarter of last year. AMLO initially called for a growth rate of 4 percent, has now reduced his hopes to 2 percent, though most national and international financial institutions suggest that growth will be 1.6 percent.

AMLO is being friendly to finance, but the financiers don't necessarily return the favor. The credit rating agencies Fitch Ratings and Moody's both reduced ratings on Mexico's PEMEX oil company on June 5, Fitch from BBB+ down to BBB and Moody's changed its outlook from A3 to negative. [56] They did so because they believe AMLO's government doesn't have the money to carry out his plan to overhaul the company, and the change in ratings means that Mexico will find it more expensive to borrow money.

And the Violence Continues" and Worsens

Since former Mexican President Felipe Calderón initiated Mexico's drug war in 2006, something like 200,000 Mexicans have been killed and tens of thousands more have disappeared, let's say a quarter of a million people, and nearly everyday someone stumbles on a previously undiscovered mass grave. Thousands of women have been killed, enough that the systematic and widespread murder of women has its own name, "femicide." Many Central American migrants have also been among the victims. AMLO recently said that the violence was under control and that homicides were down, but in fact some 33,000 were killed in 2018, and

in the first three months of 2019 another 8,493 were murdered, a 9.6 percent increase. [57] [58]

AMLO's plan to deal with the violence is a new National Guard, approved by the Mexican Congress in May. The National Guard will initially have 50,000 members going up to 80,000 within a year or so, most of them recruited from the Federal police, the army, and the navy. They will have greater police powers and be heavily armed and may stay for longer.

Why this new police force "especially made up as it is of other armed forces" should be any different than other Mexican police forces is unclear. [59] Since the drug war that began in 2006, according to Mexican international human rights organizations, the Mexican Army committed many human rights violations, including extra-judicial killers. Mexican police forces are notorious for the routine torture of suspects, robbery, kidnapping, and

murder. [60] [61]

AMLO's Government Uses Violence against Migrants

While AMLO was talking about Mexico's sympathy and solidarity with the migrants, his government was taking a harder line against undocumented migrants in Mexico, mobilizing both the police and the Army to stop the migrants at the Mexican border, and arresting migrant movement leaders. AMLO's government has tripled the arrest of migrants, deporting 15,654 in May, which will rise to an annual total of some 800,000 people. [62]

On June 5, Central American migrants crossing the border were met by both police and soldiers who blocked their entry. [63] And on June 6 the Mexican

authorizes arrested two leading figures in the migrant caravan movement, Ireneo Mujica of Pueblos sin Fronteras and Cristobal Sanchez who was leading a migrant caravan.

AMLO's government's repressive policies toward the migrants are motivated by a desire to stop Trump's threats, and to do so, it appears that AMLO is prepared to do Trump's work. AMLO may have a sincere desire to carry out, from the top, progressive policies to benefit those at the bottom, but he believes he needs to buy time by placating Mexican and foreign bankers and the U.S. government. His strategy for reform is a problematic one that risks giving up his country's national sovereignty, which has never been very secure, and the humanitarian ideals he has expressed, even while failing to carry them out.

June 6

[New Politics](#)

Understanding the Catastrophic Victory of the Fascists and the Long Term Consequences

13 June 2019, by Kunal Chattopadhyay

Before we go into left responses, though, we have to begin by looking at what happened and explain why.

A summary comparison between the 16th and the 17th Parliaments would be useful, as a starting point. In 2014, the BJP won 282 seats with about 31% of the votes, and the NDA as a whole received 38.5% votes and 336 seats. Later, some of the NDA partners left, notably the Telugu Desam Party led by N. Chandrababu Naidu, which had won 16 seats. Given India's first past the post system, opposition parties and intellectuals had often pointed out the voting percentages.

In 2019, the BJP obtained 303 seats and the NDA as a whole 353. This involved the BJP getting 37.4% votes and the NDA as a whole claimed about 48% votes, which means practically one in two Indian voters voted BJP and its allies. The two BJP allies who got badly mauled were the AIADMK in Tamil Nadu whose seats came down from 37 in 2014 to just 1 in 2019, and the Shiromani Akali Dal in the Punjab which got 2 seats.

The main opposition bloc, the former ruling bloc for a decade from 2004 to 2014, was the United Progressive Alliance (UPA), led by the Indian National Congress. In 2014 the UPA

had 60 seats, while in 2019 it has 91. But the Congress seats have gone up from its worst ever performance of 44 seats to only 52, its second worst. In terms of vote share it has actually lost 0.8% compared to 2014. The main gain for the UPA has come from the DMK in Tamil Nadu. It had no seats in 2014, and has secured 23 this time, making it the third largest party in parliament.

Parties outside the two blocs have fared worse than in 2014. In 2009 such parties had 122 seats, in 2014 147, while in 2019 this came down to 98. Among those most badly hit were, on the extreme right, the Trinamul

Congress, which is the ruling party in West Bengal (34 in 2014, 22 in 2019), and on the left, the CPI and the CPI(M), the two major parliamentary fragments of the original Communist Party of India. [64]The left had 11 seats in 2014 and 6 in 2019, of which the CPI and the CPI(M) together had 10 seats in 2014 and 5 in 2019. The final seat in both cases was held by the Revolutionary Socialist Party, allied to the CPI and the CPIM in West Bengal, but opposing them, and allied to the Congress in Kerala, from where it won one seat. On terms of vote share the CPI(M) shrank to 3.28% in 2014 and 1.75% in 2019, while the CPI was 0.78% in 2014 and 0.58% in 2019.

The Bahujan Samaj Party, which is the most powerful Dalit (the formerly untouchable castes who are still oppressed and marginalised despite the formal abolition of untouchability in the Indian constitution), had formed an alliance with the Samajwadi Party, the most powerful party of Other Backward Classes in the key province Uttar Pradesh. But the SP barely retained its 5 seats with a slight drop in votes, while the BSP won 10 seats, up from zero in 2014. However, it had polled over 4% votes across India in 2014, and it does not seem to have increased that.

So what were the factors that led to this rise of the BJP?

We need to make a distinction between the longer term narrative and the immediate background. The BJP, and its previous incarnation, the Jana Sangh, were electoral arms of an aggressive Hindutva nationalist political outfit, the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh. It was founded in 1925 to assert Hindu dominant caste (primarily Brahmin) supremacy. By the 1930s, its leaders were in touch with Mussolini and then with Hitler, and were among the most fervent supporters of the Nazis from the time of the Kristallnacht, arguing that such should also be the future of Muslims in India. At the same time, they were

loyalists in Indian politics, refusing to take part in the freedom struggle, while explaining to their cadres that the real fight would be the one between Hindus and Muslims, not between the British colonial rulers and the Indian people.

The murder of Gandhi by Nathuram Godse, who had formally resigned his RSS membership before the murder, resulted in a ban on the RSS. It finally came out of the ban by promising not to take part in politics, a promise it interpreted simply to mean that the RSS would not contest elections. Hence the electoral arms like Jan Sangh. A strategy of long-term penetration in civil society by building up a wide range of institutions followed. They included schools, where through philosophy, history, and literature, Hindutva (political Hindu nationalism) was glorified. They also included specific organisations targeting different segments of the population, including Dalits and other subordinate castes.

The 1970s saw a change in the fortunes of the Hindutva right, as mainstream bourgeois and socialist/Stalinist left all displayed some degree of willingness to collaborate with them in order to defeat the congress, led by Mrs. Indira Gandhi. In the 1977 elections she did lose. But much of the cadre base was provided by the RSS in the fight against her. As a result, the united opposition that fought the Congress (I) during the elections of 1977 enabled them to get a considerable number of their members elected to parliament, and for the new government to carry out quite a bit of the RSS agenda.

By the late 1980s, the Congress, the traditional party of the Indian capitalist class, was facing a crisis. 1984 was the last time the Congress won a majority in parliament on its own, and it did so by a shift to Hindu communalism, with Sikhs as the target. Again, there was an attempt by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to create a balance of communalisms, including opening up a dormant communal tension over a mosque in Ajothya, supposedly built by destroying a temple back in the 1520s.

The elections of 1989 and 1991 saw

new issues coming to the forefront. The BJP, founded in 1980, initially attempted to present a more moderate face than the erstwhile Jan Sangh, talking about "Gandhian Socialism". But it won only two seats in the parliament of 1984, and decided to shift to more aggressive Hindutva thereafter. Meanwhile, a dissident Congress minister, Viswanath Pratap Singh, pushed for the recognition of oppressed castes and social groups (collectively Other Backward Classes) who had never been "untouchables" but who were part of the socially marginalised. Aware that this posed a threat to its strategy of Hindu consolidation, the BJP, which had supported Singh during the 1989 elections and had propped him up in his coalition government, went for a very aggressive campaign to destroy the Babri Masjid in Ajothya and build a so-called Ram temple there.

Three issues would dominate thereafter - Indian capitalism and its march to globalisation, and the rival discursive strategies of Hindu nationalism versus Dalit-Bahujan-Adivasi-Muslim alliance building. The shift from a welfare state model to the neoliberal economy however took place initially under the Congress.

The BJP was far from being the first choice of the ruling class during the 1990s. However, the weakening of the Congress led to a change in ruling class attitude as well. The various attempts at building "third fronts", whether sponsored by the left or not, saw regional parties, concerned with local voter bases, making demands that often went against the core demands of the bourgeoisie. And anytime the parliamentary left was a partner, for all its limitations, it insisted on reforms that would provide (within capitalism, certainly) some benefits to its core constituencies. As a result, while the 199-2004 Vajpayee government was formed initially without any huge bourgeois support, the performance of that government changed the attitude of the ruling class. From 2004, the BJP has increasingly become the preferred party of the bourgeoisie. This also has links with the specific problems faced by Indian capitalism.

Globalisation, Indian Capitalism and the BJP

Indian capitalism has developed an aggressive appetite. The Global Wealth Report 2018 published by the Credit Suisse, an investment bank, says India now has 343,000 persons owning over one million US dollars, or about 7 crores of Indian rupees, worth of wealth. According to the World Inequality Database, the *income* of the top 1% of the Indian population was Rs 33 lakh per adult or Rs 275,000 per month (just under US\$ 4000). Mukesh Ambani's wealth is currently put at 53200 million US\$, Ratan Tata's wealth is seemingly much less, but that is because much of it is concealed as company property which he fully controls. But the Tata group has under his stewardship acted aggressively to take over Tetley (by Tata Tea), Jaguar Land Rover (by Tata Motors) and Corus (by Tata Steel).

However, Indian capitalism has been forced to compete with much more powerful US, European and Japanese capitalism, and recently with Chinese capital, from a weaker base. As a result, and lacking any historic colony, Indian capitalism has the need to impose super-exploitation on the Indian working class. This includes a huge burden on the Adivasis (including evicting them from forests where they have dwelt, compelling them to work for abysmally low wages, etc) as well as destroying the organised working class altogether. [65]

This is where the Congress has been unable to deliver the goods. The privatization of the finance sectors have been slowed down. due to massive struggles by finance sector employees. The very existence of some of the older labour laws, however much they are flouted, create benchmarks against which workers can raise their demands. And this was something that became clear in 2004-2009, during the UPA-I government, when the left had 61 MPs, and Congress had to rely on the support of those MPs. Some reforms which from above appear very

insignificant actually provided quite a bit of bargaining power to the rural poor. These included the Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employees Guarantee Act (MNREGA), which provided that one person per poor family would get 199 days guaranteed work per year.

The Gujarat Model of Narendra Modi consisted of ignoring labour laws, ignoring environment protection (since that increases the cost for the individual capitalist), and promoting big capital. [66] In 2002, after the Gujarat carnage, sections of the Indian capitalist class, members of the Confederation of Indian Industries, had criticised the then Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi. Led by diamond merchant and businessman Gautam Adani, a group formed an alternative body, Resurgent Group of Gujarat, and even threatened to leave CII.

Adani pledged a sum of Rs 15,000 crore for the first Vibrant Gujarat summit (held in September-October 2003). Thereafter, Adani was one of the principal lobbyists for Modi consistently, including outside India. Other capitalists began to see the value of the Modi/Gujarat model. Unlike in the case of previous BJP leaders, the Modi for Prime Minister campaign was launched at Vibrant Gujarat summits, with prominent Indian capitalists sounding the tocsin.

The Modi government started repaying their friends. When it became a Modi government at the all India level, this repayment was even more fulsome. The BJP had a few campaign planks in 2014, one of which was its opposition to corruption. But from Anna Hazare down, all the "anti-corruption" crusaders who had targeted the Congress, remained silent as India's big capital, and to a certain extent certain major international capitalist concerns including Monsanto, made huge inroads.

But it was not simply a matter of corrupt practices (the so-called crony capitalism). It was a matter of systematic inroads on the workers and poor peasants' livelihoods for the profit of big capital. However, there were roadblocks. The Indian working class is much weaker now than it had

been three decades back. Nevertheless, the call for changing the labour laws, the speeding up of the privatization of Public Sector Undertakings, got slowed down primarily because of labour resistance. While only about 5-7 per cent of the working class is organised by now, the twenty-first century did see attempts, including by some of the bureaucratic Central Trade Unions, to mobilise not just their immediate members but others as well. General strikes across India, and regular struggles in the financial sectors, meant that the plans could not always proceed. [67]

The ideological mobilisations

But in 2004, Vajpayee had stumbled here. He too had sought, as BJP leader, to serve big capital. But the India Shining campaign had resulted in huge popular rejection. That was also the last occasion when, as we saw, the left votes had gone up along with seats. Though that was a matter of 59 seats of the four LF parties (CPIM 5.66%, 43 seats, CPI 1.41%, 10 seats, RSP - 0.43%, 3 seats, All India Forward Bloc - 0.35%, 3 seats) along with 2 more by their allies , this was an indication that the masses of people were willing to vote for alternatives if these were posed before them. Also, the BSP had won 19 seats (5.33%), the SP 36 seats (4.32%), and in Bihar the Rashtriya Janata Dal (the SPs rough equivalent in Bihar) had won 24 seats (2.41%). In 2009 too, the UPA had trounced the NDA. But this was followed by the old guard of the BJP being pushed aside, and a firm, aggressive new leadership taking over. Between 2014 and 2019, this leadership consolidated itself.

The Hindu nationalist rhetoric was modified, because it was clear that merely pushing for Hindu unity was not paying adequate dividends. At the same time, a series of policy measures by the government had created popular anger. This was eventually translated into votes in several state assembly elections in 2018. In May, the Janata Dal (Secular) and the Congress tied up after the elections to form a JD(S) led government. The BJP

tried to spend huge sums of money to buy up several MLAs but was foiled. In November-December, there were elections in Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Mizoram, Rajasthan, and Telangana. The Congress lost Mizoram to the Mizo National Front, but gained Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh from the BJP. The Telangana Rashtra Samithi swept Telangana, defeating both BJP and Congress.

The BJP showed that it was prepared for these setbacks. While this also calls for a discussion of the errors and flaws of its opposition, we need to understand that right from 2014, the BJP had taken up a multi-pronged strategy. One was a shift from merely Hindu nationalism to a full-fledged appropriation of Indian nationalism in its ugliest form. The distinction lies in the past of the RSS. The RSS does not have, as we saw, the freedom struggle in its genes.

So it has in the past stressed that it is fighting for the real rights of Hindus. But this time, Kashmir, Pakistan, became important buzz words. In place of previous governments with their attempts at some degree of carrot and stick policies in Kashmir, under Modi there was simply a big stick with no attempt at either carrot or talking softly. From a very early stage, Modi projected himself as a strong man. Kashmir was a key component of this chest thumping nationalism. Violence in Kashmir was firmly justified. This was the way in which the Sangh worked itself into nationalism. Violence in Kashmir is not new. Between 1990 and 2017 about 41,000 persons have died due to the conflicts. They include 14,000 civilians and 22,000 real or alleged militants. However, there was clearly an upward graph from 2014. And this has resulted, with the Pulwama incident, in the emergence of purely home-grown cases of militants, even though Pakistan had to be blamed for political (primarily electoral) reasons.

National security trumps civil liberties –this was the message. The failure of the RSS student wing, the ABVP, to win the JNU Students Union election, led to aggressive nationalism and fake propaganda, which however was dramatically effective. The JNUSU

President Kanhaiya Kumar (a member of the CPI dominated AISF), along with students belonging to other left organisations, such as Umar Khalid and Anirban Bhattacharya, were accused of having raised anti India slogans at a meeting which was held over the commemoration of the hanging of Afzal Guru. Guru was a Kashmiri who was hanged in a case that will remain one of the worst cases of legal violence, with ample evidence that he was framed by the police. Many lawyers, civil rights activists have protested his conviction and hanging. Kumar and others were charged with having shouted anti India slogans. They were arrested, Kanhaiya Kumar was assaulted in front of the Patiala House Court.

While no legal case could stand, the bulk of the electronic and print media were used, with shouting brigade leaders like Arnab Goswami (then Times Now, currently Republic TV) leading the pack. The aim was manifold. First, Kashmir was made into a seat of evil. Modi was shown as the first muscular leader tackling Kashmir the way it should be, namely by massive and unrelenting violence.

Second, leftists of all shades were depicted as “anti-national” for talking about civil rights in Kashmir. Of course, their utterances were distorted so that they, including someone like Kanhaiya Kumar, belonging to the CPI (all moderate left parties take the position that Kashmir is an integral part of India, and differ only over how to conduct control there), was supposed to have advocated Kashmir’s right to self-determination to the point of secession. Third, as these were JNU students, and much of the left and liberal intellectuals of Delhi, and because it was a Delhi based incident, intellectuals and students all over India stood by them, it was argued that liberal intellectuals by definition were suspect, with a tendency to become anti nationals.

The focus on national security and nationalism was successful. The elections of 2004, 2009 and 2014 were all fought on primarily economic issues. In 2004 BJP went into the polls claiming India was shining. It had a fully articulated aggressive neoliberal

policy, while the Congress, the original party that had ushered in neoliberalism in India, was talking about social security. The left won its highest ever number of seats. In 2009, the UPA-II government was formed because UPA successfully defended its economic record, including the MNREGA. In 2014 Modi and the BJP focused on corruption, economic failures. Hindutva was worked in, but with a distinct economic tinge in areas like West Bengal and Assam, where “infiltration” by Muslims was linked to outsiders (real or alleged immigrants) taking away jobs from locals. In 2019 by contrast, the economy was in a mess. So much so that the government of India stopped data from being published. As we write this the Government, now securely in place for five years, has acknowledged that the growth rate had plummeted to 5.8% and that India’s unemployment rate hit a 45 year high in 2017-18. But the success of the BJP lay in its ability to move the entire campaign away from the economy. The Congress did try raise issues relating to the economy as well as corruption (the Rafale deal), as did other parties. But the BJP stayed firmly on course for an ideology driven campaign that stressed national security, a strong leadership, and anti-Pakistan rhetoric. Nor was this last something invented only after Pulwama and the Balakot strike. This chest thumping belligerent nationalism was ratcheted up immediately after the 2014 victory and stayed the entire course. And no party, not even the left, was in a position to take this on adequately (in most cases not at all).

Ideology, Institutional Subversion, Force

There is a need to understand the different dimensions that were integrated in this success. The ideological triumph, while backed by force and fraud, cannot be discounted. The RSS-BJP has succeeded in becoming the hegemonic voice across much of India, spreading beyond the North and the West to Eastern India and to parts of the south. It has used local issues, but woven them into its

core outlook.

Three decades of neoliberalism have shown that there is no trickle down. Wealth accumulates at the top, and simply stays there. This has created frustration. There is a tremendous sense of anger, insecurity and frustration among the youth, many of whom were the first time voters in the elections of 2019. The BJP government's policies over the last five years certainly contributed strongly to their economic crisis. Yet, a disproportionately high fraction of them appear to have voted for the BJP. No mechanical understanding can explain this. For this, it is necessary to look at how their imagination has been captured, how their anger has been shifted in certain directions by astute politics.

This involves taking on and defeating the challenges from left and subaltern politics. Electorally, one of the challenges mounted from the 1980s, and especially in the 1990s, was the attempt to create political identities called Dalit politics and OBC politics. While caste oppression is a living social reality in India, specific caste groups or jatis are linked to particular occupations. The change from pre-capitalism to capitalism has partially transformed that. That has also given the opportunity of cobbling together a discursive alternative based on shared experiences of oppression, humiliation and the desire to fight back and gain social identity and pride. B.R. Ambedkar started this process, but it was in independent India, with the adult suffrage, that a serious attempt was made to build table, cohesive political projects around this.

The Dalit assertion for greater dignity, and recognition as equal humans, as well as the struggle for material benefits, came up against the recognition that without political power these were not going to be possible. The Dalits, their aspiring political leaders and intellectuals, saw the left as non-serious about them at best, because of the repeated arguments that when all the exploited improved their social conditions Dalits would find themselves in a better situation. This seemed at best a failure to recognise the special oppression they faced, and at worst a reassertion

of upper caste (in recent parlance, savarna) domination in the name of class leadership. So there was an attempt to build Dalit parties within bourgeois politics, the most successful being the Bahujan Samaj Party of Kanshi Ram and Mayawati. Historically Dalits were the "outcastes". The "shudras" were people who came to occupy places a little above Dalits but were also oppressed. This essay cannot trace fully the class-caste interfaces and linkages. However, a large part of them were the ones who came to be identified as the Other Backward Classes. Here too, social engineering and a political project based on that went together. But that political project fragmented into state level entities, like the Samajwadi Party in UP, the Rashtriya Janata Dal in Bihar, etc.

These were however political processes based on discursive identity politics. There was no easy road to unity based on the argument that Dalit-Bahujans constitute the majority and are oppressed. Both parts of the statement are true, but they could not easily be turned into lasting political vehicles. Apart from the interests of the elite, and certainly Brahminism is a component of the elite in India, this political process required a material basis that did not necessarily emerge. Thus, in UP, the core area of the BSP, the Jatavs formed its most enthusiastic supporters, and got disproportionate support and patronage from it, so that it has been argued by analysts that other Dalit castes have not remained as strongly loyal to the BSP as in the past. Equally, the RJD and the SP were backing mainly the most powerful OBC group, the Yadavs. In Bihar this led to the split between RJD leader Laloo Prasad Yadav and the Kurmi leader Nitish Kumar.

The BJP has taken note of these processes and has encouraged the formation of small parties based on one or two smaller but significant castes, or forged alliances when such parties existed, in order to ensure that the project of a Dalit unity or OBC unity does not materialise. Hindutva, allegedly very catholic and capable of embracing diversity, was pushed as the key to how these different castes could all be accommodated. At the

same time, the BJP has shown greater flexibility in recent times. It has moved to acceptance of reservations while diluting them (e.g., through the so-called economic reservation) It has absorbed gods and goddesses traditionally worshipped by people outside the elite Brahmanical hierarchy, while ultimately ensuring that the co-option is on the terms of the Sangh. And through sustained scapegoating of Muslims, it has actually managed to make Dalits in many parts of India hostile to the Muslims, so that even real Brahmanical oppression has not led to Dalits siding with Muslims. One of the ugliest cases in the past was of course the successful mobilization of oppressed castes against the Muslims during the 2002 pogroms in Gujarat.

The scapegoating of Muslims has been done systematically, and taking into account local issues. Thus, in Bengal it is "infiltration". In Assam it is linked to an older anti Bengali sentiment. So, while it has variations, there has been generated a massive fear, hatred and anger against the Muslims within a considerable part of the Hindus. While leftists have often pointed out rationally that the Sachar Committee Report and other documents show that the majority of Muslims are actually socially and economically in a worse position than for example Dalits, the BJP-RSS way of handling popular religiosity and promoting the hatred against Muslims rides over such rational arguments.

At the same time, there have been massive institutional shifts. This needs to be understood to recognise the nature of the BJP victory. The BJP had sustained support from most newspapers and TV channels. This is not surprising. It is sometimes said by well-intentioned but totally erroneous commentators that the media has been purchased, journalists have been purchased. The reality is simple.

Most newspapers and television channels are owned by capitalists who are part of the hegemonic bloc that sees the BJP as the sole stabilizing force. So journalists are instructed to take pro BJP lines. Social media was also dominated by the BJP. There were large numbers of paid social media operators sending out messages,

cartoons, memes, fake news to vast numbers of citizens. There was the tapping of the UID (Aadhaar) data and its use. There were the shifts in the Supreme Court and the Election Commission (EC).

There is no need to accept conspiracy theories like the EC creating EVMs where whatever button is pressed the BJP would get the votes. The EC did other things which were quite visible. This began with the EC waiting till Modi's all India tour of inaugurating various projects was over before it announced the election dates. This continued with the EC giving clean chits to Modi's numerous violations of the Poll code.

From the point of view of funding for the elections, this time there was simply no comparison. The BJP had about fifty times the funds all others had. It was like a super heavyweight fighting with a number of bantam weight boxers, and the media gleefully attacking the bantamweights for not being able to go the entire distance.

To this we need to add the matter of force and fraud. A vast number of Muslims and Dalits found their names deleted from the electoral rolls and therefore could not vote. During the election campaign there was massive show of force and threats. Thus, Muslims in many UP seats were subjected to threats of various kinds, like Maneka Gandhi, the BJP candidate from Sultanpur, openly threatening Muslim voters that if they did not vote for her, after the elections she would not help them. This is not an empty threat, because the EC's use of electronic voting *EVM* mean that its Form 20 data, released after the polls, allows everyone to check how each booth, or each EVM, voted. This breakdown practically nullifies the secrecy of the vote.

The Opposition and the Strategy of the Congress

The possibility of defeating the BJP rested on forming a wide block of parties. Any such alliance would have been a bourgeois alliance, and there is

no question of our supporting it. But an objective analysis would show that whereas in the first half of 2018, the Indian National Congress was keen on moving to some sort of alliance of that type, the victories it got in a few state assemblies changed its outlook.

In UP the major alliance was the Samajwadi Party-Bahujan Samaj Party alliance, which tried accommodating others. But the Congress made huge demands. For the SP-BSP alliance to accommodate a very weak Congress any further than they did (they did not put up candidates in the seats contested by Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi), the Congress had to respond in places it was stronger (Madhya Pradesh, Punjab etc), which it simply did not. The Aam Aadmi Party, which controls the Delhi government, tried negotiations about the Delhi seats but the negotiations fell through. The Left front in West Bengal all but begged the Congress for at least a seat adjustment if not an alliance, but there too it was the Congress that showed disdain.

It was clear that the Congress was more interested in putting itself forward as the only legitimate alternative to the BJP than with winning elections and putting together a coalition government. Its pitch was successful among liberal and soft left intellectuals of certain types, who were urging votes for the Congress. One key element in the liberal arguments for the Congress was that all other parties had at certain times allied with the BJP and given it legitimacy (including the Left front), while the Congress had not. Of course - since the Congress was usually the party against which such alliances had been put together in the first place.

Moreover, the Congress took a soft Hindutva policy over a series of issues. In Kerala, where the contest was primarily between the CPI(M) led Left Democratic Front and the Congress-led United Democratic front, there was a Supreme Court verdict that stopped the regressive practice of not permitting women who were of roughly the age when women would menstruate into a temple known as the Sabarimala temple. In order to win the Hindu conservative vote, it was the Congress which aggressively

mobilized people, basically demanding that the provincial government should not help any woman trying to enter the temple. Certainly, in Kerala the UDF won 19 out of 20 seats, though not *only* for that reason. Finally, of course, if we look at the economic policies that the Indian capitalist class, or at least its dominant sections, want, it was the Congress that started pushing for them from the end of the 1980s and particularly in the 1990s onwards.

Why the Congress wanted this seemingly suicidal policy of going alone and ensuring its defeat has to do with its alliance experiences and a strategy it seems to have developed. Alliances, whether with the Left in 2004-2009, or even with regional parties (2004-2014) compel the Congress to give too much ground on core issues of interest to the Indian capitalists and international capitalism. So, the Congress strategy, on looking back over what it did since November 2018, was to appear progressive, as the left of centre alternative to the BJP (a fake appearance) while concentrating on the collapse of regional and left parties. Just one example will clarify this. It was the left that was primarily responsible for the big kisan marches in Mumbai and Delhi. The Congress picked up the rhetoric. But after the November victories, the Congress did not hike the crop procurement prices in the provinces where it won, contrary to its pre-election promises. As a result, when the Congress made an electoral promise to give Rs 72,000 annually to 20% families in poorest of the poor category, benefiting around 25 crore people (the NYAY scheme) in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, it made evidently zero impact. The BJP swept those provinces, bouncing back from its defeat just six months back.

The Disaster of the Left

For Marxists, discussing the rise of an ultra-right force, the key questions are, what is going to be the line of march in the coming period, and how do we fight it? To answer these questions however, we have to begin

with examining the extent of the disaster of the left. [68].

The mainstream left, as it is often called, consists of four main parties - the Communist Party of India, the CPI(M), the Revolutionary Socialist Party, and the All India Forward Bloc. The CPI and the CPI(M) belong to the same current, and the historic reasons for the split are long over. The CPI has repeatedly called for a unification of the two parties. The CPI(M) has in the past rejected the appeal with arrogance, arguing that as it is a bigger party, the CPI should enter it instead. This is something that would also enable the CPI(M) to argue that it remains the "correct" legatee of the undivided CPI, even though in fact today the CPI(M) no less than the CPI is a fervent campaigner for an alliance with the Congress.

What is far more important is the experience of being in government and how it has transformed the mainstream left. The CPI and the CPI(M), emerging from the Stalinised milieu, had not been revolutionary parties at any time in independent India. But they did have militancy, and a degree of focus on extra-parliamentary mass action. Even the toppling of the Namboodiripad government of Kerala in 1959, and the toppling of the United Front governments of 1967 and 1969, did not mean a total rupture with that outlook.

But between 1977 and 2011, the Left front was continuously ruling West Bengal at the provincial level, and it also had a long stint in Kerala, alternating with the Congress led alliance. In the small state of Tripura it ruled for a quarter century. These experiences, and above all the West Bengal experience, transformed the CPI(M), not only in West Bengal, but across India.

CPI(M) cadres in West Bengal did not take part in any real mass movements since 1977, because only when the government had decided what to concede were fake controlled movements launched. This had an impact at the all India level too. While the left parties and their mass fronts continue to be important (the CITU and the AITUC among trade unions,

the AIDWA and the NFIW among women's organisations, the two Kisan Sabhas, etc), movements have become peculiar.

This is most clear when we look at the working class. There has been unremitting assaults in the name of globalisation and reforms since 1991. The left trade unions have responded by periodic general strikes. The massive support these general strikes have evoked show that there is huge popular anger at the government and ruling class policies. Since 1991 there have been 17 general strikes. Yet the grass roots work of rebuilding unions, organising the contract workers, launching struggles or deepening existing struggles, these have been seldom done, either in the provinces where the Left ruled in the past, or elsewhere.

Instead, the central thrust became the question of the popular front, adapted to India. The popular front is the Dimitrov version of the United Front, which is not an attempt to unite the working class, and behind it the other oppressed, but an alliance between workers' parties and so-called democratic or anti-imperialist bourgeois parties. Its Indian version, originally worked out by two British Stalinists, R. Palme Dutt and Ben Bradley, continues to be the dominant ideological guide for the CPI and the CPI(M). Finding bourgeois allies and contesting elections with them remains their key task.

These two dimensions - the transformation of the mass struggles and the crass electoral line have resulted in a deep transformation of their cadres. The fact that the Left Front in power was capable of distributing patronage, and that its very high votes represented that, not just its ideological strength, was ignored.

So, the decline in its vote shares from 2009 was not properly understood by its own cadres or even leaders in West Bengal. Once it was out of power, and unable to provide patronage, that mode of securing votes was gone. The Trinamul Congress saw to it that even when left leaders were MPs or when the left won municipalities etc, their funds could not be spent or they would

not even get funds.

A major example is the case of Siliguri. A Left Front-Congress bloc managed to get the majority and Ashok Bhattacharya of the CPI(M) became Mayor of the municipal corporation. The corporation has not been getting funds, and all road development and other work, along with patronage, in Siliguri, has been done through a bureaucratic agency created by the state government.

To top it, there was the massive violence on the left, unleashed during the last panchayat (rural local self-government bodies) elections in West Bengal. Conducted by the state election commission with the state police "ensuring" law and order, it saw total mayhem by the All India Trinamool Congress TMC. And when that happened, while in some areas the BJP-RSS cadres stood up to resist, even at the cost of being beaten up, the Left leadership simply abdicated. Large numbers of left local supporters, candidates or would be candidates, were beaten up, forced to leave their villages for months, while the leaders confined themselves to statements, dharnas (sit down protests) in front of the state election commission office, etc. This made a large part of the electorate feel that the left was not serious about resisting the TMC and the violence it had unleashed. Meanwhile, as the BJP has never ruled in West Bengal, they did have illusions about the BJP as the alternative force that might resist the violence of the TMC.

In West Bengal, the TMC and the BJP succeeded in achieving a communal polarisation. It has been argued that the Left votes were transferred to the BJP (seemingly plausible because the decline of Left votes and the rise of BJP votes between 2016 and 2019 seem to match). In fact the case is more nuanced. Muslims earlier voting left have often switched to the TMC, as have Muslims voting Congress.

Congress won in two seats in West Bengal, but it also saw a decline in its vote share. Many Hindus who had previously voted left voted the BJP this time. But while there have been cases where local CPI(M) leaders have been shown as urging people to vote BJP,

this is not a systematic case. Those accusing the left of doing so are firstly suffering from the same illusion that the left leaders themselves were - namely that these voters were inert people whose votes the left could transfer wherever they wanted at will. They are anything but that.

Secondly, the left lost its deposits in 39 out of the 40 seats it contested in West Bengal. It is ridiculous to argue that there was a setup and a conscious transfer of votes. A covert alliance, or a tacit understanding, between the BJP and the left, would have had to involve the left also getting BJP votes switched in a couple of cases at the least. Finally, had the left not fought with whatever its real and not inflated cadre strength was, there would have been around 8 more seats where the anti-TMC vote would have gone to secure seats for the BJP.

One of the charges that have been levelled against the left, from post-modernist intellectuals as well as people claiming to be on the radical left, is that the left parties were bhadrak parties, or parties of the upper caste elites, while it was the TMC led by Mamata Banerjee that represents the subaltern. We cannot discuss this at length here. But even if we look at the elections of 2019, something emerges clearly. In Kolkata, the seat that above all represents the bastion of the bhadrak is Kolkata South. From 1971 to the present, the CPI(M) has won this seat only twice (1980, 1989), while from 1991 to 2011 it was represented by Mamata Banerjee. It was not a subaltern (defined in caste terms) backlash that resulted in the collapse of the left, but its failure to be even a good reformist left (i.e., ensure that extra-parliamentary struggles continue).

What to expect and how to resist?

The BJP government in the first few days has given clear indications of what we should expect. In brief, it will seek to retain its position as the preferred party of the Indian big bourgeoisie. This means an aggressive attempt to reform labour laws in

favour of capital. [69]The draft for a new labour code will now be pushed rapidly, depending on the degree of resistance that can be generated.

In foreign policy, the pro US thrust will be retained, along with something that is distinct to the BJP, namely its extreme closeness to Israel. The anti-Muslim internal ideological politics will be supplemented by anti-Pakistan rhetoric. One especially significant aspect of this is to remember that Balakot was the first case of two nuclear armed states coming into direct military confrontation of the order where one country sends in its air force so deep into another. Much has been written in the Indian media and social media about how many actually died etc. Much more significant is the fact that this happened, and may embolden the BJP to try it again, with aggressive retaliation by Pakistan at some point.

In 2014-2019, the Modi government had already started a process of controlling all segments of the state apparatus. Institutions that previously had some autonomy by law have been gradually brought under control of the Prime Minister's Office. This is likely to deepen.

This means that under a formal retention of "democracy", there will be a steady erosion of all democratic content. The institutional subversions will be backed by the deepening of communalism so that all non-Hindus are relegated to the status of second-class citizens.

Within a couple of years, it will be likely that the NDA will also have a clear majority in the Upper House (Rajya Sabha). The constitutional changes that the RSS has been pushing for can then be pushed through, making India formally a Hindu Rashtra. We are not predicting that these will all happen, but these will certainly be attempted, and only mass resistance can stop them.

We can expect greater state violence in Kashmir and the attempts to scrap Articles 370 and 35A. There will also be efforts to pass the Citizenship Amendment Bill making it an Act, so that Muslims coming from Bangladesh, Pakistan, or Afghanistan

are denied asylum or residency while non-Muslim migrants will find it easier to get naturalization and the right to stay permanently. Muslims across India may be forced to show their officially prescribed documentation or lose citizenship status. This will not only mean they lose their votes, but that they are likely to lose a whole series of basic rights as humans. Muslims are being clearly warned, that if they want to live in the new India they must accept ghettoization, they must not object to the RSS, they must not raise their heads and protest. Here too, what has happened to Muslims in Gujarat since the 2002 pogroms is a template for what will be attempted elsewhere.

The RSS has always had a deep interest in ideological control. This will now involve greater control over education and the media. Curriculum changes are already in the offing. Funding is being linked to loyalty, as well as to a competitive strategy that means that only a handful of institutions will be really high grade, while the rest will be far more easily amenable to control. The appointment of loyalists to key positions will be another way in which this control will be increased.

Finally, the last five years have also shown that there will be both state sponsored force - the wide use of laws like UAPA, etc, to arrest anyone who protests, the attack on NGOs who talk about issues like environment, health and safety, organic farming, farmers rights, etc.

The three major responses within left organisations and parties to all this are flawed. For the Maoists, the elections do not matter much. Certain Maoist inclined activists have even displayed greater happiness at the collapse of the reformist left than alarm at the growth of the BJP. But their strategy of a protracted Peoples' War is at a dead-end. The focus on forests and extraction from there, along with the appointment of Amit Shah as Home Minister, presages a far more violent war in the core areas of Maoist influence. Unless there is a radical transformation of their outlook, doctrine, and tactics (which essentially means unless they stop being Maoists) there seems no

prospect for serious widening of resistance by them.

For the mainstream left it is business as usual. Where even Rahul Gandhi of the Congress tendered his resignation after his party's failure to gain many more seats, the left leaders, hiding under the cover of collective responsibility, actually do not acknowledge responsibility for the disaster to the left. Rebuilding the old left, with a few poultices here and there, one or two face lift operations, will not gain them anything. This is clearly seen by the fact that the CPI(M) daily in Kolkata has been printing news and op-ed articles that do not address this central issue, the devastating blow suffered by the left.

For many activists, the desire will be to say, we must focus on social movements. But unless all such fragments are brought into a coherent and focused politics, these efforts will all be targeted by the Congress and its

liberal intellectual supporters each election time in the name of a rainbow coalition.

What we need to understand is that unlike in many other countries where also there has been a rise of radical right or fascistic forces, in India the opposition is divided, including the popular opposition. The struggle against Hindutva, with the RSS having some 36 organisations and over 800 NGOs working within all sectors of civil society, and having an existence of nearly a century, is different from a struggle against say, Bolsonaro. To damage the hegemony of the RSS-BJP calls for struggles beyond the electoral struggles.

This can however be done only by the building of a new, radical left. The forces for them will have to come from the existing far left, from the sections of the reformist left willing to challenge their leaderships and the drift to the right, the social movement

oriented left activists, in particular caste activists. A separate discussion is needed to look further at why the Amedkarite movement in its various forms does not provide a full answer. But one key point is, as long as Dalit parties and leaderships try to fight for upward mobility within the caste system rather than its radical overthrow, they cannot get out of the ultimate trap of Hindutva. Also, as we saw, the political project of Dalit unity has often foundered on ambitions of particular Dalit castes. But a revitalized left has to be a left that takes caste oppression seriously.

Any such new radical left has to therefore reject the politics of Stalinism and Maoism, without going to a rejection of building revolutionary parties altogether. In this struggle, Radical Socialist will lay its role, reaching out to organisations and activists for collaboration and unity. Overcoming fragmentation is the call of the day in today's India.

Algeria: Popular mobilizations impose first setbacks to regime

12 June 2019, by **Hocine Belalloufi**

Crisis of the regime

Already long standing, the crisis of the regime was manifested by a crisis of representation concretized by mass popular disaffection at the electoral level. According to the official participation figures (which are systematically inflated) only 50.7% voted in the last presidential election of 2014 against 74.56% in 2009. Between the two elections, the successful candidate Abdelaziz Bouteflika had lost 4.5 million votes.

However, through the presidential coalition (National Liberation Front-FLN, National Democratic Rally-RND, Algerian People's Movement-MPA and

Tadjamoue Amal Al Djazair-TAJ) and its employer (Forum of CEOs-FCE) and employee (Union General Government of Algerian Workers-UGTA) satellites, the government and administration monopolized, especially through public and private television, a sluggish political life in which all opposition was marginalized. Outside the regime's clientele, most Algerians do not vote. Many millions, especially young people, who make up 70% of the population, are not registered on the electoral lists.

The main "elected" institutions did not reflect the election results. The presidency of the Council of the Nation (Senate) and the post of Prime Minister were held by two leaders of a minority party, the RND. These were Abdelkader Bensalah, who has been

acting President of the Republic since 9 April, following the resignation of Abdelaziz Bouteflika, and Ahmed Ouyahia, whose government was dissolved on March 31. The senatorial elections of December 2018 were the scene of a massive fraud between parties "allied" to the "presidential majority" in favour of the FLN.

The coup against the president of the National People's Congress (NPC), Said Bouhadja, in October 2018, confirmed the lack of institutional credibility. He was illegally ejected from his post and his office by members of his own party (FLN) and those of the formations of the "presidential coalition". Prime Minister Ahmed Ouyahia said of this: "Strength is more important than the Constitution".

But the crisis eventually caught up with the main party of the regime, the FLN. And it was in the utmost opacity that, in November 2018, the Secretary General and the leadership of the putschists were removed, not by a vote of the “leaders”, but by a decision from the Presidency of the Republic. The party has since been in full “reorganization”.

The disaffection did not spare the opposition parties that struggled to convince and mobilize, all tendencies combined, and who have experienced recurring organic crises. The same goes for the employers’ and workers’ organizations.

Most Algerians no longer believe in the possibility of political alternation under the current regime. Radical Islamists, who had captured the hearts of many citizens in the 1980s and 1990s, were no longer politically credible, but no other force had managed to occupy the space thus freed up.

Beginning twenty years ago, the reign of Bouteflika was punctuated by an impressive and incessant series of scandals: cocaine trafficking, corruption cases involving land, large public projects (the East-West highway) and procurement with foreign multinationals (multiple Sonatrach-ENI-Saipem cases), the Khalifa affair involving squandering public funds for a company set up by a golden boy, privatizations using symbolic dinar. The list of scandals would be too long to pursue, but all have in common the involvement of members of the nomenklatura (ministers, police and army and so on) and/or their children and the new bourgeois business class.

Many Algerians consider corruption a mere drift from an abstract norm, religious or secular, which commands not stealing. The phenomenon is thus grasped in its purely moral dimension. This spontaneous moralistic vision is consolidated by the conscious discourse of the ultra-neoliberals in the opposition, which tells us the fable of a capitalism without corruption where each would have what they deserve, a good capitalism that allegedly exists elsewhere.

However, it is enough to follow the world news to realize that corruption spares no country and that some “respectable” states even specialize in the recycling of sums that originate from it. Corruption is not a deviation. On the contrary, it represents an objective necessity for the wealthy, condemned to fight in perpetuity against each other to preserve their market share, to acquire new ones, to fill their order books, to oust their competitors and to escape from the taxman who takes their money to build roads, schools, and hospitals. It is an integral part of the capitalist system.

In Algeria, corruption has played a particular historical role over the last forty years. It has contributed, along with the laws dismantling the public sector, to dispossessing the Algerian people of what formally belonged to them through public legal property: companies, agricultural and urban land, movable and immovable assets and so on. It has contributed to the regulation of foreign trade to replace the former public monopoly with a private monopoly. It is not an accident of course, much less an error or a deviation, but a process necessary to allowing an illegitimate minority to accumulate. This dimension of corruption has not escaped the people, who have grasped the relationship between power and wealth.

There has been a concentration of powers and a concomitant rise in authoritarianism. The executive has been considerably strengthened during Bouteflika’s various terms of office. The hyper-presidential nature of the Constitution and the appearance of a cult of personality, outrageous and grotesque, express the objective necessity of concentrating powers around a person to unify the different factions and impose policies that do not necessarily enjoy consensus.

This was the case on the Amazigh question, with the recognition of the Amazigh language (Berber) as a national and official language and the establishment of a National Academy of the Amazigh language. Under the pressure of the masses, Bouteflika decided this, even though there is no consensus within the regime. The same goes for certain economic and

social issues: privatization, subsidizing the prices of consumer products, the price of gas and electricity, water and so on. The other side of the coin lies in the fact that this hyper-concentration of powers made it difficult to reach consensus on the name of a successor.

The internal settlements of accounts and contradictory decisions that have multiplied in recent years confirmed the cracks in the regime. The irremovable security services boss, General Mohamed Mediène, known as “Toufik”, was sacked a year after Bouteflika’s re-election to a fourth term in 2014, and the Intelligence and Security Department (DRS) he led has been restructured.

In 2018, the arrest of a vessel containing 701 kg of cocaine resulted in the dismissal of the head of the National Security Directorate (DGSN). His successor only lasted a few months, and several measures including changes that he had made within the police were frozen by the Minister of the Interior. Senior officers of the National People’s Army (ANP) were banned from leaving the country and their bank accounts frozen before they were arrested. Their unexplained release came shortly afterwards. Seven former police officers accused of undermining state security following police protests against difficult working conditions in 2014 were acquitted on 26 February 2019.

One of the main signs of the regime’s crisis is its inability to complete the process of structural economic reforms that began forty years ago. The path has been set towards deregulation since 1980, but the state continues to direct the economy. Energy (hydrocarbons) and mining remain in the public domain to the chagrin of the ultra-neoliberals of the regime and the opposition, as well as the imperialist powers (G7) and their financial institutions (IMF, World Bank and so on). Large public companies that had been privatized (Sider El Hadjar in favour of Arcelor-Mittal, Asmidal which became Fertial after the Spanish group Grupo Villar Mir became majority shareholder and so on) have returned to the fold of the state.

The attempt by Ali Haddad, former leader of the Forum of Business Leaders-FCE (the main employers' organisation) arrested last March 31, to buy the shares of the Spanish group, was foiled thanks to the mobilization of workers of the complex. The Presidency forced the executive to exercise the right of pre-emption of the state, which has regained control of the company. The law on cutting hydrocarbon prices passed in 2005 was not promulgated by the President and was eventually amended a year later. The investment law - which stipulates that Algerian companies associating with foreign partners must hold the majority of shares (51/49) - has been maintained. Imports are falling sharply as a result of government measures (quotas, prohibitions, heavy taxes and so on). The government is also continuing to build social housing, subsidize prices, maintain free public health and education and reject foreign indebtedness.

This contradiction between, on the one hand, the course clearly set towards neoliberalism and the breaks, U-turns and permanent setbacks has for many years fuelled tensions within the regime. It has also fuelled an ultra-neoliberal democratic opposition and growing popular discontent. Unemployment affects 11.7% of the active population and rises to 28.3% among young people aged 16 to 24. Graduates cannot find employment opportunities, while 43% of employees are not declared to social security. The purchasing power of workers, the unemployed, landless peasants and poor peasants, small artisans and traders is falling under the triple effect of rising prices, the depreciation of the dinar and a stagnation of wages and pensions. The reduction of the state's commitment to education and health severely penalizes the underprivileged classes. The regime is challenging what remains of the social state.

This policy, on the other hand, favours the ruling classes (Algerian and foreign capitalists, landowners, importers, big traders, the higher liberal professions and so on) who profit from the illegitimate dispossession of the Algerian people (privatization, public-private

"partnership" and so on), and the generous help that the regime gives them. Multinational companies that boast of exporting fertilizers or cement (Fertial, Lafarge and so on) do so thanks to gas subsidized by the state. Cement is exported at half price and the public group Sonelgaz has a deficit of 23 billion dollars!

Faced with the legitimate resistance of the masses, the only answer is repression: recourse to justice to hinder the right to strike, transformation of the Labour Code into the Capital Code, arbitrary arrests of officials, bloggers and journalists, bans on demonstrations and the questioning of activists, the beating of football fans and so on. The bosses of the private and the public spheres are directly attacking trade unionists. The regime defends the interests of the dominant comprador classes which constitute the true Trojan horse of imperialism more and more clearly.

One of the last, and not the least, signs of the crisis of the regime appears precisely in its difficulty in resisting imperialist pressure. The government still supports the cause of the Saharawi and Palestinian peoples, and refused to endorse the imperialist interventions in Libya, Syria and Yemen. It rejects any participation of the National People's Army (ANP) in operations outside its borders as well as the installation of foreign military bases in Algeria and does not accept the installation of transit centres for migrants. But it has signed an "exceptional partnership" with French imperialism and maintains excellent relations with the United States.

From February 18th to March 1st, the ANP participated, in Burkina Faso then in Mauritania, in large-scale military manoeuvres called "Flintlock 2019", placed under the supervision of the US Armed Forces Command for Africa (Africom). The "Phoenix Express" manoeuvres organized by Africom in Greece in May 2018 saw the participation of the Algerian navy. There is therefore an undoubted shift in foreign policy that can only feed contradictions within a regime traditionally oriented to the USSR, then to Russia (especially in military matters) and which, above all, was

oriented to non-alignment.

We can conclude that the Algerian regime is neither monarchist nor truly republican. It is neither a dictatorship nor a democracy. It is neither a theocracy nor a secular regime. It is not pro-imperialist but is no longer anti-imperialist. It is not ultra-neoliberal but is not anti-neoliberal. Its inability to resolve the contradictions of the Algerian society as well as its own permanently renews the conditions of crisis. This immobility is indicative of its inability to reform.

Crisis of hegemony

Contrary to the discourse asserted by the ultra-neoliberals, the crisis of the regime refers to the issues and class struggles that traverse Algerian society. It derives in particular from the hegemonic incapacity of the dominant classes.

The policy of liberalization is led by the inner bourgeoisie. This class fraction is not national in that it no longer has a sovereign project and refuses to confront the imperialist world order economically, politically and diplomatically. But it often depends on public orders and still needs the protection of the state to accumulate in the face of the international market.

This faction comes up against two pitfalls. The first is the active and passive resistance of the masses and a part of the state apparatus. To pass its reforms, this faction led by the regime is forced to constantly tack, advance, retreat. To date, it has not succeeded in completing its structural economic reforms and has not fully integrated into the imperialist order. But it does not want, conversely, to return to a national development policy and resistance to the imperialist order as some states still do, totally or partially and with more or less consistency and determination.

The application of its neoliberal economic and social policy (blocking wages and pensions, calling into question the employment code, unemployment) compels it to tack, but it does not hesitate to use force

against the masses of workers and the popular classes who refuse to see their conquests go up in smoke. This fraction of the bourgeoisie thus turns out to be incapable of obtaining the consent of the exploited and dominated.

The second pitfall facing the inner faction lies in its inability to obtain the support of the other faction of the bourgeoisie, the comprador faction which defends an ultra-neoliberal conception of integration/submission to the world market and the imperialist order. It has been considerably strengthened over the past three decades as a result of the civil war that facilitated the destruction and plundering of public enterprises ordered by the IMF (with the Structural Adjustment Plan signed in 1994) and the transformation of an Algerian economy that wanted to be productive and industrial into a bazaar economy based on "import-import". This comprador faction continues to emphasize the lack of will power in terms of structural reforms and integration into the global market. The faction of the inner bourgeoisie is thus caught between the popular masses on one side and the comprador faction supported by imperialism on the other.

The comprador faction has aimed at the conquest of power for several years. It has traditional formal parties, the main ones being the Movement of Society for Peace (MSP) of Muslim Brotherhood orientation, the Rally for Culture and Democracy (RCD) of secular tendency, the Talaie El Houriat party of the former Prime Minister Ali Benflis, and some parties and personalities grouped in the movement Mouwatana (Fatherland). But it relies especially on a real, organic, party consisting of traditional and electronic media, think tanks, movements like the one that supports the country's first oligarch, Issad Rebrab, who was arrested on April 22 for "economic and financial crimes", and personalities who form a group that is often more dynamic than the formal parties. This comprador faction has the support of the imperialist centres (the Western powers, IMF, World Bank and so on) which exert constant pressures on the Algerian regime.

This faction influences a large part of people and groups of the opposition who basically share its vision of the need for structural economic and social reforms, but who dare not openly take a stand in its favour, for fear of the reactions of the regime. In general, the integration of the *nouveaux riches* into the regime through parties, elected institutions and the direct or indirect presence of soldiers or their relatives in the business community contributes significantly to changing the balance of power to its benefit. Because its rival who currently runs the country works for it. This inconsistency renders it incapable of returning to a national and social development policy. It would have to rely on the masses.

The comprador fraction thus experiences an ascendant dynamic. It works to conquer hegemony within the ruling classes. But its acquaintance with the world's capitalist forces and the imperialist states alienates it from part of the deep Algerian state with its roots in the war of national liberation and the development policies of the first two decades of independence. These sectors are very cautious in terms of national independence and security.

The comprador faction also has the greatest difficulty in obtaining the consent of the exploited and oppressed because its ultra-neoliberal economic and social project is tougher and more relentless. Can it, under these conditions, gain power through the ballot box? And if it succeeds in the current crisis or because it is currently the only political alternative to the regime, what would be the reaction of the masses? Since the workers, the unemployed and the youth are not ready to accept this policy, this faction is likely, while it claims to be democratic, to govern undemocratically to pass its ultra-neoliberal potion.

It is this hegemonic incapacity of the two fractions of the bourgeoisie which is at the origin of the crisis of the regime, its incapacity to govern by being united and obtaining the consent of the exploited and dominated. The regime cannot be democratized. This crisis has lasted

for years and deepened. It has accelerated during the year 2018.

Popular mobilization and open political crisis

The crisis of hegemony could have continued for a few months or years. But the presidential election originally scheduled for April 18, 2019 was the trigger for the political crisis. The announcement of the candidacy of Bouteflika for a fifth term and, illustrative of the cynicism and contempt of the rulers towards the people, the assertion that citizens were happy with this candidacy, indeed had eagerly sought it, broke the camel's back. Neither the masses nor the different oppositions could tolerate it.

Until February 21, 2019, no political or social force threatened the regime. The latter was contested only in words by impotent and marginalized opponents. Even the strikes of workers which tended to multiply did not really worry it. So, it was about to renew the outgoing president or, more precisely, his framed photo exhibited on all occasions (official ceremonies, meetings and so on) by his zealous supporters. The status quo seemed to be the country's unsurpassed horizon.

But February 22 was the breaking point with, following anonymous calls on social networks, the spectacular appearance of the masses on the political scene, followed, a week later, by a historically unprecedented popular surge in the 48 wilayas (departments) of the country.

This mobilization changed the political situation. It broke the wall of fear and allowed the reconquest of the right to demonstrate throughout the country, particularly in Algiers where it had been banned since 2001. It forced the public media, under the pressure of their own staff (journalists, technicians and so on), to report on the situation in the country more equitably. It freed speech and initiative and opened the way for

protests and demonstrations by multiple social groups: students, lawyers, journalists, teachers, doctors and paramedics, artists and writers, high school students and so on. This culminated in the historic marches of March 1 which demanded the departure of the whole regime and no longer that of Bouteflika alone.

These demonstrations led the regime to launch a last manoeuvre to try to keep the upper hand even though it had lost the initiative. In a letter purporting to emanate from Bouteflika and read on television, the candidate proposed, if he were re-elected, the holding of an open and inclusive National Conference in the wake of the elections in order to define political reforms, but also economic reforms which the citizens had not demanded during the demonstrations. This conference was to set the date for an early presidential election in which Bouteflika pledged not to participate.

But on the very evening of the announcement, youth demonstrations broke out spontaneously in many cities, relayed the next day by new student marches across the country and the anonymous announcement of a general strike. More than ever, the popular movement was united around the slogan of "No to the fifth term" and the departure of the whole regime.

The camp of the people has since multiplied its actions: big demonstrations on Fridays in the 48 wilayas of the country, permanent demonstrations of students and high school students, lawyers, artists, health staff and so on. It is on the offensive.

Having re-imposed its right to protest, it moved on to a higher stage, that of strikes. Local and/or sectoral strikes first and then a general strike with anonymous calls or emanating from an old structure resuscitated, in the greatest opacity it is true: the Trade Union Confederation of Productive Forces (COSYFOP). The entry into the movement of the local UGTA branch in the historic workers' stronghold of Rouiba-Reghaïa east of Algiers clarified the stakes by showing what the working class expects: "Unable to stay on the margins of the profound

popular aspirations being expressed, we join our voices to say yes to a change of system. A system that preserves the inalienable property of the people over the natural wealth of the nation, rehabilitates the role of the state in economic and social development and the fight against poverty and inequality. A system that stands out from oligarchies and enhances the value of work and puts people at the centre of development. A system that guarantees individual and collective freedoms and the free exercise of the right to organize." This is the exact opposite of the project of the ultra-neoliberal wing. This is why the latter, who is in favour of a much more radical economic course than that of the regime, is advancing the prospect of a transition leading to a presidential election.

This offensive dynamic of the popular movement has enabled it to garner support from trade unions, associations and movements. It has received support from members of the FCE employers federation (which supported Bouteflika), mayors and militants of the FLN, and the politically significant association of the National Organization of Mojahedin (veterans) which formed the backbone of the "revolutionary family" on which the regime was based and which, in addition to the support it gave to the protesters, denounced "collusion between influential parties within the regime and corrupt businessmen who benefited illegally from public money." The same goes for the Association of Alumni of the MALG (Ministry of Armaments and General Liaisons during the war of liberation) which is none other than the ancestor of the Algerian secret service, headed by the former minister of the Interior, Dahou Ould Kablia.

This strength of movement has several consequences. Those putting themselves forward as candidates retreated one after the other from the electoral masquerade of April 18, like the President of the MSP. Others, generally representing parties (FFS, RCD and so on), had already announced their refusal to take part in the ballot. Mokrane Aït-Larbi, a respected lawyer, human rights defender, and veteran democratic

activist, has left the leadership of the campaign for the candidate Ali Ghediri, a dissident military figure, as well as the electoral process. Despite the incomprehensible persistence of the regime to maintain it, the presidential election had lost its credibility.

Oppositions of right and left have radicalized. The symbolic figure of the ultra-neoliberal democratic camp, the boss of the Cevital group, Issad Rebrab, who mobilized his workers and employees for several months with the support of ultra-neoliberal opposition parties to protest against the "blocking of its investments" by the authorities, cancelled the march of March 5 initially planned in Tizi Ouzou (Kabylie). But he explained his gesture by the fact that it was not the time for "sectoral demands", but a "change of regime". The time has long gone when he maintained that industrialists did not have to concern themselves with politics.

Regime forced to retreat

Massive popular demonstrations on Fridays, February 22, March 1 and 8, 2019, culminating in a general strike that began on March 10, eventually forced the regime back. On March 11, Bouteflika announced by letter his decision not to seek a fifth term, the cancellation of the presidential election of April 18 and "significant changes within the government." This announcement was followed by the sacking of Prime Minister Ahmed Ouyahia, replaced by his Minister of the Interior, Nouredine Bedoui, the same man who threatened the people just a few weeks ago.

But Bouteflika's promise of change came too late and was too limited. The Algerian people expressed themselves: they did not want Bouteflika to remain in place and rejected the maintenance of the current rulers and institutions. That's why the demonstrations continued the day after the announcement by Bouteflika. The protesters rejected the extension of the fourth term beyond April 18 and demanded the departure of the President. The general strike launched

on March 10 continued as a process of re-appropriation of the UGTA by its members and its grassroots structures started. The left-wing political parties refused to join the presidential initiative.

The mobilization of the Algerian people finally paid off. A month and a half after the irruption of the popular masses on the political scene, Abdelaziz Bouteflika finally resigned on April 2. He will not have finished his term and will exit by the side door of History. The demonstrations of the entire population every Friday and those of workers, students, lawyers, magistrates, architects, doctors, pensioners during the weekdays, as well as local strikes and sectoral general strikes overcame the will of the presidential clan to maintain itself.

The resignation of Bouteflika was a huge political victory, won despite a final manoeuvre of the resigning president who, in exchange for his renunciation of a fifth term, sought to pilot a controlled transition to ensure the perpetuation of the authoritarian-liberal democratic façade regime in place for three decades. Indeed, in his letter of March 11 to the Algerian people, Bouteflika, taking note of his failure to go for a fifth term:

- formally and officially renounced running for president,
- cancelled, in violation of his own laws, the presidential election on 18 April and announced the opening of a transition that was not limited in time at the end of his fourth term,
- remained, just as illegally, in office until the end of the announced transition,
- fired Prime Minister Ahmed Ouyahia and instructed Interior Minister Noureddine Bedoui to form a new, open government, including the opposition,
- announced his intention of convening as soon as possible an inclusive National Conference composed of representatives of political parties of power and opposition, "elites" and other "independent personalities" of "civil society".

The former Algerian and UN diplomat Lakhdar Brahimi was recalled to informally pilot the preparation of this National Conference. The manoeuvre was rejected by the Algerians who multiplied marches, sit-ins and strikes throughout the week. This mobilization exacerbated dissensions within the government. Ahmed Gaâd Salah, Deputy Prime Minister and Chief of Staff of the Army, who had been one of the most determined supporters of the President, no longer mentioned his name in his speeches and insisted on the privileged links between the people and the ANP. The two main parties of the presidential coalition, the RND and the FLN, experienced individual and collective resignations of activists and elected officials and requests for the dismissal of their respective leaders, Ahmed Ouyahia and Moad Bouchareb.

Popular determination seriously affected the internal cohesion of the regime. As the new government was slow to emerge, the rank and file of the RND and the FLN stirred. Many activists and elected officials and even the most hated leaders, like their respective Secretaries General Ahmed Ouyahia and Moad Bouchareb, rallied shamelessly to the movement. The General Secretary of the UGTA (General Union of Algerian Workers) was not long in lining up behind them. The most opportunist people who had supported the President until then now publicly called for his departure at the end of his fourth term.

They were finally joined on March 26 by the strongman of the regime. Ahmed Gaâd Salah argued that the only solution now lay in the application of article 102 of the Constitution which provides for the resignation of the President of the Republic or his dismissal because of impediment or death. The demonstration of Friday 29th which put in the same bag the different clans of the regime pushed Gaâd Salah to accentuate the pressure on Bouteflika so that he resigned.

Today, the chief of staff presents himself as the defender, not of the President whom he stabbed in the back, but of the popular movement. He affects to discover the endemic corruption that plagues the country.

He seeks to reap the benefits of Bouteflika's resignation.

But until March 26, the departure of the head of state was not on his personal agenda, or that of Ahmed Gaâd Salah, nor that of any leader. Everyone wanted to impose the Bouteflika option, first as a candidate for a 5th term, then as the one steering a controlled transition. The millions of demonstrators on Fridays dissuaded them. This victory is therefore that of the people who defied the prohibitions of power by organizing daily demonstrations without asking for administrative authorization or even declaring them. The joy and pride of forcing Bouteflika to abdicate should not, however, obscure the fact that the authoritarian-liberal regime with a democratic facade remains in place. The Algerian people have not yet, by far, recovered their scorned sovereignty.

The "constitutional solution" of the Chief of Staff is a political manoeuvre to patch up the regime. It sacrifices the President in order to abort any prospect of democratic transition and constitutional change. Article 102 implies the maintenance of the current Constitution, the Government, the Constitutional Council, the two Houses of Parliament and all the institutions of the authoritarian regime. Some rights are already conceded, provisionally, with regard to the creation of associations, unions and parties, but the regime could be maintained as after October 1988 because it will be its responsibility to organize future presidential elections which will undoubtedly be won by the regime's candidate.

Such an outcome would even represent a regression in relation to Bouteflika's manoeuvre on March 11, since it would exclude his puppet inclusive National Conference. With article 102, we would move from the controlled Bouteflikian transition piloted by the regime to the absence of transition. It would basically be a return to February 21st! This is why many protesters put forward the slogan of application of articles 7 to 12 which restore to the people its full sovereignty, in place of article 102.

Act 2 of the struggle: “The constituent power belongs to the people”

All indications are that the popular movement has not experienced the downswing that RND number two Chihab Seddik wants. On April 5, it again overwhelmingly rejected the option of maintenance of the regime represented by the application of section 102.

The spontaneous demonstrations that have succeeded each other since March 31st across the whole country (students, lawyers, pensioners and so on), the call of the Confederation of Autonomous Trade Unions (CSA) for a general strike and a demonstration held in Algiers on April 10 despite police opposition, a strike supported by judges and justice sector officials, and the night marches that followed the announcement of the President's resignation on April 2 proved that the popular movement demands a complete change and does not fall for the line that presents Bouteflika as a scapegoat for the entire regime.

The resignation of the President has brought the real power, the hard core of the regime to the fore. This real power is not that of the ANP. The National People's Army is made up of *djounoud* (soldiers), non-commissioned officers and officers. But the real power is that of the very high military hierarchy which constitutes the armed wing of the regime. From 1962 to the present day, it has continuously created and defeated Presidents, and since 1980 it has supported an anti-national, anti-social and undemocratic neoliberal policy.

It is this armed wing that has brought back and perpetuated Bouteflika's reign for twenty long years, in violation of their own constitution imposed by force on the Algerian people. And while the latter is fighting to assert its citizenship, they want the people to recognize themselves in this Constitution which has kept citizens in

a state of political subordination.

In attempting to mislead the popular mobilization by a legal device (Article 102) in order to save a corrupt authoritarian regime, the hard core took on the heavy responsibility and risk of bringing the people and the army face to face, thus endangering the Algerian state faced with the appetites of imperialism (G7, NATO, Israel and so on), regional reaction (Arab monarchies, Turkey and so on) and their internal relays.

The popular movement has not been mistaken. It did not turn against the ANP whose function is to defend the people, their achievements and their social welfare, their national sovereignty over their wealth, their borders and their political sovereignty. They chanted by millions: “Djeich-chaab, khawa khawa” (“the army and the people are brothers”). They did the same with the elements of the police that they refrained from confronting during the demonstrations.

On the other hand, they oppose the project of the top military hierarchy to maintain the regime. Recourse to Articles 7 to 12 of the current Constitution may constitute a window leading to the free expression of popular sovereignty, too long violated. But the solution to the present crisis can only be political and unconstitutional. It involves setting up a provisional government to defend national sovereignty, to satisfy popular demands and to organize a wide-ranging debate throughout the country, a debate crowned by the election of a sovereign Constituent Assembly.

Two undemocratic projects or a Constituent Assembly?

Three projects are emerging today, only one of which corresponds to popular interests.

The first, defended by the regime, intends to maintain the unfair constitutional order in force.

The second is a short, top-down transition that would maintain or reorganize some aspects of the current Constitution. It is the project of the ultra-neoliberal opposition, of all tendencies (secular, nationalist, Islamist). It expresses the interests of the comprador fraction of the bourgeoisie.

Under the pretext of urgency, it aims at the election of a President who would have, finally, the “legitimacy” to impose on the people the “sacrifices necessary for its happiness”: an end to price subsidies for products of primary necessity, of electricity, water, gas, gasoline and conquests in health, education. Transformation of the Labour Code into the Code of Capital, extension of the retirement age, blockage of wages, obstruction of the right to strike and trade union organization. Opening of the Algerian economy to the world capitalist economy by the return to foreign indebtedness, the convertibility of the dinar, the total lowering of customs barriers.

The insistence of the ultra-neoliberal current on putting the UGTA in the museum is as revealing as it is suspicious. While trade unionists and conscious workers are fighting to reclaim this organization that has fallen under the thumb of an anti-labour bureaucracy, the ultra-neoliberals want to dissolve this strategic tool for the defence of workers' interests. A strategic tool in the perspective of a national (anti-imperialist), democratic (anti-authoritarian) and social (anti-neoliberal) alternative.

The third project is supported, with nuances, by the parties, movements and personalities who defend the election of a Constituent Assembly. The people, and they alone, must choose under which type of regime they intend to live parliamentary, presidential or otherwise.

It is up to them to decide whether they want to maintain the monarchical presidential office or whether Parliament, elected by a fully proportional system, elects a presiding government, whether or not they want a Senate to control and counter the will of the National People's Congress,

or they prefer to elect representatives for one or more terms. If they introduce a right of revocation against any elected official who betrays his constituents, affirm respect for the independence of justice and control of the government. If they introduce, along with the dusty old representative democracy, forms of direct democracy: committees of neighbourhoods and villages, businesses, educational institutions and so on.

In the current climate of mass politicization, the idea of the constituent assembly is making its way into consciousness, against the advice of the ultra-neoliberals in the regime and the opposition. Opponents of the return to the true sovereignty of the people advance miserable quibbles.

The first is that of the “constitutional void”. They dramatize things on purpose, to frighten the people. They warn that the institutions will collapse if we leave the framework of the current Constitution. They forget that, from 1965 to 1976, Algeria lived without a Constitution. This did not prevent the state from functioning, placing the country among the main leaders of non-alignment, recovering the natural riches of the soil and subsoil, improving the condition of the popular masses in terms of education, health and work, and laying the foundations of an industrial development which contrasts with the miserable bazaar economy of today. The mobilized people can devise a transitional framework to go to a constituent assembly responsible for developing a new institutional architecture.

The second quibble is that of “urgency”. However, the transition from a dictatorial or authoritarian regime to a democratic one cannot take place in the blink of an eye. Ensuring the real and massive participation of the people is essential if we intend to lay solid foundations for the future democratic regime.

Finally, the third quibble is a totally exaggerated “Islamist danger” that trivializes the victory of the Algerian people over armed Islamism. This position ignores the evolution of a society deeply imbued with religious

culture but absolutely not won to the theocratic state project as evidenced by the slogans chanted during the demonstrations, the huge presence of women in the movement and the widespread deployment of the national emblem which means that the Algerian identity is political and non-cultural (religious, linguistic and so on). Islamism must continue to be fought politically and not by the introduction of a regime based on a selective suffrage or a new façade of democracy.

The conditions for the establishment of a democratic regime are undeniably maturing, even if the road is full of pitfalls. To refrain from fighting under the pretext of a lack of safeguards is tantamount to advocating the maintenance of the status quo.

Destabilized for a moment by the suddenness and magnitude of the popular movement, the regime, through the Chief of Staff, intends to regain control by forcing the Constitutional Council to initiate the implementation of Article 102, presented as the appropriate response to popular demands, although the liberal authoritarian regime of which it is a part did not depart with Bouteflika.

But the people do not see it that way. The popular demonstrations of joy that immediately followed the announcement of the resignation of the President made it clear that the people would not be satisfied with a half-victory. The regime is thus directly confronted with the challenge of the masses and will have to choose between a coup d'état or retreating again to abdicate in the face of the popular will.

To achieve its ends, the popular movement must redouble its efforts and mobilization. But to produce their full effects, these efforts and mobilization will have to be integrated into a correct tactic based on an objective assessment of the balance of power between the camps present and its evolution and a clear awareness of the real political stakes that flow from it.

A revolutionary situation?

Despite appearances, we are not in a revolutionary situation even if the moment undoubtedly possesses potentialities in this sense. Things could obviously change, more or less quickly, but at the time when these lines are written, we are not there.

Characterized by a duality of power in which those at the bottom no longer want and those at the top no longer can, a revolutionary situation inevitably leads, at a given moment, to a direct confrontation between the former ruling regime and the new one, which involves making a revolution during which the new regime must overthrow the old one and take its place. In such a situation, the revolutionaries and the most determined sectors of the popular movement must take the offensive to seize power.

However, conscious of its strength but also of its limits, the popular movement has not, so far, opted for the tactic of the buffalo rushing on its target, but for the boa constrictor who grips its prey and slowly tightens its rings on her.

Algerians demonstrate, demand and gather on weekdays and Fridays. Workers and students resort to strike action many times. But they do not occupy the squares permanently and do not adhere to the slogan of civil disobedience, as did the FIS in 1991 during its insurrectional strike. They do not seek direct confrontation with the police, but rather avoid it carefully. They do not march on the Presidency in Algiers or on the wilaya (prefecture) headquarters to seize them. They have not yet created popular committees that would replicate the basic official structures of the state (town halls) as was the case in Kabylia in 2001.

They occupy the street every Friday to show their strength, point the way out for the regime's supporters, lobby the regime to exacerbate its contradictions and make the leaders understand that they must all leave. Then they go home, go back to work

and go about their business while waiting to measure the real political effect of their action on the regime and prepare for the next rounds. The millions of Algerians who have demonstrated so far are in a dynamic of pressure on the regime and not its overthrow. This may change in the future, but this is not the case now.

The regime, for its part, cannot do everything. From February 22 to April 2, the date of Bouteflika's resignation, it was on the defensive. But it is not totally helpless and tries to regain the political initiative through the application of Article 102 to bring the river of popular protest back on course. It also has forces (army, gendarmerie, police) which it can use when needed. The police, gendarmes and soldiers have not fraternized with the people. If they did not repress the protesters, it was because they had not received the orders and not because they had already passed onto the side of the popular movement.

All these objective elements lead us to conclude that we remain in a pre-revolutionary situation characterized by the fact that those below no longer wish, but that those above, although weakened, still can. The popular movement can therefore be defined as a movement of radical reform. Reform, insofar as it wants to change the regime by exerting pressure on it without trying to overthrow it by means of a direct confrontation. Radical, because it is not content with cosmetic modifications and acts without weakness and by extra-institutional ways to reach its objective.

The political challenge of the moment

In such conditions, what is the main political issue of the moment? This issue lies in the ability or not of the power to impose its solution plastering regime. The movement must, on the contrary, prevent it from achieving this goal.

No one will be surprised by the fact that the strongman of the regime is

not the acting president, but the army chief of staff and deputy minister of defence. He is the only one to speak publicly every week and set directions for the regime. President Bensalah has failed to create a political momentum for the presidential election scheduled to take place on July 4, under the current Constitution. His Prime Minister Nouredine Bedoui no longer expresses himself publicly and has become invisible. His ministers are pursued by the population when they go on work visits (meetings, inaugurations and so on). He was forced to sack the *wali* (Prefect) of Algiers following the collapse of a house in the Casbah (historic city) that killed five people and after the leader was pursued by the population. More and more local elected officials (mayors) and magistrates announce their refusal to organize the presidential elections on 4 July. A process of civil disobedience is on the horizon.

The majority of political parties (including TAJ and the MPA), unions, associations and personalities boycotted Bensalah's invitation to a national dialogue meeting to prepare the presidential election. This meeting was a fiasco and the interim president did not participate. However, the regime has not given up and reiterates firmly and unanimously (Bensalah/GaÃd Salah) its will to hold the poll on July 4th.

The camp of the regime continues to weaken. It has lost his grip on the justice sector, as magistrates and lawyers join the movement. The two parties on which its democratic facade was based (RND and FLN) are in full disarray. Their leaders are challenged, including physically, by a good part of their rank and file and their cadres. And their respective general secretaries are in trouble with the law. Ahmed Ouyahia is under investigation along with the current Minister of the Economy, as will be Djamel Ould Abbas once his immunity as a senator is lifted.

In an attempt to calm the people, but also to settle scores with other rival factions, Gaid Salah urged that the legal system reopen all corruption cases. The main oligarchs of the country (Ali Haddad, Isad Rebrab, the

Kouninef brothers) were thrown in prison. Others are summoned by the courts and should join them as well as several accomplices. With the same aim of winning the population, Gaid Salah has lent his support to the popular movement and warned those who would try to repress it. This was aimed directly at the police forces that gassed and beat protesters during a Friday march in Algiers, and who tried to prevent students and trade unionists in the capital from marching on weekdays.

But he has been intractable so far on the July 4 presidential election and has launched, once again, accusations against forces who want to harm the country, without specifying their identity.

There is therefore a secondary battle, internal to the regime, and a main battle, which opposes the latter to the population.

Under what conditions can the current popular movement triumph? That is the question we are facing. This movement has strengths. It is massive, national, unifying (inter-class, intergenerational, mixed, all the opposition currents). It proved his determination for six weeks and achieved important political results, including the resignation of Bouteflika. It lifted the burden which weighed on the political life of the country and thus opened the way to a dynamic of expression (demonstrations, strikes) and mass self-organization. It has unexploited potentialities within the working class and the peasantry.

But it is traversed by secondary contradictions (social, political, ideological) that can at any time become major and divide or even explode. We can measure this risk by seeing the content of the reactions to the attacks against feminist groups during the March 29 demonstration in Algiers. Because if the movement is united to end the regime, it is not agreed on the tactics to implement to achieve it. Nor is it united on the perspective: what alternative? What should replace the current regime?

These questions are not settled. The absence of internal organization and

the initially understandable rejection of the presence of political forces inside the movement are likely to prevent it from developing effective tactics. For all these reasons, the movement needs time.

A strategic question

For this reason, considering the strengths and weaknesses of the movement, it is appropriate to inscribe it in the long term and not to seek an immediate political outcome. Popular mobilization needs time to expand further, to organize itself at the base, to have a leadership that is understood first and foremost as a consistent orientation and not an improbable governing structure. It will not happen in a day.

On the other hand, a strategy that combines “war of movement” and “war of position” should be pursued in a thoughtful and active way, and not unconsciously and passively. The “war of movement” mainly takes the form of major Friday demonstrations that must be reinforced or, at the very least, remain at the current level of mobilization and remain as united as possible. It must also take the form of sectoral and/or general ad hoc strikes, like the one called for by the Confédération des syndicats autonomes (CSA) on April 10th. This “war of movement” aims to exert increasing pressure on the current regime to exacerbate its contradictions, to isolate its most repressive supporters and force it, finally, to retreat and to accede to the demands of the movement.

The “war of position” aims to seize strongholds. Access to public media and the effective enjoyment of freedom of expression, demonstration, assembly and association, trade union and political organization and the right to strike ... constituting strongholds to conquer or reconquer, expand and defend. This has begun to be done through local demonstrations and strikes.

The re-appropriation of the UGTA by workers and trade unionists represents another strategic position.

The process has begun but has not yet reached a sufficient size to bring down the bureaucratic leadership of the federation. The Secretary General of the UGTA was however forced to announce that he would not be a candidate for his succession to the 13th congress of the federation set for June 21 and 22, a congress that had been announced for January 2020. He is thus trying to speed up the coordination of the wilayas (departmental unions) of Tlemcen, Tizi-Ouzou, Bejaia, Saida and Ouargla to which the local unions of Hassi Messaoud (an important oil field) and Rouiba (the main industrial area of the capital) are attached, as well the National Federation of Mechanical, Metallurgy, Electricity and Electronics Workers (FNTMMEE) and the members of the National Executive Committee (CEN) which is the union leadership of more than 21 wilayas, who gathered on April 15 in Bejaia and organized a large rally in front of the UGTA headquarters in Algiers on April 17 to demand, among other things, the departure of Abdelmajid Sidi Said. This coordination, which has continued to grow since then, encourages workers to renew their union bodies everywhere.

Things will not be easy because, alongside sincere trades unionists, there are many bureaucrats who are turning their coats and who will necessarily be part of the process of re-appropriating the UGTA. To prevent it from being reduced to a mere replacement of the most discredited heads of the federation, it is essential to clarify the basic principles of union renewal (democratic, mass, anti-imperialist and class) and methods of organization and functioning (limitation of terms and alternation). It is also necessary that the “refounders” develop a trade union orientation and platform.

The re-appropriation of the UGTA must be coupled with the construction of a united front with the autonomous unions to work to rebuild the unity of the workers’ camp. This involves helping self-governing unions, who have the merit of having raised demands consistently and who have supported the popular movement from the beginning, to overcome their

divisions, their fragmentation and a certain corporatism towards a union that defends workers as a class. The CSA called for a national march of the workers in Algiers on May 1, 2019. It is the occasion to gather in unity members of the UGTA, the CSA and the General Autonomous Confederation of Workers in Algeria (CGATA) and thus give all active, retired and unemployed workers the opportunity to finally celebrate in the street the international day of struggle of the proletariat.

It is fitting, as has begun, to rebuild an autonomous and democratic student movement and a women’s movement, while waiting to make a breakthrough in the peasant world. One of the objectives could be to work for the reintegration within the UGTA of the former National Federation of Land Workers (FNLT) whose members had been arbitrarily and authoritatively transferred to the National Union of Algerian Peasants (UNPA), an organization of landowners. Another task is to support, strengthen and expand the camp of associations, unions and movements that define themselves as “civil society” and win them over to the perspective of the Constituent Assembly.

It is also possible that a process of self-organization in the city and village neighbourhoods starts and that popular committees emerge. But no one can decree it. Nevertheless, it is important to remain attentive to this possibility which could be realized at a certain degree of development of the movement.

Building a consistent political leadership

In the face of the regime and the unavoidable inconsistencies and betrayals of the ultra-neoliberal opposition forces, we need to build a political leadership, i.e. a political orientation capable of endowing the movement with the means to realize its ambitions and to experience a qualitative development.

This leadership can only be created by

a pole of the supporters of the Constituent Assembly. The political struggle, distinct from the ideological struggle, aims above all to add strength to strength and to influence the balance of power and win the game, totally or partially. It does not, therefore, require that the aggregating forces possess the same ideology, defend the same historical program, or even agree with every comma on the definition of the Constituent Assembly. It simply asks that these forces agree, at some point, to strike together.

In the face of the regime and ultra-

neoliberal forces, the formation of such a pole is an urgent task. The movement can only move forward and make a qualitative leap if it moves from a legitimate position of rejection to a position of proposal and implementation of a solid and credible political alternative. Now, the only slogan that allows the people to regain full and complete sovereignty is that of the Sovereign Constituent Assembly. The formation of this pole is possible because parties defending this slogan begins to make their way into the popular consciousness. The PT, the FFS and the PST are thus

placed before a historic responsibility. In no case should the work of building/rebuilding grassroots movement be opposed to the joint action of political forces at the top.

Collective groups for a sovereign Constituent Assembly could thus be built jointly in the neighbourhoods by the militants of these different parties and by all those who share this idea without being a party member. It is more important than ever to strike together, even if everyone is marching separately.

24 April 2019

Controlled slowdown or early depression?

11 June 2019, by **Eduardo Lucita**

The dynamic of capitalism as a system rests on its capacity for innovation and continuous improvement of labour productivity. Since the early 1970s, this improvement has slowed down. If, until 2010, labour productivity grew at a rate of 2.5 per cent per year, only increased by 0.6 per cent per year from that date until 2017.

Low growth

Despite these mediocre advances, capital, globally, succeeded between 1970 and 2010 in maintaining the rate of profit and restoring the overall profitability of the system. This was possible because from the global crisis of the 1970s, capital launched a process of restructuring its productive spaces and services (relocation and concentration of enterprises, technocentric model of production) accompanied by a strong offensive against labour (structural reduction of wages, changes in working conditions, introduction of new technologies, capital-intensive investments).

However, despite this maintenance of the rate of profit, the growth of the global economy has been very weak. Although, until the crisis of 2008,

growth averaged 5.5 per cent a year, mainly thanks to the contribution of so-called emerging countries, subsequently it did not exceed 3.7 per cent, despite an improvement in the American economy. This growth resulted in a strong concentration of wealth and an increase in inequalities around the world.

Two visions

On the basis of this stagnation of productivity, because we have been witnessing a long period of insufficient demand and because the world economy is unable to give a strong impetus to wages and employment, many analysts believe that the global economy is stagnating in the long run.

In one way or another, they are rediscovering the thesis of structural stagnation that Keynes' disciple, Alvin Hansen, put forward in the late 1930s and that the former secretary to the US Treasury, Lawrence Summers, took up again several years ago.

Others, on the contrary, argue that what we have been seeing lately is really the end of the super cycle of indebtedness. According to them, the countries of the centre are absorbing

the monetary expansion that they were forced into in order to end the crisis in 2008 (the United States is raising interest rates and the European Central Bank is reducing the purchase of bonds and withdrawing the cheap money released by the crisis). The possibilities of a new expansive wave are thus being prefigured.

The conjuncture

In 2018, uncertainty dominated the global economy, characterized by a deterioration of commercial relations, strong market volatility and rising interest rates, with on top of that the Chinese slowdown and problems in Europe, especially the resurgence of extreme right nationalism.

The IMF estimates that in 2018, global GDP grew by 3.7 per cent, a lower percentage than in the period prior to 2008 (5.5 per cent) but higher than in the years following the crisis. It is in the advanced countries (2.4 per cent as against 3 per cent previously) that this trend is the most marked. However, according to the analyst Jorge Castro, "US production increased by 3.5 per cent in 2018

under conditions of full employment (3.7 per cent unemployment, the lowest rate in three decades), with an increase in real wages of 3.2 per cent (the highest in ten years), 1.8 per cent inflation and productivity increasing by 2.5 per cent". The fact that the tax cuts decided by the Trump administration resulted in the repatriation of capital worth \$7 billion, of which - according to Jorge Castro - part went to Wall Street, but also part to productive investments, is not unrelated to this table.

Despite the importance of the US economy, the world economy is weakening. The IMF has recalculated downwards its estimates for this year to 3.5 per cent, and 2.5 per cent for the United States, the slowdown taking place "at a faster pace than was foreseen". According to the OECD, "global expansion has reached its apogee ", while the WTO has just predicted that "world trade will continue to contract in the first half of this year". In fact, Germany and Japan have reduced their growth rates during recent months and the Chinese economy, with the slowest growth in nine years, is slowing more quickly than had been foreseen.

In this situation, how important is the conflict between the United States and China, which is not only trade dispute with rising tariffs on both sides, which have affected trade, but which also has a strategic character aimed at determining who will control the fourth industrial revolution that is underway.

A new tariff escalation - that is Donald Trump's threat if an agreement that satisfies him is not concluded - would push the economy directly into recession, but there are indications of a possible agreement, after the truce concluded in Buenos Aires during the G20 meeting. But it is not just the dispute between the United States and China that exerts an influence. There are also indications of the possibility of a recession in the United States. And of its global impact. The meeting in Davos concluded on the conviction that "the global economy is not on the point of collapse, but the risks are increasing".

Are we at the dawn of a new world financial crisis?

We have noted that the world economy was entering a period of defining its long-term prospects. The way the present conjuncture is solved will influence this definition.

One of the distinguishing features of this situation is the uncertainty resulting from both political and economic unknowns. Among the first figure Brexit, extreme right-wing nationalism in Europe, the tense relations of the United States with China and Korea ... and also the case of Venezuela. Among the latter are the deterioration of commercial relations, the high volatility of markets, rising interest rates and the Chinese slowdown.

In the risk zone

According to economist and former Portuguese MP Francisco Louça, there are three indicators of possible risks for 2019:

- a) neoliberal deregulation spreads throughout the world, which makes nation-states increasingly vulnerable;
- b) speculative centres are still stimulated, financial capital and the concentration of accumulation continue to be privileged;
- c) the accumulation of debts (public, private or business) continues; debts already exceed 300 per cent of world GDP.

For their part, analysts Oscar Ugarteche and Alfredo Ocampo stress four specific points of the North American economy:

- 1) Between 2008 and the third quarter of 2017, GDP grew below its potential, but from that last date, its growth has been greater than this potential (nearly 5 per cent in the third and fourth quarter of 2018, with an annual growth rate of 3.7 per cent). According to them, this cannot last any longer, because it would overheat

the economy, with foreseeable consequences.

- 2) The unemployment rate remained below its natural level throughout the years 2017 and 2018. They note that something similar happened in the moments preceding the three recent recessions: 1990, 2001 and 2008, more or less a year before.

- 3) There are differences in bond yields of ten- and two-year Treasury bills. There is less risk in long-term bonds than in short-term bonds. This is an anomaly that has already manifested itself in recent recessions, anticipating them by more or less a year.

- 4) For the first time since 2008, the interest rate is positive.

For these authors, these four points indicate the possibility of an overheating of the US economy that would result in further interest rate hikes and appreciation of the dollar, which would increase the trade deficit. In addition, a stronger dollar would attract new capital from emerging countries and reduce commodity prices, especially in Latin America.

A recent Citigroup report indicates that a "slowdown in the United States would affect global growth and its impact would be more important than during the previous financial crisis". According to this report, Argentina, Mexico, Canada and Taiwan would be the most exposed countries.

Continuity of the crisis

It turns out that the main causes that led to the crisis of 2008 have not disappeared. Large multinationals have continued to accumulate profits despite the weak growth of the world economy. This accumulation is not the result of greater productive activity, but of financialization, speculation or appropriation of natural resources and commons, which as a whole operate as a support for capitalist accumulation but at the same time, because of their overdevelopment, accentuate the contradictions of the system.

Because this phase of the

internationalization of capital that we know under the name of globalization has ushered in a new mode of domination. This model has strong political and social implications:

• concentration of wealth;

• increased social inequalities;

• worsening of the climate crisis;

• localized wars and strengthening of the world debt system.

These are the products of the generalization of neoliberal policies.

However, this new order has not yet been completely realized. Its completion requires dismantling of all the governance architecture that was built in the aftermath of the World War II and replacing it by another, founded on a new balance of power between the great powers, especially between the United States and China. Are we in the preliminary stages of a new global finance, while this new balance has not yet been completed?

From contraction to recession?

Commercial deterioration, market volatility, high indebtedness, speculative bubbles. The risk of a new world recession is increasing. Is another 2008 coming?

Data showing that the world economy has entered a zone of risk, without a solution of continuity, is accumulating. IMF Director Christine Lagarde has just declared that everything is worse than expected for the global economy and that "70 per cent of the global economy is slowing down." For his part, the Director of the World Trade Organization added that "Trade cannot fully play its role of engine of growth" and predicted that global GDP growth and trade will be lower than in 2018.

Weakening in the United States ...

At the beginning of this year, the US Federal Reserve (FED) indicated that it could change its monetary policy. A few weeks ago it made this announcement effective with an

abrupt modification: not only the bank rate of reference will not be raised throughout the current year, but the policy of absorption of market liquidities will also be limited.

All of these measures indicate that the US economy is showing signs of weakening. In a way, this confirms what we have already indicated: American growth has recently exceeded its potential and at the same time we can observe an anomaly - a lower risk of long-term bonds, as against short-term ones - what we call an "inversion of the curve". Everything seems to indicate that the momentum given to the economy through Donald Trump's tax reform and the tax breaks that helped repatriate some \$7 billion has come to an end. The experience of other crises indicates that all this can lead to overheating of the US economy, which would lead to further interest rate increases of interest and an appreciation of the dollar, increasing the US deficit.

With the aforementioned FED decision, the increase in the interest rate is cancelled for this year, 2019. But the deficit is the most important in ten years: of the order of \$621 billion (of which \$419 billion are owed to China and \$110 billion to the EU). The appreciation of the dollar is reversing the flow of speculative capital, which leaves the so-called emerging countries to take refuge in the greenback, thus causing a strong devaluation of their currencies (the Brazilian real, the Turkish pound and the Argentine peso ...).

... and not only

In the most industrialized countries, growth and investment remain very low and their economies are contracting. China has just reduced its forecast of growth for this year to 6 per cent, the lowest rate in 25 years. Germany has done the same, going from 1.8 per cent to 0.8 percent. Turkey went into recession after almost a decade of strong growth. In Japan, after years of expansionist monetary policy, they have come to the conclusion that there is a strong probability that the economy is shrinking. Russia estimates its growth at only 1.3 per cent, while among the

other BRIC members, only India records an annual growth rate of 7 per cent.

Available data indicate that the current slowdown of the world's major economies could be transformed into a global recession in the not-too-distant future. And the central banks could not do much because rates of interest are already at zero or negative in the European Union and in Japan. According to the FED, they have also limited their policies of monetary absorption policies.

Towards another 2008?

In the United States, the Trump administration has continued deregulation and the easing of controls over the banking system. Moreover, the fact that the FED decided to limit monetary absorption - with which it partially conjured up the 2008 crisis - means there will be more money in circulation, while banking deregulation will facilitate the granting of credit without additional requirements. All this is going to stimulate growth ... while speeding up the journey towards recession.

But for some analysts, the risk is greater - it is enough just to look in the mirror of 2008 to see why: neoliberal deregulation threatens to spread again globally, making nation states increasingly vulnerable. The financial centres where speculation reigns and which favour accumulation in the hands of a small number - are prospering again while global indebtedness, whether state, private or corporate, already exceeds 300 per cent of world GDP. The stock market and real estate bubbles complete the list of threats. As if something was missing in the conflicts between China and the United States, the Brexit labyrinth, the rise of European nationalisms and a trail of geopolitical conflicts add uncertainty to a situation where financial capital and speculators investing in the short term move around like fish in water. Nobody knows if this acceleration of the slowdown will end in a global recession, but fears are growing.

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China's rise as a world power

10 June 2019, by **Ashley Smith, Au Loong-Yu**

One of the most important developments in the world system over the last few decades has been the rise of China as new power in the world system. How has this happened?

China's rise is the result of a combination of factors since it reoriented on production within global capitalism in the 1980s. First, in contrast to the Soviet bloc, China found a way to benefit in a twist of historical irony from its colonial legacy. Britain controlled Hong Kong up until 1997, Portugal controlled Macau up to 1999, and the US continues to use Taiwan as a protectorate.

These colonies and protectorates connected China to the world economy even before its full entry into the world system. In Mao's era, Hong Kong provided about one-third of China's foreign currency. Without Hong Kong, China would not have been able to import as much technology. After the end of the Cold War, during Deng Xiaoping's rule, Hong Kong was very important for China's modernization. Deng used Hong Kong to gain even more access to foreign currency, to import all sorts of things including high technology, and to take advantage of its skilled labor force, like management professionals.

China used Macau first as an ideal place for smuggling goods into mainland China, taking advantage of the island's notoriously lax enforcement of law. And then China used the Casino City as an ideal platform for capital import and export. Taiwan was very important not only in terms of capital investments, but more importantly in the long run was its technology transfer, first and foremost

in the semiconductor industry. Hong Kong and Taiwanese investors were also one of the key reasons for rapid growth of the Chinese provinces of Jiangsu, Fujian, Guangdong.

Secondly, China possessed what Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky called the "privilege of historical backwardness." Mao's Communist Party took advantage of the country's precapitalist past. It inherited a strong absolutist state that it would retool and use for its project of national economic development. It also took advantage of an atomized precapitalist peasantry, which had been accustomed to absolutism for two thousand years, to squeeze labor out of them for so-called primitive accumulation from 1949 through the 1970s.

Later, from the 1980s on, the Chinese state drafted this labor force from the countryside into the big cities to work as cheap labor in export processing zones. They made nearly 300 million rural migrants work like slaves in sweatshops. Thus, the backwardness of China's absolutist state and class relations offered the Chinese ruling class advantages to develop both state and private capitalism.

China's backwardness also made it possible for it to leap over stages of development by replacing archaic means and methods of development with advanced capitalist ones. A good example of this is China's adoption of high technology in telecommunications. Instead of following every step of more advanced capitalist societies, beginning first with using telephone lines for online communication, it installed fiber optic cable throughout the country nearly all at once.

The Chinese leadership was very keen to modernize its economy. On the one hand, for defensive reasons, they wanted to make sure that the country was not invaded and colonized as it was a hundred years ago. On the other hand, for offensive reasons, the Communist Party wants to restore its status as a great power, resuming its so-called heavenly dynasty. As a result of all these factors, China has accomplished capitalist modernization that took one hundred years in other states.

China is now the second largest economy in the world. But it is contradictory. On the one hand, lots of multinationals are responsible for its growth either directly or through subcontracting to Taiwanese and Chinese firms. On the other hand, China is rapidly developing its own industries as national champions in the state and private sector. What are its strengths and weaknesses?

In my book *China's Rise*, I argue that China has two dimensions of capitalist development. One is what I call dependent accumulation. Advanced foreign capital has invested enormous sums of money over the last thirty years initially in labor-intensive industries, and more recently in capital-intensive ones. This developed China but kept it at the bottom of the global value chain, even in high tech, as the world's sweatshop. Chinese capital collects a smaller part of the profit, most of which goes to the US, Europe, Japan, and other advanced capitalist powers and their multinationals. The best example of this is Apple's mobile phone. China merely assembles all the parts which are mostly designed and made outside of the country.

But there is a second dimension, autonomous accumulation. From the very beginning the state has been very consciously guiding the economy, funding research and development, and maintaining indirect control over the private sector, which now accounts for more than 50 percent of the GDP. In the commanding heights of the economy, the state maintains control through the State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs). And the state is systematically conducting reverse engineering to copy Western technology to develop its own industries.

China has other advantages that other countries do not have; it is huge, not just in size of territory, but also in population. Since the 1990s, China has been able to have a division of labor within three parts of the country. Guangdong has a labor-intensive export processing zone. The Zhejiang delta is also export oriented, but it is much more capital extensive. Around Beijing, China has developed its high tech, communication, and aviation industry. This diversification is part of the state's conscious strategy to develop itself as an economic power.

At the same time, China suffers from weaknesses as well. If you look at its GDP, China is the second largest in the world. But if you measure GDP per capita, it is still a middle-income country. You also see weaknesses even in areas where it is catching up to advanced capitalist powers. For instance, Huawei mobile phone, which is now a world brand, was developed not just by its own Chinese scientists, but more importantly, by hiring four hundred Japanese scientists. This shows that China was and is still heavily reliant on foreign human resources for research and development.

Another example of weakness was revealed when China's ZTE telecom company was accused by the Trump administration of violating its trade sanctions on Iran and North Korea. Trump imposed a trade ban on the company, denying it access to American-designed software and high-tech components, threatening the company with collapse overnight. Xi and Trump eventually worked out a

deal to save the company, but the crisis ZTE suffered demonstrates China's ongoing problem of dependent development.

This is the problem that China is trying to overcome. But even in high tech, where it is intent on catching up, its semiconductor technology is two or three generations behind that of the United States. It is trying to overcome that with dramatically increased investment in research and development, but if you look closely at China's huge number of patents, they are still mostly not in high tech but other areas. So, it still suffers from indigenous technological weakness. Where it is catching up very fast is in artificial intelligence, and this is an area that the US is very concerned about, not only in terms of economic competition, but also military, where artificial intelligence plays an increasingly central role.

On top of these economic weaknesses, China suffers from political ones. China does not have a governmental system that ensures peaceful succession of power from one ruler to the next. Deng Xiaoping had established a system of collective leadership term limits that began to overcome this problem of succession. Xi has abolished this system and reinstated one-man rule with no term limits. This could set up more factional fights over succession, destabilizing the regime, and potentially compromising its economic rise.

Xi has dramatically shifted China's strategy in the world system away from the cautious one pioneered by Deng Xiaoping and his successors. Why is Xi doing this and what is their program for assertion of China as a great power?

The first thing to understand is the tension in the Communist Party over its project in the world. The Chinese Communist Party is a big contradiction. On the one hand, it is a force for economic modernization. On the other hand, it has inherited a very strong element of premodern political culture. This has laid the ground work for conflicts between cliques within the regime.

Back in the early 1990s there was debate among the top echelons of the bureaucracy over which clique of rulers should have power. One clique is the so-called blue bloods, the children of the bureaucrats that ruled the state after 1949--the second generation of bureaucrats. They are fundamentally reactionary. Since Xi has come to power, the press talks about the return to "our blood," meaning that the old cadre's blood has been reincarnated into the second generation.

The other clique is the new mandarins. Their fathers and mothers were not revolutionary cadres. They were intellectuals or people who did well in their education and moved up the ladder. They usually climb up the ladder through the Young Communist League. It is not accidental that Xi's party leadership had repeatedly and publicly humiliated the League in recent years. The conflict between blue-blood nobles and the mandarins is a new version of an old pattern; these two cliques have had tension for two thousand years of absolutism and bureaucratic rule.

Among the mandarins, there are some who came from more humble backgrounds like Wen Jiabao, who ruled China from 2003 to 2013, that are a bit more "liberal." At the end of his term, Wen actually said that China should learn from Western representative democracy, arguing that Western ideas like human rights possessed some kind of universalism. Of course, this was mostly rhetoric, but it is very different than Xi, who treats democracy and so-called "Western values" with contempt.

He won out in this struggle against the mandarins, consolidated his power, and now promises that blue-blood nobles will rule forever. His program is to strengthen the autocratic nature of the state at home, declare China a great power abroad, and assert its power in the world, sometimes in defiance of the United States.

But after the crisis over ZTE, Xi conducted a bit of a tactical retreat because that crisis exposed China's persisting weaknesses and the danger of too quickly declaring itself a great

power. In fact, there was an outburst of criticism of one of Xi's advisors, an economist named Hu Angang, who had argued that China was already a rival to the US economically and militarily and could therefore challenge Washington for leadership in the world. ZTE proved that it's simply not true that China is on par with the US. Since then, a lot of liberals came out to criticize Hu. Another well-known liberal scholar, Zhang Weiying, whose writings were banned last year, was allowed to have his speech officially posted on line.

There was already hot debate among diplomacy scholars. The hard-liners argued for a tougher stand in relation to the US. The liberals, however, argued that the international order is a "temple" and as long as it can accommodate China's rise, Beijing should help build this temple rather than demolish it and build a new one. This diplomatic wing was marginalized when Xi chose to be more hard-line, but recently their voice has reemerged. Since the conflict over ZTE and the trade war, Xi has made some tactical adjustments and retreated slightly from his previously brazen proclamation of China's great power status.

How much of this is just a temporary retreat? Also, how does China 2025 and One Belt One Road factor into Xi's longer-term project of achieving great-power status?

Let me say clearly that Xi is a reactionary blue blood. He and the rest of his clique are determined to restore the hegemony of China's imperial past and rebuild that so-called heavenly dynasty. Xi's state, the Chinese academy, and the media have churned out a huge number of essays, dissertations, and articles that glorify this imperial past as part of justifying their project of becoming a great power. Their long-term strategy will not be deterred easily.

Xi's clique is also aware that before China can achieve its imperial ambition it has to eliminate its burden of colonial legacy, i.e., take over Taiwan and accomplish the CCP's historic task of national unification first. But this will necessarily bring it

into conflict with the US sooner or later. Hence, the Taiwan issue simultaneously carries both China's self-defense dimension (even the US acknowledges that Taiwan is "part of China") and also an interimperialist rivalry. In order to "unify with Taiwan," not to speak of a global ambition, Beijing must first overcome China's persistent weaknesses especially in its technology, its economy, and its lack of international allies.

That's where China 2025 and One Belt One Road come in. Through China 2025 they want to develop their independent technological capacities and move up the global value chain. They want to use One Belt One Road to build infrastructure throughout Eurasia in line with Chinese interests. At the same time, we should be clear that One Belt One Road is also a symptom of China's problems of overproduction and overcapacity. They are using One Belt One Road to absorb all this excess capacity. Nevertheless, both of these projects are central in China's imperialist project.

There has been a big debate on the international left about how to understand China's rise. Some have argued that it is a model and ally for "third-world" development. Others see China as a subordinate state in an American informal empire that rules global neoliberal capitalism. Still others see it as a rising imperial power. What's your viewpoint?

China cannot be a model for developing countries. Its rise is the result of very unique factors I outlined previously that other third-world countries do not possess. I don't think it's wrong to say that China is part of global neoliberalism especially when you see China come forward and say that it is willing to replace the US as a guardian of free-trade globalization.

But to say that China is a part of neoliberal capitalism doesn't capture the whole picture. China is a distinctive state capitalist power and an expansionist one, which is not willing to be a second-rate partner to the US. China is thus a component part of global neoliberalism and also a state capitalist power, which stands

apart from it. This peculiar combination means it simultaneously benefits from the neoliberal order and represents a challenge to it and the American state that oversees it.

Western capital is ironically responsible for this predicament. Their states and capitals came to understand the challenge of China too late. They flooded in to invest in the private sector or in joint ventures with the state companies in China. But they did not fully realize that the Chinese state is always behind even seemingly private corporations. In China, even if a corporation is a genuinely private, it must bow to the demands put to it by the state.

The Chinese state has used this private investment to develop its own state and private capacity to begin to challenge American as well as Japanese and European capital. It is therefore naïve to accuse the Chinese state and private capital for stealing intellectual property. That's what they planned to do from the beginning.

Thus, the advance capitalist states and corporations enabled the emergence of China as a rising imperial power. Its peculiar state capitalist nature makes it particularly aggressive and intent in catching up and challenging the very powers that invested in it.

In the US there is increasingly a consensus between the two capitalist parties **that China is a threat to American imperial power. And both the US and China are whipping up nationalism against each other. How would you characterize the rivalry between the US and China?**

Some years ago, many commentators argued that there was a debate between two camps over whether to engage China or confront it. They called it a struggle between "panda huggers versus dragon slayers." Today the dragon slayers are in the driver's seat of Chinese diplomacy.

It is true that there is a growing consensus among Democrats and Republicans against China. Even prominent American liberals bash China these days. But many of these

liberal politicians should be blamed for this situation in the first place. Remember that after the 1989 Tiananmen Massacre it was liberal politicians like Bill Clinton in the US and Tony Blair in Britain that forgave the Chinese Communist Party, reopened trade relations, and encouraged massive investment flows into the country.

Of course, this was about padding the ledgers of Western multinationals, which reaped super profits from exploiting cheap labor in Chinese sweatshops. But they also genuinely, if naively, believed that increased investment would lead China to accept the rules as a subordinate state within neoliberal global capitalism, and "democratize" itself in the image of the West. This strategy has backfired, enabling the rise of China as a rival.

The two camps of panda huggers versus dragon slayers also find their theoreticians in academia. There are three main schools of the foreign policy establishment. On top of that, all three schools have their own panda huggers and dragon slayers, who could also be called optimists and pessimists. Within the optimist camp, different schools argue different perspectives. While the liberal internationalists thought that trade would democratize China, by contrast, the realists argued that even if China had its own state ambitions to challenge the US, it was still too weak to do so. The third school is social constructivism; they believe international relations are the result of ideas, values, and social interaction, and like the liberals, believe economic and social engagement would transform China.

In the past, most of the American establishment bought the optimist liberals' case. The liberals were blinded by their own belief that trade could change China into a democratic state. China's rise has thrown all of the optimist schools into a crisis because their predictions about China have been proven wrong. China has become a rising power that has begun catching up and challenging the US.

Now it is the pessimist camp of these three schools that is gaining ground. The pessimist liberals now believe that

Chinese nationalism is much stronger than the positive influence of trade and investment. The pessimist realists believe that China is rapidly strengthening itself and that it will never compromise over Taiwan. The pessimist social constructivists believe that China is very rigid in its own values and will refuse to change.

Yet if the pessimist school is now proven right, it also suffers from a major weakness. It assumes US hegemony is justified and right, ignores the fact that the US is actually an accomplice of China's authoritarian government and its sweatshop regime, and of course never examines how the collaboration and rivalry between the US and China occurs within a deeply contradictory and volatile global capitalism, and along with this a whole set of global class relations. This should not surprise us; the pessimists are ideologists of the American ruling class and its imperialism.

China is moving in an imperialist trajectory. I'm against the Communist Party dictatorship, its aspiration to become a great power, and its claims in the South China Sea. But I don't think it's correct to think that China and the US are on the same plane. China is a special case right now; there are two sides to its rise. One side is what is common between these two countries--both are capitalist and imperialist.

The other side is that China is the first imperialist country that was previously a semicolonial country. That is quite different from the US or any other imperialist country. We have to factor this into our analysis to understand how China functions in the world. For China there are always two levels of issues. One is the legitimate self-defense of a former colonial country under international law. We should not forget that even as late as the 1990s US fighter jets flew on the southern border of China and crashed into a Chinese airplane, killing its pilot. These kinds of events naturally remind Chinese people of their painful colonial past.

Britain until recently controlled Hong Kong, and international capital still exerts enormous influence there. An example of Western imperialist

influence just came to light recently. A report revealed that just before Britain withdrew from Hong Kong, they disbanded their secret police and reassigned them into the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC). The ICAC enjoys huge popularity here as it makes Hong Kong a less corrupt place. But only the head of the Hong Kong government, formerly chosen from London and now chosen from Beijing, appoints the commissioner, while the people absolutely have no influence over it at all.

Beijing was very concerned that the ICAC could be used to discipline the Chinese state and its capitals as well. For example, in 2005 the ICAC prosecuted Liu Jinbao, the head of the Bank of China in Hong Kong. It appears that Beijing is trying hard to take control of the ICAC, but the public is kept in the dark about this power struggle. Of course, we should be happy that the ICAC goes after people like Liu Jinbao, but we must also recognize that it can be used by Western imperialism to advance its agenda. At the same time, Beijing asserting its control will mean consolidation by the Chinese state and capitalists, something that will not serve the interests of the Chinese working masses.

There are other colonial holdovers from the past. The US basically maintains Taiwan as a protectorate. We should, of course, oppose China's threat to invade Taiwan; we should defend Taiwan's right to self-determination. But we must also see that the US will use Taiwan as a tool to advance its interests. This is the downside of the colonial legacy that motivates the Communist Party to behave in a defensive manner against American imperialism.

China is an emerging imperialist country but one with fundamental weaknesses. I would say that the Chinese Communist Party has to overcome fundamental obstacles before it can become a stable and sustainable imperialist country. It is very important to see not just the commonality between the US and China as imperialist countries, but also China's particularities.

Obviously for socialists in the US, our principal duty is to oppose US imperialism and build solidarity with Chinese workers. That means we have to oppose the relentless China bashing not only on the right but also among liberals and even the labor movement. But we should not fall into a campist trap of giving political support to the Chinese regime, but with the country's workers. How do you approach this situation?

We must counter the lie used by the American right that Chinese workers have stolen American workers' jobs. This is not true. The people who really have the power to decide are not the Chinese workers but American capital like Apple that choose to have its phones assembled in China. The Chinese workers have absolutely zero say over such decisions. Actually, they are victims, not people who should be blamed for job losses in America.

And as I said, Clinton, not China's rulers or workers, was to blame for the export of these jobs. It was Clinton's government that worked with China's murderous regime after Tiananmen Square to enable big American corporations to invest in China on such a massive scale. And when jobs in the US were lost, those that appeared in China actually were not the same kind of jobs at all. The American jobs lost in auto and steel were unionized and had good pay and benefits, but those created in China are nothing but sweatshop jobs. Whatever their conflicts today, the top leaders of the US and China, not workers in either country, put today's wretched neoliberal world order in

place.

One thing we have done here in the US is help to put on tours of Chinese workers on strike so that we can build solidarity between American and Chinese workers. Are there other ideas and initiatives that we can take? There is a real danger of nationalism being whipped up in both countries against workers in the other country. It seems overcoming this is very important. What do you think?

It is important for the left in the rest of the world to recognize that China's capitalism has a colonial legacy and that it still exists today. So, when we analyze China and US relations, we must distinguish those legitimate parts of "patriotism" from those whipped up by the Party. There is an element of common-sense patriotism among the people that is the result of the last century of imperial intervention by Japan, European powers, and the US.

It does not mean that we accommodate to this patriotism, but we must distinguish this from reactionary nationalism of the Communist Party. And Xi is certainly trying to whip up nationalism in support of his great power aspirations, just like American rulers are doing the same to cultivate popular support for their regime's aim to keep China contained.

Among common people nationalism has been declining rather than rising because they despise the Chinese Communist Party, and more of them now don't trust its nationalism, and

hate its autocratic rule. One funny example of this is a recent opinion poll that asked if people would support China in a war with the US. Netizens' response online was really interesting. One of them said, "Yes, I support China's war against the US, but we first support sending the members of the Political Bureau to fight, then the Central Committee, and then the entire Chinese Communist Party. And after they either win or lose, we at least will be liberated." The censors, of course, immediately deleted these comments, but it is an indication of the deep dissatisfaction with the regime.

That means there is the basis among Chinese workers to build international solidarity with American workers. But that requires American workers to oppose their own government's imperialism. Only that position will build trust among Chinese workers.

American imperialism's threats are real and known in China. The US Navy just sent two warships through the Taiwan Strait in a clear provocation to China. The American left must oppose this militarism so that Chinese people understand that you oppose the US imperialist agenda on the Taiwan question--although one should also acknowledge Taiwan's right to purchase arms from the US. If the Chinese people hear a strong voice of anti-imperialism from the American left, they could be won over to see our common international interests against both US and Chinese imperialism.

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After the European elections

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At the same time, the EU, while blocking access for emigrants from Africa and the Middle East, causing more than 17,000 deaths in the Mediterranean over the past five

years, continues to exercise its neo-colonial policy towards African populations, in particular through the control of the European Central Bank with the CFA (African Financial

Community) Franc and the African-Caribbean-Pacific (ACP-EU) agreements. At the same time, in the face of the social exasperation caused by this situation, regimes have linked

their ultraliberal reforms and a strong state; restricting democratic rights and strengthening security laws; using the terrorist threat or the control of migrants as a pretext.

In this context, the results of the recent European elections reflected several aspects of the political situation in the European Union.

In general, they show a process of political fragmentation in which the extreme right seems to have made the most progress.

The traditional dominant parties, which are part of the EPP (European People's Party) and the Socialists and Democrats Group, have suffered a major setback, showing the increasing mistrust of European citizens to these traditional parties. This decline is only partly compensated by the rise of new pro-EU centre-liberal parties in the ALDE group (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, such as Ciudadanos, the British Lib Dems and, in France, the Macron En Marche movement).

The Green parties have had an important increase, obtaining their most seats ever. This reflects partly an increasing environmentalist conscience across Europe, also shown in the discourses of some mainstream parties. The recent social movements across Europe, in particular of youth against climate change, with the importance of Fridays4Future mobilizations, show that this is becoming more and more a central political issue. However, unfortunately most Green parties response to this trend directs this changing conscience to policies of management within the neoliberal policies and institutions, the German Greens being the most clear example.

The parties to the left, grouped in the GUE/NGL (European United Left-Nordic Green Left), have suffered a major setback, going from 52 members to 38 and becoming the last group of the chamber.

The general trend is to a strengthening of the most reactionary parties, and directly from the far right, which gains 78 seats and, above all, polarizes all right-wing groups, both

conservative and nationalist.

The far right, led by Salvini and Le Pen, is now on the rise in Europe. Without challenging the power of the large capitalist groups responsible for social injustice, precariousness and the abandonment of social protection systems, it has been able to adapt its discourse on European issues. From a policy of exiting the EU and the Euro they have decided to try to conquer it from within, building alliances across the continent and provoking the European institutions to appear as challengers to the EU order. They are limiting their programme above all to two issues, which it considers to be priorities: migration flows and security issues. On these themes, by pushing to the end the logic already implemented by the leaders of the EU and most national governments, it seeks to divert the exasperation of the working classes produced by austerity policies towards a racist, nationalist and Islamophobic expression. In government in several European countries in recent years (in Italy, Austria, Slovakia and Bulgaria in particular), despite its demagogic statements, it is obviously adapting itself to ultra-liberal policies. Moreover, the traditional right is easily accommodated by its coexistence with the Law and Justice parties, in the case of the British Conservatives, with Viktor Orban in the case of the EPP and with Vox in the case of the PP and C's. Today, there is indeed an "urbanization" of the European right. This is also true for "liberal" parties such as En Marche, which, while presenting itself as a barrier against the extreme right, are themselves implementing an ultraliberal policy, coupled with a frontal challenge to democratic rights and increased police violence. It's ally in the Spanish State, Ciudadanos has chosen to become an openly right-wing party, willing to establish agreements with far-right Vox in order to build right-wing majorities.

The crisis of the parties to the left of Social Democracy points to several phenomena. In 2014, during the last European elections, after several years of massive mobilization of the Greek people against the dictates of the EU, Syriza affirmed a policy of rejecting austerity. Similarly, Podemos

had just formed in the wake of the 15M and the Mareas, major social movements, and stated that it wanted to affirm, on the left, a policy of breaking with social-democratic management. Around these two experiences, in Europe, tens of thousands of activists hoped to find a political response to their struggles, to mobilizations for social, democratic and environmental emergency, to the rejection of discrimination and gender-based and homophobic violence, to the reception of migrants in the face of racist policies.

Syriza's surrender succeeded in deeply shaking this hope. The Podemos experience has been shaken by internal disputes, given its inability to establish a proper inner democratic functioning able to maintain unity, and the Iglesias leadership has increasingly taken the line to become a subordinated ally to the Socialist Party. France Insoumise has also chosen to give itself a functioning model based on charismatic leadership, and has been unable to attract the great discontent expressed in the Gilet Jaunes movement. Overall, the credibility and usefulness of the radical left has not kept pace with the powerful social movements of recent years.

On the other hand, it is necessary to note the electoral success, especially of the Bloco, and of the PTB, which were able to advance their political position in these elections.

The Brexit disaster has stressed the necessity of advancing a project to challenge the European Union that goes hand in hand with the interests of the working classes.

The 2016 referendum, called in an attempt to heal the longstanding pro-Europe vs pro-US rift in the ruling Tory party, has led to three years of chaos and crisis as the government has failed to negotiate an agreement. The period since the 2016 referendum campaign has been characterized by a carnival of reaction with increased media and physical attacks on those perceived from to be migrants, i.e. from Black, Muslim, Middle Eastern or Eastern European communities. Farage's new Brexit party, its sole platform being for a "hard" or "no deal" Brexit, again won the European

elections. Labour's support declined, in both remain and leave camps, and it was overtaken in the European elections by the clearly remain Liberal Democrats. After one extension, Britain is set to leave on October 31 - almost certainly with no deal - and it is likely that only a general election and/or a second referendum can stop that.

The challenge for the radical left is to be credible and useful in the field of mobilizations and standing, in campaigns and elections, for political requirements in response to social, democratic and ecological

emergencies. The task is not easy: while the far right moulds itself into the capitalist system to develop its xenophobic and reactionary themes, the radical left, like the social movements on which it relies, clashes head-on with the system in putting forward its political demands. It is against it that the political attacks of the ruling class and the media, whose editorial line it controls, are really carried out. The other great pending task of the moment is to be able to build mass organizations that combine a democratic and militant structure with the ability to address themselves

to the broad masses. Here we have to learn both from the successes and failures of the recent years.

But the dynamism of international mobilizations against violence against women and discrimination, those taking place throughout Europe for the climate, the depth of mobilizations such as the yellow jackets in France, must stimulate us as to the urgency of building political mobilizations in Europe capable of pushing these social demands, to build political movements linking them to a social emancipation project, directly facing capitalist exploitation and oppression.

The Left Needs a Vision for Europe

8 June 2019, by **Miguel Urbán Crespo**

Last month's European elections offered the latest evidence of fragmentation in the continent's hegemonic political order. For the first time in the history of the European Parliament the social-democratic (S&D) and Christian-Democratic (EPP) groups lost their majority of seats. Yet while the ongoing effects of austerity have been a key force in breaking up the old party blocs, this year's European elections also saw the demobilization of the radical left electorate. The vote instead saw a growing polarization of the political arena between liberal and green supporters of the European project and the far right.

As Unidos Podemos MEP Miguel Urbán argues, the fragmentation in the Brussels parliament does not mean the European Union is headed for outright collapse. As he argues in his 'Ten Theses on the European elections', reproduced below, the formation of a new centrist bloc perhaps including greens and liberals may well prolong the Brussels consensus for a few more years at least. Yet as citizens become ever more alienated from the EU's institutions and the far right creeps forward, the need for the Left to provide its own alternative at the

European scale becomes ever more urgent.

1. The crisis of legitimacy of the EU

It is clear today that the European Union is suffering from a growing loss of legitimacy among social sectors all across Europe. It is ever costlier to be associated with supposed European values such as democracy, progress, well-being, and human rights. We are witnessing an organic crisis in the full Gramscian sense of the term, that is both a consequence and a cause of the post-Maastricht Treaty model. This model has been nothing more than a neoliberal straitjacket, a lethal combination of austerity, free trade, predatory debt, and precarious and poorly-paid labor making up the DNA of contemporary financialized capitalism.

Institutional Europe has tried to contain this crisis of legitimacy and governability by granting cosmetic reforms in hopes of lending a certain mantle of liberal-democratic credibility that it otherwise lacks. In

this way, the framework of EU governance is renewed in five-year cycles, coinciding with European Parliamentary elections in an attempt to obscure the image of a bureaucratic apparatus structured hierarchically as a balance of powers between states aligned along the hegemonic Berlin-Paris axis.

2. Citizen dissatisfaction and the rebound of voter turnout

The EU's crisis of legitimacy has manifested itself in rising abstention rates in election after election as a sign of the growing dissatisfaction of its citizens with institutional Europe. This tendency was reversed in the most recent elections on May 26 when voter turnout reached 50.5 percent, an outcome celebrated with great fanfare by Brussels as a re-legitimation of the system.

These participation rates can be seen, once we dismiss the Eurocrats' euphoria, as an effect of the coincidence of local and/or regional

elections coming at the same time as the European-wide elections. The Spanish example is sufficiently paradigmatic to demonstrate how the electoral calendar boosted participation in the European elections to 64.3 percent, more than 10 points higher than the previous elections in 2014. At the other extreme, we see our Portuguese neighbor wasn't able to surpass 31.4 percent voter turnout, breaking the record for the lowest turnout for the whole EU.

3. The breakdown of bipartisan rule

Perhaps the biggest news from these past elections is the breakdown of bipartisan rule, or at least its domination of parliament. The European People's Party (EPP) and the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) failed for the first time in the history of the European Parliament to gain an absolute majority. The EPP managed to win the elections with almost 180 seats, but it lost 41 seats and 5 percent of the vote compared to its total in 2014. For its part, S&D came in second once again, electing 145 deputies, down 45 seats and 6 percent of the vote compared to 2014.

These results seem to confirm a consistent tendency of our time, that is, the crisis of the traditional parties that have held power since World War II. Furthermore, this does not appear localized to one country, but constitutes a European-wide phenomenon. It is a symptom of the intensifying implosion of the extreme center that governed Europe as a grand coalition and, among other factors, is generation an increasing fragmentation of the electoral arena.

All this notwithstanding, it appears that we are still in the initial phase of a European-wide reconfiguration of the political, economic, and cultural spheres that has only just begun.

4. New political

alliances in Europe

The breakdown of bipartisan hegemony will not necessarily lead to instability at the level of EU neoliberal governance; or at least it will be contained, as has become habitual in EU institutions in recent years thanks to the liberals as well as the Greens who constitute a large bloc in Brussels. These latter two groups grew the most in the elections, dividing up the third and fourth largest number of seats in the EU parliament. The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) promoted French president Emmanuel Macron's European renaissance proposals, managing to double their vote and increasing their deputies from 67 in 2014 to 109 this year. For their part, support for the Greens grew by 30 percent, giving them 69 MEPs, up 19 from 2014.

The growth of the Greens and the Liberals, on top of the breakdown in bipartisan hegemony, opens up a scenario for the creation of a new coalition to govern Europe that will be reflected most palpably in the election of the new European Commission and, most important of all, its president.

5. The first woman president of the European Commission?

Traditionally, candidates from the EPP (Manfred Weber) and the S&D (Frans Timmermans) would be the favorites to assume the presidency of the Commission, but at a moment when the two chief formations have lost their absolute majority, this logic is collapsing. If Weber, a German, thought that the EPP's victory would lead to his presidency, he was wrong. Instead, a bona fide Game of Thrones has broken in the European Union.

As a result, Timmermans of S&D called for a progressive alliance to cut off the EPP, while Spanish prime minister Pedro Sánchez and Macron met in Paris, presumably to concretize a social-liberal alliance between

socialists [i.e. the center-left Socialists and Democrats group], liberals, and greens. This alliance was concretized in the campaign itself and symbolized by the presence of socialists such as Portuguese prime minister Antonio Costa at a campaign rally for Macron's European renaissance in Strasbourg, bringing together all the main liberal parties in mid-May. If Macron's preferred candidate has been EU's chief Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier, publicly praised for his role in the Brexit negotiations, it seems that Magrethe Vestagar, the current EU Commission of Competition, may be able to count on more support to become the next EU Commission president. Thus, the end of the two great political families' hegemony may leave us with the appointment of a new president in the style of the Danish TV political drama Borgen in which Birgitte Nyborg, the leader of a small centrist party, rides an unruly coalition to power.

Sánchez's role in all of this is not insignificant. We must remember that the Spanish Socialists (PSOE) are the most numerous of the socialists within the European Parliament and that Spain is, perhaps, the most important country governed by socialists in all of Europe. Thus, the PSOE bloc will be decisive in any alliance gestating with the liberals, and it is from this point of view that we must understand his trip to Paris. Sánchez's visit sends a clear message for a European alliance that would stretch from Macron to Greek prime minister Alexis Tsipras. One that would not only pursue a new grand coalition without any change with respect to neoliberal austerity and the EU security imperative but would also assert Sánchez's role in dividing up the most important posts in the next European Commission. However, this European alliance would also surely be reflected in Spanish politics in the aftermath of Spain's April 28 elections and the current debate with respect to potential governing pacts. An alliance with the liberals in Europe could open a path to it being repeated in Spain in multiple regions and cities, and - who knows? - maybe even in the central government.

6. Germany always wins

Gary Lineker, one of the best center forwards for England in the 1980s, once said “Football is a simple game. Twenty-two men chase a ball for 90 minutes and at the end, the Germans always win.” This can be read as a metaphor for the EU, especially the “Germany always wins” part. So the question is: what might Germany win if Weber drops out as a candidate for the European Commission?

To make out German chancellor Angela Merkel’s real game, we have to go back a year to Luis de Guindos’s election to serve as vice president of the European Central Bank (ECB). Guindos’ rise was one piece of a strategy far more complex and important than giving then conservative Spanish president Mariano Rajoy’s friend a plumb seat on the bank’s board. It formed part of a framework of mutual interests that extended beyond control of any specific institution to the effective control of the European government itself. With this appointment, Merkel opened the way to secure the election of Jens Weidmann — the current president of Germany’s Bundesbank, known as a neoliberal hawk — to the presidency of the ECB: a critical component of neoliberal European governance. And as a consequence of its quantitative easing policy, the ECB has probably become the most important EU institution, whose increased power is shielded by its supposed “autonomy.” This is all the more true given the potential for a recession in Germany.

Weber’s candidacy for the European Commission on behalf of the EPP reflects the unsteady equilibrium inside the coalition between Merkel’s Christian Democratic Union and Weber’s Christian Social Union. Weber’s candidacy for the presidency of the European Commission pacified the Christian-Democratic alliance in Germany, but cut Weber out from the presidency of the ECB. To add more fuel to the fire, Weber has not refrained from criticizing Merkel and her government. In the middle of the electoral campaign, Weber promised

that, if he were elected president of the Commission, he would put the Nord Stream 2 Russo-German pipeline on hold, a controversial project supported by Merkel in the face of opposition from various EU partners. The more than possible defeat of Weber will reopen the possibilities of Germany vying for the presidency of the ECB. In short, we have before us the umpteenth example of swapping chairs and contestants behind closed doors and without any democratic control. It is yet another example of the shadow government operating in the EU.

7. Tensions in the European People’s Party group

Weber’s candidacy has exacerbated contradictions in the heart of the EPP parliamentary group, both its more moderate wing, which has criticized the group’s xenophobic statements, and its extreme right, led by Hungarian president Viktor Orbán’s Fidesz party, who has openly reiterated his support for Weber. An open conflict with Fidesz might be the single biggest concern within the EPP, and not without reason. After all, Orbán’s party only trails the Germans in the number of deputies belonging to the group. In May’s elections, Fidesz won 52 percent of the vote in Hungary, winning an additional seat compared to 2014.

Fidesz has been suspended from leadership positions within the EPP since last March in an electoral maneuver intended to demonstrate a hard line being taken against constant attacks against the rule of law in Hungary while keeping Orbán’s party in the EPP family. And while the EPP has the difficult task of isolating Fidesz in order to lure support from the Liberals for Weber’s candidacy, they run the risk of Orbán joining Italy’s hard-right Northern League deputy prime minister Matteo Salvini and France’s National Front leader Marine Le Pen in a new parliamentary group that aims to bring together the extreme European right, further weakening the EPP’s ranks.

8. The far right fails to advance, but it continues to grow

The European far right harvested bittersweet results on May 26. On the one hand, they increased their representation to almost 25 percent of the European Parliament, however, they fell short of the numbers needed to form a minority bloc with the weight they had hoped for in terms of EU decision-making. This failure was met with jubilation in Brussels, but a more sober reading of the far right’s results leads us to believe that there is nothing to celebrate and much to concern us.

In the first place, the far right received the most votes in three out of four of the most powerful countries (for which more EU seats are reserved): France, Italy, and Great Britain, which will continue to be represented in the European Parliament until Brexit is resolved. At the same time, the far right’s results show their growth throughout the continent where they gained seats for the first time in countries such as Spain, which had previously never elected a far-right delegate. At the national level, their results are ever more impressive, they have recognizable media personalities, and their organizations are gaining traction in more and more regions.

Beyond the dominant countries in Europe (Germany, France, Great Britain, and Italy) where the far right scored exceptional results, it is also important to examine the Visegrad Group of countries to the East: Poland’s Law and Justice Party took seven seats and 45.3 percent of the vote, while Orbán’s Fidesz party won a seat and collected more than 50 percent of the vote, tripling the vote of its closest competitor. Furthermore, we should underline the regional elections in Belgium held in parallel with the European elections where the ultra-right Flemish supporters of Vlaams Belang tripled their vote, coming second overall.

The far right's main problem is its continued dispersion into various parliamentary groups. Throughout the campaign, Salvini tried to woo the European far right, accompanying Orbán to Hungary's border fences or showing off his strength at a meeting in Milan where he gathered the majority of the leading right-wing extremists. But everything suggests that the European far right's atomization will continue, at least until the mystery of Brexit is solved and a reconfiguration can arise within the European Parliament.

9. Brexit again

Brexit continues to cast a shadow over the present and future politics of the EU. Great Britain participated in the European elections at the last minute after a new extension, but stalemated negotiations have struck down Conservative Prime Minister Theresa May and, to a certain extent, the most stable political system of the continent. The European elections were seen as a referendum on the possibility of convening a second Brexit referendum. Unsurprisingly, the winner was Nigel Farage and his two-month-old Brexit Party, which won the elections with 32 percent of the vote, five more seats than UKIP won in 2014. The Conservatives only managed 8.9 percent and were surpassed by the Greens (11 percent) and the Liberal Democrats (19 percent), while Labour came in at 13 percent; all in all, yet another example of the traditional political camps' decomposition in the United Kingdom. These results, compounding Britain's institutional and governmental crisis, suggests that far from seeing the light at the end of the Brexit tunnel, we are entering a labyrinth that may remain a permanent source of tension in the EU.

10. Fridays for Future and the Greens' electoral impulse

The Friday before the European

elections, the Fridays for Future movement called a new student strike in 1,600 cities all across Europe in an attempt to insert its climate emergency message into the election campaign. This movement - started by sixteen-year-old Greta Thunberg who began protesting outside the Swedish parliament every Friday by herself - has become over the course of a few months one of the ecological movement's main mobilizing actions. In countries such as Sweden, Germany, Austria, Belgium, France, and Switzerland, strikes and protests every Friday have continued on a massive scale for months winning unprecedented gains in several places.

The analysis of the electoral results allows us to see that in the central countries of the EU, precisely where the Fridays for Future mobilizations take place, a significant part of the citizenship, principally the youth, wanted climate change to be a prominent part of the political agenda in place of other issues that, supposedly, were going to be the big mobilizers, such as migration and security. This spurred spectacular results for the Greens, lifting them from 50 to more than 70 seats in the European Parliament. In Germany, with 20.5 percent, they placed second, finishing ahead of the Social Democrats. In France, they came third with 12 seats, seven more than five years ago. In Belgium they won 3 representatives and 15 percent of the vote.

In view of these results, and if the Fridays for Future mobilizations do not decline after the summer break, the struggle against climate change and for a new energy model may, once and for all, become the big issue for this new parliament.

So where is the Left going?

Unidos Podemos's poor results in the Spanish State were not, unfortunately, an exception across Europe, but the norm in elections where left suffered a big defeat, losing 14 deputies. The reality is that the Left is, in its

majority, unable to articulate a strategy differentiated from social-liberalism and, on occasions, even falls into the trap of rapidly rising anti-immigrant rhetoric. The only exception was the Left Bloc in Portugal, thanks in large measure to its clear position in relation to the Portuguese socialist government, and a campaign which highlighted the urgency of climate change and social rights threatened by Brussels.

The opening of a new institutional cycle in the European Union should lead us to draw up a thoroughgoing balance sheet of the situation facing the Left, we must reorganize ourselves and open an essential strategic debate. The new EU alliances must be understood as a recomposition of a social-liberal bloc with the greens, liberals, and socialists, one that reaffirms the relentless domination of the Brussels consensus. The response to this new EU governing bloc will pose the primary legislative challenge for a left that must quickly abandon chasing after votes. Perhaps the second challenge the European left must confront is how to conduct itself politically while we are the smallest bloc in European parliament. This means orienting ourselves not so much to parliamentary politics, but to reconnecting with newly emerging social movements and popular classes.

When austerity becomes the only politico-economic option for institutions alienated from the interests of the citizenry, then the really-existing EU will become a problem in the eyes of the social majority. Building a different Europe will emerge as the only solution to the aimlessness in which we are living. The integration of neoliberal Europe, including areas outside the euro zone, has come to the point where it is not possible to reverse course without a substantial change in the balance of forces at the European-wide level, a change which is, for the moment, beyond the visible horizon. Defining the Left's role must include reimagining itself on a European scale.

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“The top military hierarchy is part of the ruling oligarchy”

7 June 2019, by **Mahmoud Rechedi**

More than two months have passed since the outbreak of the February 22 popular movement. In retrospect, and in view of the goals that the movement has set for itself, namely the ending of the system, do you not feel that there is a road map, from the regime, which is being unrolled after each Friday? A kind of orderly transition with scheduled withdrawals, there is a tone and a timing that gives the impression that the popular movement supports and/or is supported in the rollout, precisely, of this roadmap.

Indeed, we are in the controlled transition scenario, to the extent that the regime, the de facto power - inasmuch as there is a de facto regime - imposes a line of march. Moreover, we have just received an invitation from Bensalah (the interim Presidency) for a consultation meeting (around the July 4th election, editor's note). There are therefore these attempts to involve everyone in this road map involving a controlled transition, which should culminate with the election on July 4 in a President of the Republic.

This means that we are still in the same authoritarian “system” with its rules, its organization, its administration, and so on, its reflexes. But what millions of Algerians, the popular masses, say is the opposite: “Yetnahaw gaÃ¢”, “Yaskout enidham”, which means radical change.

As we have seen, even after the resignation of Belaiz (President of the Constitutional Council), the mobilization has increased and the people's movement has reiterated its rejection of the system and its road map which is, in effect, its continuity.

For, beyond its authoritarian,

liberticidal nature, its monarchical excesses, the system is identified with disaster. An economic and social disaster; a direct consequence of neoliberal policies and recipes.

So, it's a system that has proven to be bankrupt. On the social level: a high unemployment rate, the decline in purchasing power, the SNMG (minimum guaranteed national wage) which has not been increased for at least nine years, wages which are the lowest in the Mediterranean, the incredible devaluation of the dinar.

This has been seen in the explosion of imports erected outright as a model of substitution for domestic production. It has been seen in the big projects: how big infrastructure projects have come to fill the order books of multinationals, when they could have served the construction of the national economy. All that has been announced as foreign direct investment (FDI), industrialization projects, is bankruptcy.

We can see it in what they presented to us as a car industry which, in fact, is only one sixth of what we had in the 1970s. Austerity, decreed with the 2015 budget law, with its severe budget cuts (...). It is these combined disasters that are also the roots of the *hirak* (movement). The 5th term being only the straw that broke the camel's back.

What is your reading of power relations in the regime?

It goes without saying that we are not privy to the secrets of the gods. We do not operate with a crystal ball. The reading of the events first reveals the weight of the oligarchs, whose existence predates the Bouteflika regime. Of course, the latter promoted his own oligarchs. Both categories of oligarch have been enriched by the

state.

Today, the “old oligarchs” claim their share. It is also from this reorganization, with its cleavages, that the pressures to renegotiate come, hence the networks of the former apparatus of the Department of Intelligence and Security (DRS) that would be acting and so on. But we will not speculate too much. What can be said, however, is that this struggle does not resonate with the claims of the *hirak*.

These are struggles between groups with vested interests, some impose their reinstatement in the circle of political decision making, and others continue to take control of this same political regime. This is not a class struggle, because it is a struggle between the factions in power.

How do you see the role of the army today? A positive or a reactionary role?

It is clear that the current crisis has accelerated the return to the forefront of the army. A crisis that obviously amplifies its role. A role questioned at least since the second term of Bouteflika and the defeat of the group around General Lamari/Benflis.

In parallel with the decline of the role of the army, that of the power of money has, on the other hand, grown. What we observe today with the *hirak* is that the takeover of power passes through the army. The hierarchy of the army, its Chief of Staff in this case, plays the role of guarantor of the continuity of the regime in a sort of recomposition. A recomposition where the army becomes again a very important actor in the centres of political decision.

How far can the army be or become a real instrument of

change?

With the current leadership, it is not possible. We have just verified it again. The military hierarchy tries to contain us in a constitutional solution. However, this clearly signifies the continuity of the regime. The solutions, again, cannot be legal. And the political solution is not in the Constitution.

From a practical point of view, how can the army suggest, initiate, lead or support a political solution that remains to be defined?

Let's start by not making the army a brake. By moving rapidly towards removing all obstacles to the effective exercise of democratic freedoms. Because we are still today unable to assemble as a group on the forecourt of the Grande Poste. There are cops now who ... occupy the square and forbid it and the public media are not so open (...).

When you say that the army should not act as a brake, isn't this army manoeuvring?

Currently, it is the military hierarchy incarnated by Gaid Salah which sets the course, and which rolls out its roadmap of a controlled transition. It's a forced passage. Even though in his speeches, Gaïd Salah pretends to support the *hirak* and the application of articles 7 and 8. Even if he gives the impression of attacking some names. For him, the slogan "Khaoua" ("fraternity here") is just for consumption. Because in fact, from a point of view of social classes, a "Khaoua" with those who represent the oligarchy is not possible. This is not possible regarding interests which are connected and well understood. See all these companies and private groups controlled by former soldiers, who benefit from the public order book, largesse and benefits.

The top military hierarchy also forms a part of the ruling oligarchy and when the people demand "Yetnhaw gaĀç" ("The whole system must go), it includes Gaid Salah. Do not slow down, remove obstacles to freedom, to allow Algerians - workers, students, unemployed - to organize and open a national debate so that all ideas,

proposals can be known and discussed freely, and from that we can go to solutions.

For the PST, the solution goes through a Constituent Assembly.

Yes, a sovereign Constituent Assembly, representative - which is important - of the democratic and social interests and aspirations of the masses, that is to say the majority of Algerians.

It is this Constituent Assembly, elected in a democratic, transparent way, which includes the direct control of the process by the popular masses, which will elaborate a new Constitution with a deep reorganization of the state, the institutions, which will have to organize the effective exercise of freedoms, economy, the place of religion, languages, equal rights for men and women, where the economy must serve the satisfaction of social needs.

We certainly need to end a regime that concentrates all power in the hands of one man, a system that returns power to the elected representatives of the people, whether they are at the local or central level. A parliamentary system without a Senate chamber to control and execute the tricks of the presidential third party. But all this must be debated.

((How can "radical disengagement" of the popular movement be transcended to achieve the implementation of this roadmap?

Through self-organization. Social movements are already represented through combative unions. In addition, the *hirak* must necessarily consider the election of its representatives. It's possible. And why not consider, after the Constituent Assembly has been elected, the formation of a government which will emanate from it? Instead of doing the opposite.

But before you reach that point, and in the perspective that the whole regime goes, you're looking at a provisional body, a provisional government ... that will lead and organize this whole process.

Yes. The proposals are not lacking, and we will not add to them. This incredible *hirak* that we experience means we must rise above these technical contingencies. And it is through the national debate, by this national debate, that these technical aspects will be taken care of.

Isn't the Constituent Assembly a Pandora's box insofar as this formula carries the risk that a fundamentalist, retrograde movement, sweeps the board? Otherwise, a remake of the elections of 1991 with the victory of the FIS in the parliamentary elections, do you take this risk into account or not?

For us, it's a discourse that is malicious propaganda ...

That's the history, though ...

But it happened almost 30 years ago. Those who claim that history will repeat as in 1992 do not want to see the collapse of Islamism. We are on the 9th Friday of demonstrations and the Islamists cannot even form a compact bloc to even demonstrate their existence. Of course, at the margin there are epiphenomena that some tend to amplify.

This is a scarecrow that the Bouteflika regime used and that the regime still uses to lock us into its road map. Political Islamism has collapsed. And it's not just an Algerian reality. We see its defeat everywhere. Islamists do not fall, like that, from heaven. In Algeria, since the 1990s, armed Islamism has been defeated. Moderates are disqualified by their participation in the regime.

Now, can it be reborn from the ashes ... it's possible, but there's no point in speculating about it. Now, if you say religiosity, it's something else. Religiosity is not a political project unlike Islamism. It is, of course, classical religious conservatism, present in our families, neighbourhoods, workplaces and so on but it has nothing to do with the "doula islamia" (theocratic state).

But this religious substratum, this potential electoral reservoir, is it likely to produce, eventually, a mass fundamentalist movement?

This is the kind of scenario that we cannot construct. It's like projecting on the scenario of a nuclear war. We are starting from concrete elements, and the concrete elements say that political Islamism has collapsed. We are at the intersection, at the crossroads where everything is possible: the best and the worst. But, objectively, the evolution of the *hirak* is not in line with what you say. Islamism is no longer audible or visible. Concretely, we are living through a great, historical movement, but be careful, I'm not saying that Islamism is dead. I say it collapsed.

But aren't the Islamists in a tactical position, in strategic withdrawal, awaiting, opportunely, the right time to resurrect and steal victory, as has happened everywhere with the Arab Spring?

Again, it's speculating. In the absolute, everything is possible. But today, it is neither constructive nor productive, nor serious, nor interesting to speak of Islamism being reborn when we cannot see it or hear it in this formidable *hirak*, half of which is women, where there is a revival of workers' struggles and so on. I prefer to focus on that: it's concrete. I add that for the Constituent Assembly, the danger comes less from Islamism than from the liberals and their money resources.

The PST called for self-organization. It is difficult to do on the ground. Especially in back country Algeria. Why convergence is impossible to put into practice and to achieve?

I am optimistic. Why do you want that in just two months of *hirak*, we can set up a perfect organization? Let's not forget that the country is emerging from a very difficult situation, made of systematic de-structuring, depoliticization ... it is true, it is laborious, but the results are there: the *hirak* is better structured, is organized a little more every day.

In the demonstrations, the slogans are increasingly political, better elaborated. The student movement, for those who do not know it, is setting up a national coordination (...) for the labour movement, we are progressing seriously, either through the dynamics of re-appropriation of the UGTA by the workers or by the CSA (Confederation of Autonomous Trade Unions).

There are collectives of women being set up. Even in neighbourhoods like Sa'ad Hamdine (Bir Mourad Ra's, Algiers) and also inside the country, neighbourhood committees are emerging. We must see and admire the agoras, the "halaqate" (seminars) of political debates that are held throughout the country ... it's a whole process and starts from the bottom.

We hope that other sectors join this movement so that self-organization reaches its critical mass. This is to say that even if it does not progress as we wish, self-organization progresses anyway. Self-organization, this is what will give its content to the *hirak*.

Why do you think the *Hirak* had not clearly articulated social issues, the issue of women's rights and so on? Is it because of its cross-class character, or is it a question of hierarchy of objectives: the *hirak* first fixing itself the goal of clearing out the system?

Equality in rights between men and women is first and foremost about democratic issues. The movement of February 22 gave ample evidence of its popular character. An obvious popular dimension. Even if we also find there the liberal professions, the tradesmen, the middle layers in general, but the essential dimension is there. And if we are not, *stricto sensu*, talking of a proletarian, working class character, this relates to a problem that is not peculiar to Algeria, namely

the decline of class consciousness and so on.

We experience it. The workers do not come to the *hirak* as such, not as a class force: they come individually. The popular dimension is present in the sense of the popular masses, Algerians from below, popular neighbourhoods, which permeate the *hirak*. The slogans, moreover, hegemonic in this *hirak*, come to us from the stadiums, and therefore from the popular neighbourhoods.

To return to the question of articulation, we must admit that it is a serious problem. But that's not true everywhere. And even in Algiers, when slogans about unemployment, social justice are launched, they are quickly taken up by the crowds. But let's be clear: every time these social issues are articulated, pressure is exerted by the regime and the liberal opposition to say "no, this is not the moment", including for the questions of democratic rights, including women's rights.

So, if these questions of purchasing power, blocked horizons, unemployment, lower status of women are not asked now, when will they be? Being at the root of the *hirak*, these issues must be at the heart of the process. Therefore, we supported the principle of the general strike, knowing that it would put social issues, the working class, the workers at the centre of the political battle and thus give a progressive meaning to the popular movement.

There are arrests and legal proceedings against certain oligarchs and figures in the system. Operation "clean hands", or witch hunt?

In the PST, as in the *hirak*, we say that the judiciary, under orders, is part of this system to be cleared out. Before, the judges were under the orders of the Bouteflika regime, today they are under the orders of Gaid Salah and the new masters. It's a logic of factions. If we are cleaning the Algerian house, the tenants of this regime are also involved. Of course, everyone must be judged, but bourgeois justice, which is part of the dominant order, must also be radically

changed

“The West prefers a regime subject to its interests”

5 June 2019, by **Hocine Belalloufi**

The world is discovering with great fascination these Algerians who go onto the street by millions, not to advance social demands, but for their dignity and freedom ...

I think it's a very ideological reading, neoliberal and purely factual, which stops at what is observable to the naked eye without bothering to get to the bottom of things and understand the deep springs of this popular explosion. Dignity and freedom have a material basis that resides in the economic independence of the individual. Economic and social demands are not yet sufficiently emphasized in the popular movement and I regret it. Everything must be changed so that the trade union and workers' movement becomes the backbone of the movement, because while workers, the unemployed, pensioners and young people struggle, the partisans of the market economy who ask them to be “above all these low social demands”, fight for their part to preserve and increase the immense subsidies granted to them by the regime for decades. They also struggle to seize power and share the “Algerian cake” directly while imposing “necessary sacrifices” on the people. Understand by this austerity, unemployment, the end of social housing, health and free education, the legal challenge to the right to strike and other joys of the market economy.

Does this Algerian *Hirak* fit in for you with the dynamics of the Arab revolutions of 2011?

There are two questions here. Algeria is part of several geostrategic zones: the Arab world, the wider Middle East, the Sahel and the Mediterranean

basin. These geostrategic zones have in common that they are dominated by the imperialist powers (G7, IMF, NATO and so on). From this point of view, what is happening in Algeria undoubtedly has to do with the process that began in 2011 in the Arab world. All the peoples of this region are subject to political and military domination by the United States and its European, Israeli and Arab allies. They are naturally rebelling against this imperialist order.

I do not think that we are, in Algeria today, in a revolutionary process. Rather, we are in a pre-revolutionary situation where the people exert pressure on the regime to carry out reform. Most Algerians no longer accept the current political order, but it is not, for the moment, at least, in a strategy of direct confrontation aimed at overthrowing the regime. And the latter, which has been on the defensive since February 22, still has forces in reserve and tries to take the initiative with the application of Article 102 and the implementation of a strategy of tension. We are still in a situation of unstable equilibrium.

The chief of staff accuses a “foreign hand”, which he does not name, of wanting to destabilize the country.

This conspiracy view has become a universal constant of authoritarian regimes. The Western “great democracies” which are increasingly authoritarian (United States, France and so on) incessantly accuse Russia or China of wanting to destabilize them. In the countries of the Arab world, it is the foreign hand that is emphasized as an explanatory factor by authoritarian regimes, by

sycophants or by imperialist thinkers and politicians fighting against competitors. Three recent examples are particularly striking. [70]

Let us first remark that these texts can be applied to any crisis. It is more of a standard form than a concrete analysis providing a little detail of the present Algerian reality. In these texts, the main actors are neither the regime, nor the people, nor the oligarchs, nor the workers, the magistrates, the doctors or the students, nor even these millions of people who have gone out onto the streets of the country every Friday since February 22nd. The many contradictions of Algerian society are not mentioned at all. They clearly do not represent the main factor of the crisis. The actors are Western services.

These authors proceed by analogies. They completely decontextualize the political dynamics whose bases they do not seek at any time to bring out. They magnify under the microscope an element of the conjuncture, that of the actions of great powers, actions that are in any case permanent and that no analyst can ignore, and they make them “the” main factor, even almost the sole explanation of the crisis. As if a movement of the millions and millions of individuals who make up the people could be activated remotely or by local relays. Now, no movement of this magnitude can be chemically pure. It necessarily contains within itself contradictory forces, national and foreign. But to orient so ostentatiously the gaze on this single aspect is as caricatural as it is miserable.

These texts finally turn out to be

tragically poor. We do not find there any historical analysis, even the briefest, of the Algerian social formation nor the least analysis of the political sequence that we live through, of the economic, social, political and ideological crisis of the country. The real Algeria - in the complexity of its social classes and their struggles, its political regime, its ideological currents - apparently does not exist. Our people are presented in the most contemptuous way as an object without soul or spine. A people devoid of conscience, an object reduced to the name of the "street".

The existence of more or less brutal or subtle pressure and interference from Western foreign powers, but also from certain Gulf monarchies, is beyond doubt. The opposite would have surprised us as it is, in reality, a truism. But these external actions must imperatively be placed in the general context of the foreign policy of these powers and their precise role explained through internal contradictions in the country. Is it certain, for example, that French interests are not already served through the exceptional partnership signed between the Algerian government and Paris? And what about the "excellent relations between Algeria and the United States" highlighted by former Foreign Minister Abdelkader Messahel just days before the 4th session of the Algerian-American Strategic Dialogue held in early February 2019 in Washington? It is obvious that France and the United States would prefer to deal with a regime totally subject to their interests and desiderata. Are they ready to set Algeria on fire to get there, knowing that most of the people and opponents - with the exception of a handful of ultra-liberals defending

the interests of the comprador fraction of the Algerian bourgeoisie is viscerally attached to the national independence of the country of the revolution of November 1st? This is theoretically possible, but neither General Delawarde, nor Ahmed Saâda, nor the author of the Lebanese article has provided any proof.

Will Algeria finally emancipate itself from the regime set up in 1962?

The reduction of the history of independent Algeria to a regime of dictatorship seems to me as reductive as it is dangerous. Independent Algeria has certainly seen the introduction of a single party regime. But this regime, during the first two decades, worked to build a state and an economy independent of the former metropolis and any other imperialist power. It has undoubtedly democratized education and health, opened the doors of the university to the people, substantially improved the condition of the urban and rural popular classes, slowed the development of social inequalities contrary to what we have seen in Tunisia and, above all, in Morocco. It has prevented the development of a comprador bourgeoisie that serves as a relay for international capitalism to plunder the natural and human resources of our country. It industrialized the country and fought against capitalist and imperialist international domination and united with the struggling peoples of the world in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Fight the authoritarian regime with a democratic façade yes, but without throwing the baby out with the

bathwater. Our project must combine democracy, social justice and national sovereignty and therefore fight against authoritarianism, economic liberalism and imperialist interference and looting.

There are a multitude of proposals for ending the crisis. How do you see them?

The first, that of the regime, is to retain the current liberal-authoritarian regime with a democratic façade. It is massively rejected by the people. The second is that of the ultra-neoliberals of the opposition (democrats, Islamists and nationalists) who use the democratic demand to apply an even more anti-national economic policy and an even harsher social policy (the "necessary sacrifices"). Such an outcome implies the election, as soon as possible, of a President who can, with the vote of the citizens, apply his ultra-neoliberal potion. The third is the one defended by the leftist forces who propose the establishment of a Constituent Assembly so that the people decide not only to elect their representatives, but also and above all, first, on the institutional architecture of the country. Do we need a president of the Republic or not, a Senate or not?

How many times can a deputy, a mayor ... be re-elected? What should they be paid? Can they be recalled by citizens if they betray their commitments? The more the citizens participate massively in the definition of the political regime the more the latter will be solid because based on the trust of the constituents. The argument of urgency does not stand up to the need to give the people the real, not the theoretical, means to really exercise their sovereignty.

Sudanese military launch attack against the Khartoum sit-in, many dead and injured

4 June 2019, by Mena

The attack follows a general strike on 28 and 29 May after the Transitional Military Council refused to concede protesters' call for a new sovereignty council composed of a majority of civilian members. [71]

Solidarity is crucial - what you do in the next few hours will make a difference.

Take action now:

✉ Email, fax or call the Sudanese Embassy. [Go here](#) for contact details

for the Sudanese embassy in London] [[today, condemning the attacks on peaceful protesters and demanding that the Transitional Military Council withdraws all troops and militia forces from the Khartoum sit-in and other protest sites.

✉ Contact the foreign ministry of your government and your local member of parliament. Urge them to issue a statement condemning attacks on protesters and stating that they will hold Generals Burhan and Dagalo of the Transitional Military Council responsible for deaths and injuries to

civilians. Call on your government to stop all forms of cooperation with the TMC until those responsible for killing and injuring protesters are brought to justice.

✉ Circulate this appeal to your trade union branch or campaign

✉ Read and share our background briefing on the armed men who threaten Sudan's peaceful revolution [here](#).

[Mena](#)

Political rupture or revolution as a project- notes and reflections on the protest movement

3 June 2019, by **Nadir Djermoune**

In order to grasp the analytic aspects conveyed by the movement that is in the process of structuring itself and politically maturing, let us start from the stakes of the historical moment that we are living through.

The military institution and the dynamics of the movement

The current moment in the protest movement is dominated by the spectacular arrests of Said Bouteflika, brother and special advisor to the ousted president, ex-generals Athmane Tertag and Mohamed Mediène, former chiefs of the security services, followed by the summoning of Louisa Hanoun of the PT [72] for a hearing in the same investigation and her incarceration.

What do these incarcerations mean? "It is not illegitimate," says journalist and essayist Yassine Tamlali "to think

that the involvement of military justice in this case is intended to prevent the possible trial of the accused revealing too many embarrassing elements concerning the operation of the regime of Abdelaziz Bouteflika for the de facto regime in place since his dismissal. Nor is it illegitimate to believe that a "controlled" trial before a court martial avoids two former powerful generals, Mohamed Mediène and Athmane Tartag, undergoing a public humiliation that can cause disturbances within the army".

The arrest of Louisa Hanoun, on the other hand, seems to serve a double purpose. First, on the politico-legal terrain, the president of the PT is slightly at odds vis-à-vis the popular movement. Because she stuck to Bouteflika throughout his reign, under the pretext of the defence of the nation-state against imperialist plots and strayed too much in the vicinity of the security services. Postures she has never hidden. This does not make her a criminal or a "conspirator" It depends on her opinions and her political line. However, it is easy to

offer her to popular "vengeance" as an accomplice of the "plot against the army" and the mismanagement of the regime, providing a solid argument on ideological and symbolic grounds for Gaid Salah, the chief of staff who seeks to pose as Bonaparte, to attack "mafia oligarchs", the former "corrupt" regime and finally those who "represent the workers". So, above ideologies, he avoids the artificial "Arab/Kabyle" contradiction into which, for a time, some of the opposition wanted to lead him.

But a military institution that is trying to gain popularity by bringing these personalities, who are not moreover devoid of accusations, before military justice may be the prelude to something more politically serious. Seeing in Gaid Salah's attitude a rapprochement with the people, and a response to the movement demanding action, while remaining blind to the intimidations that are looming over the movement itself, is tantamount to pure and simple support for the military institution.

The political alternative the movement needs

This institution is today the only organized structure, as was the case for the general staff, its ancestor, in relation to the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic in 1962. It tries to ensure a transition without confronting protest. It tries to fill a gap opened by the movement itself and considers itself legitimate in imposing its roadmap which is considered constitutional, with the risks that this involves for democratic liberties and popular sovereignty.

This current political schedule is not the initiative of representative political forces. It is introduced and imposed by the movement without completely controlling the schedules or their future. The outcome of elections as a solution to every phase of protest is also not a strategic choice. It is an obligation imposed by this constitutional schedule. It was first reviewed and corrected by the movement by cancelling the election scheduled for April 19. It was then postponed by the heirs and supporters of this constitution to July 4. A date that the protesters refuse and that responds to three issues. Because we can no longer take for granted the homogeneity between the different protagonists of the events we are experiencing. There is the beginning of a decantation.

Faced with the military institution that claims its constitutionality in order to consolidate its power, the first issue is introduced by politicians of neoliberal persuasion who make offers of services to the "oligarchic" system that is emerging. Because, once rid of Bouteflika who had the monopoly of initiative, these oligarchs want to quickly move to a new presidential regime, which, if necessary, would initiate reforms. A presidential regime they aspire to control by demanding a transitional body co-opted by the de facto regime, that is, the military! Because that's what it's all about, since none of the candidates running this transition are the emanation of the movement. The different service

offers are only supported by the press. And it is enough to look at who runs this press to understand this issue. The population in movement, however, remains deaf to any political representation.

The second issue is underlined by the proposal to convene a sovereign constituent assembly. This is the only approach, in the current state of affairs, which ensures a break with the "system" so much decried by the demonstrators and which allows the beginning the construction of a political and social project which is legitimate and representative of the aspirations of the majority of the people in movement. It is a question of common sense or mathematical logic: either to accept the current constitutional order and avoid a clash with the regime. Then to go to the presidential elections of July 4 relying on popular mobilization to make them honest and transparent. This is rejected by people in movement because they do not trust the old and are wary of the new. Or to abandon this constitution and go to a new one. But how? It will require a personality who can build or a representative and legitimate structure that will guide this process.

These few examples can help us understand this equation: When in 1958, the French state in full "Algerian crisis" appealed to General De Gaulle, the latter, with his symbolic legitimacy and the hegemony of the French bourgeoisie, which he represented, agreed to lead a transition from the 4th to the 5th republic through a referendum on a new constitution he himself established to the extent of his power and what he represented; it took May 68 to question that legitimacy, but not the constitution that is still in force. When Boumedienne, in another context, took power in 1965 in Algeria, he waited until 1976, the time it took to build a hegemony and a legitimacy to pass his constitution. Similarly, Boudiaf in 1992, in another context, also had the symbolic legitimacy to initiate a re-founding of the republic, without prejudging the content of what he could have done. But, his romantic and nationalist ambition prevailed, leaving Algeria in turmoil. It is this Bonapartist tradition that

explains the use of General Zeroual by Bouteflika as soon as crisis engulfed the Algerian regime. And since then, the supporters of a continuity of the system seek a "providential person". That is what Gaid Salah seems to understand by relying on the legality that is granted to him the current constitution. That's why he does not want to leave this framework. He sees himself perhaps as embodying this character!

On the third issue there is a nebula that wants to be "revolutionary", but an abstract revolution, postponed indefinitely. Considering that "conditions are not right for such a break", it refuses to engage in a laborious confrontation with concrete politics. It is a mode of thought that is doomed to constantly turn around the problem without addressing it.

The rejection of the deadline of July 4 without offering a feasible prospect within reasonable deadlines places the movement in a perspective of a political and institutional vacuum. These protagonists who reject the constituent solution are objectively aligned to give way to Gaid Salah who is preparing to fill this void!

The constitutional battle is not enough

The stakes are high. It is now imperative to support this new Algeria born on February 22, to be up to the measure of these exceptional moments in the history of a country. This is not just a legal and constitutional impasse. Whatever the immediate outcome, the path of emancipation is now open. It must be occupied before it is closed.

However, it is not a question of starting from a critique or a revolutionary program outside of time and real history, hence abstract. It is a question of starting from the contradictions introduced by the movement itself.

The need to resort to the Sovereign Constituent Assembly is not, from this point of view, a mere tactical subterfuge. It is fundamental and

strategic for the workers, the poor, that is to say the majority of people to access their emancipation and the defence of their projects in a free and democratic way. For it is in these historical moments of great mobilization that a truly democratic advance can be imposed on the dominant and the authoritarian regimes. It is for this reason that the defenders of the oligarchic minority reject this path.

Obviously, this solution through the Constituent Assembly will be the result of a process of national debate under the leadership of a civilian Provisional Government, of a reasonable duration to give the opportunity to all forces to prepare themselves and to conduct a substantive debate on the desired constitution, a debate essential to situating issues and clarifying elections. The quality and independence of this temporary structure thus plays a large role, as does true freedom of information of expression and demonstration, insofar as it allows all parts of the people, under the control of the movement, to weigh in the debate on the nature of the principles from which it is not permissible to derogate.

This recourse to a constituting democratic renewal is also valid, at the beginning of the 21st century, for the great capitalist economic powers that made their democratic revolution. To return to the French example cited above, the arrival of De Gaulle in 1958 is a challenge to the democratic equilibrium introduced by the Constituent Assembly after the war of 1939-45. But as the French bourgeoisie is unable to share power democratically, it managed the tour de force through de Gaulle, amid a crisis facing the progress of the Algerian independence movement, to shape an ultra-presidential constitution. A bit like Bouteflika in 2009, all proportion kept on form. Today again the recourse to a constituting process for a 6th republic is possible and necessary for a power like France. It is also valid for another power like the United States of America which still functions on the constitution of Abraham Lincoln where power is structurally shared between the great financial clans called pompously "Democrats" and "Republicans". We can of course broaden this strategy of a democratic renewal for the new oligarchies represented by Russia or China.

Combining the political perspective with a transitional socio-economic program

But this constitutional necessity, which fundamentally raises the question of political power, opens the door to the question of its content, that is, the development project that concerns Algerians as it does all human societies. From this point of view, what people demand is a profound change in the system, a renewal of Algeria so that the country can advance as expected. Through the denunciation of the "system" it is, for the moment, bureaucratic and oligarchic control of the economy that is aimed at, a sort of "connivance capitalism". But this capitalism of connivance simply hides another world capitalism which is more voracious and in full crisis.

These are questions that must accompany the issues related to the probable immediate rendezvous of July 4th and even after that.

Sudan at the Crossroads

2 June 2019, by Revolutionary Socialists of Egypt

The Sudanese people have fought a heroic battle since last December, losing dozens of martyrs in clashes on the streets with the militias of the dictator, Omar al-Bashir. Sudanese revolutionaries have organised huge marches, strikes and sit-ins. At the time of writing, these are continuing in front of the headquarters of the Sudanese Army in Khartoum, and outside army barracks in other provinces. Having forced the downfall of Omar al-Bashir on 11 April, the Sudanese people immediately brought down the head of the Transitional Military Council, Awad Ibn Auf, the next day.

Since Abdelfattah al-Burhan took over the presidency of the military council with his deputy, Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, Al-Bashir's generals are trying to divert the Sudanese revolution and empty it of any content in order to buy time to recover from the first blow that the revolutionaries have struck against the regime. The generals have not lost any time. They have been in constant contact with the counter-revolution forces in Cairo, Riyadh, Abu Dhabi, and Manama. Gulf cash has begun to flow towards the military junta, and Egyptian dictator Abdelfattah al-Sisi is working hard to support the military council with

intelligence and diplomacy.

The Gulf media are burnishing Hemideti's image on their screens, sending reassuring messages that the Sudanese army is continuing to take part in the aggression in Yemen.

Things are different in the streets. Sudanese revolutionaries organised two protests to the Egyptian embassy to denounce interference by al-Sisi and Egyptian intelligence services in Sudanese affairs. Banners opposing the Gulf states and their "aid" have proliferated, along with demands for the withdrawal of Sudanese troops

from a war in Yemen which they have no interest in fighting.

What about the Sudanese Professionals Association and the Forces of the Declaration of Freedom and Change which have spearheaded the mobilisation? The leaders of the Sudanese opposition responded to the invitation by the military council to “negotiate” after the fall of al-Bashir and Ibn Auf. Conflicting accounts and leaks about differences with the military council emerged. Then came a call to escalate the sit-ins along with accusations that the military council was manoeuvring in order to try and retain sovereign powers. The opposition went back to the negotiating table again and revealed on 28 April the details of the dispute with the military council.

While the opposition is calling for a “civilian sovereign council”, which would include all the current members of the military council (seven generals), alongside eight civilian members, this was rejected by the military council, which instead called for the addition of only three civilians.

In both cases, the civilian sovereign council would have a military president.

The low bar set by the opposition leaders in their demands sparked anger among many Sudanese revolutionaries, who expressed disappointment in the performance of the negotiators. There was widespread

debate on social media, for example asking whether the reason for this complacency was the weakness of the negotiators.

However, the problem is not so much the personalities of the negotiators as the overall strategy of the opposition. By agreeing to negotiate with Al-Bashir’s generals, and allowing them to participate in the transition period, the leaders of the opposition are trying to reconcile the demands of the revolutionary street on the one hand, and the counter-revolutionary generals on the other. This strategy is suicidal for the revolution. Regardless of who the negotiators are, they will betray the hopes of the revolutionaries.

Sit-ins in the streets do not bring down regimes on their own, and the Sudanese Professionals Association has not seriously used general strikes as a weapon since the fall of al-Bashir. Meanwhile the wheel of exploitation continues to turn as revolutionaries gather in the squares to protest after the working day is done. A general strike is necessary to confront the military council while preserving the peaceful character of the movement. In some places, and without waiting for the invitation of the SPA, workers and civil servants are mobilising in their factories and offices to demand permanent contracts, independent unions and to kick their managers from the old regime out of their workplaces. We saw this happen in Egypt in 2011, when Islamists and liberals went on the attack saying

“strikes are selfish, now is not the time for them!”

Yet these strikes are the beating heart of the revolution: escalating them into a general strike is a matter of life or death.

There is another challenge. With whom exactly in the military should revolutionaries negotiate? Who from the military should be allowed to take part in the transitional period? Al-Bashir’s generals? Or the junior officers and the soldiers who rebelled against their commanders and fraternised in the streets with the revolutionaries?

The rebellion growing in the lower ranks of the officers and among soldiers was one of the main reasons for the junta’s rush to get rid of Al Bashir, fearing the collapse of the army and the regime. These are the parts of the army that the revolutionaries should be seeking to negotiate and ally with, and whose participation they should be seeking.

Some may accuse the revolutionaries of trying to drag the country into a bloodbath. But the real bloodbath will be the inevitable blow by the generals against the revolution. Maintaining a peaceful revolution requires a quick move towards a general strike and an appeal to the lower ranks of the army to join it.

May 17 2019
[Revolutionary Socialists](#)

The Long Arab Spring

1 June 2019, by Ashley Smith, Gilbert Achcar

After years of counterrevolution and bloodshed, the Middle East began to see some glimmers of hope last month. In Algeria and Sudan, mass demonstrations emerged to challenge the autocratic regimes of presidents Abdelaziz Bouteflika and Omar al-Bashir, respectively. And in that respect, both have been successful:

both leaders have been removed, their decades-long rules at an end. But protests have continued, because as in Egypt after the 2011 revolution, the basic power structure behind those leaders remains intact. So do the material conditions driving the uprisings: the rock-bottom wages, mass unemployment, insecurity, and

lack of a future for youth baked into the structural adjustment model imposed by the IMF.

Thus, popular forces in Algeria and Sudan are in a precarious position. The specter of the counterrevolution waged against the actors of the Arab Spring looms large. But today’s

protesters have learned from the recent struggles in the region, and may benefit from such retrospective vision. To discuss the dangers and hopes of these developments, Jacobin contributor Ashley Smith spoke to Gilbert Achcar, who has written extensively about the Arab Spring and the politics of the Middle East.

AS: The uprisings in Sudan and Algeria have inspired renewed hope in the Middle East and North Africa after a long period of counterrevolution. What is happening in these two countries?

GA : In Sudan and Algeria, we are witnessing two waves of mass protests equal in magnitude to the revolts that erupted in 2011. Back then it was called the Arab Spring. As a result, in the mainstream media, we've had a lot of commentary asking whether we are in the midst of a new Arab Spring.

In reality, the uprisings in these two countries are the product of what I've been calling a long-term revolutionary process that started in 2011 for the whole Arab-speaking region. The main cause for this is the social and economic blockage brought about by the combination of IMF-sponsored neoliberalism and the rotten authoritarian political systems that impose it throughout the Middle East and North Africa. This blockage produces systematic social problems, the most important of which is enormous youth unemployment.

The blockage produces many other deep grievances among the populations in the region that keep driving uprisings. In Sudan, the trigger of the revolt was the increase in bread prices after the state cut subsidies at the behest of the IMF. In Algeria, the immediate cause was political; the Algerian regime tried to secure a fifth term for Abdelaziz Bouteflika despite the fact that he has been semi-paralyzed by a stroke for the last six years. This offended the democratic aspirations of people.

So, again economic and political grievances are driving another wave

of popular revolts just like those we saw in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, and Syria in 2011. This confirms that it was wrong to view those risings as a "spring" that would, just like the season, last a few months and end with mere constitutional changes, or end in failure. In reality, we are still in the midst of a long-term revolutionary process born out of the region's very deep structural crisis.

This means that there won't be any kind of stabilization of the Arab-speaking region short of a radical change in the social, economic, and political conditions that have produced this developmental blockage. Until this happens the crisis will go on and we'll see more explosions of struggle and more counterrevolutionary offensives.

If we look at the years after the first wave of uprisings from 2011 to 2013, we have had six years dominated by counterrevolution. The counterrevolution took various forms but led either to the consolidation of the old regimes or degeneration into civil war and chaos. The Gulf monarchies beat back the revolt in Bahrain early on. The Syrian regime has for now won its brutal counterrevolutionary drive backed by Iran and Russia. The old regime returned to power in Egypt with a vengeance. And civil wars have erupted in Libya and Yemen between equally reactionary forces with criminal intervention by the Saudi kingdom and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

At the same time, social volcanoes continue to erupt throughout the region because the old regimes can offer no solutions to the people's grievances. So, we've had important social movements over the last years all over the region from Tunisia, which started the whole process of uprising in December 2010 and witnessed several social upsurges since then, to Morocco and Iraq through Sudan and Jordan and beyond the Arab countries to Iran.

This should come as no surprise. As every long-term revolutionary process in history has shown, there will be a dialectic of revolution and counterrevolution as long as the key

political and economic problems have not been solved. Short of that we risk having more and more mayhem and tragedies.

AS : What lessons have the activists in the new revolts in Sudan and Algeria learned from the earlier wave of struggle?

GA: There are two major lessons that political forces have learned from the past experiences. One is seen in their insistence on the nonviolent character of the movement. They are very keen on avoiding doing anything that would give the state the opportunity to use the full spectrum of its repressive means against them.

The first wave of revolts too was actually very keen on that. They all raised the slogan "silmiyya, silmiyya," which means "peaceful, peaceful," even in Syria. All attempted to stick to nonviolent means. Violence was started everywhere without exception by the regimes themselves. Of course, faced with a qualitative escalation of state violence, the mass movement has only two options left: one is to give up the struggle, and the other is to defend itself.

Civil wars attracted foreign intervention of various kinds. In Libya, foreign intervention by the US and its allies came in favor of the insurgents in an attempt at co-opting their struggle. The result was that it is the only Arab state that has completely collapsed due to the victory of the insurgents. That's because the whole state machine was organically tied to Muammar Gaddafi and his clique.

On the other hand, in Syria, foreign intervention mainly by Iran, its proxies, and Russia was on the side of the regime. It enabled Bashar al-Assad's regime to survive, commit terrible massacres, and destroy whole swathes of the country. The scale of atrocities has been far worse in Syria than in any country so far. Even Yemen comes second in terms of the scale of the tragedy. There, foreign intervention is conducted by the Saudi kingdom and the UAE on the side of one counterrevolutionary camp opposing the alliance of two other counterrevolutionary forces.

In light of these tragedies, new mass movements have become acutely wary of this risk of violence and foreign-backed civil war and are very much taking it into consideration. In a sense, what is most amazing is that the Algerians and Sudanese started their revolt at all given the tragic outcomes they saw in other countries. The regimes in the whole region have been using those outcomes as a powerful new counterrevolutionary argument to dissuade their peoples from rising. The Algerian regime explicitly warned the mass movement that they risked a Syrian scenario. But that was not enough to deter the people from going into the streets and fighting for their aspirations and demands.

The second lesson that Sudanese and Algerian activists have learned is that the military command is not an ally. They learned that from the experience in Egypt, whose kind of state is most similar to theirs. These states have in common the fact that the military are in control of political power. The armed forces are not just a repressive backbone of the state, which is something common to all states, but the center of gravity of political power.

The Sudanese and Algerians had watched how the army removed Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak in 2011 on the background of the uprising only to restore the old order at first opportunity. So, when the military removed Bouteflika in Algeria and Bashir in Sudan, the popular movement knew that this was not enough. It understood that the removal of the president and his cronies was just the removal of the tip of the iceberg, that the mass of the iceberg — what people call the deep state — made up especially of the military-security complex, is still in place and that as long as power remains in its hands, there is no end to the regime.

Even when the military relinquished control of the head of the state for a year in Egypt, they were actively preparing their comeback. And on the first chance they got, they staged a coup against the elected president from the Muslim Brotherhood, Mohamed Morsi, and came back to

full political power with the crowning of Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. The regime is so authoritarian now that it made the Egyptians miss the previous dictator, Mubarak!

So, the movements in Sudan and Algeria have learned the lesson that one must get rid of the deep state. You can see the difference between the Egyptian uprising's reaction to the military taking down of Mubarak and the Sudanese and Algerian movements' reaction to the similar removal of their dictators. In Egypt, people thought it was victory and emptied the squares after celebrating. But in Algeria and Sudan, people said that's not enough and carried on demonstrating.

They want to get rid of the whole regime, not just a few people at the top. Getting rid of the regime means giving back political power to civil society through democratic means including elections and provision of rights. Full relinquishing of power by the military is what the popular movement is insisting on in both countries.

AS: Libya seems to stand in stark contrast with the hopeful signs in Algeria and Sudan. There we are witnessing an intense battle between factions for the reconstitution of state power. What's your assessment of what's happening there?

GA: Libya had — in the aftermath of the fall of Gaddafi, after decades of totalitarian rule — a period of democratic blossoming with large numbers of political groups and NGOs emerging, newspapers developing, and elections, which were the first free elections in that country and among the freest the region has seen, with a remarkable rate of participation. They were won by a liberal secular alliance that defeated the Islamic fundamentalists. Then the counterrevolution started with the fundamentalists rebelling against the elected government.

In the middle of the resulting chaos, a former military leader, Khalifa Haftar, launched a counterrevolutionary bid for power, backed by Egypt and the UAE. His troops clashed with the

fundamentalist forces. In Libya exactly like in Egypt, Syria, and the other countries of the 2011 uprising, there was a triangular dynamic with a revolutionary pole facing two rival counterrevolutionary ones: the old regime and its Islamic fundamentalist opponents. Everywhere, the progressives got marginalized and the situation overwhelmed by the clash between the two counterrevolutionary poles.

AS :This triangular scenario you describe doesn't seem to fit in Sudan. Why is it different?

GA: In Sudan, Bashir's regime actually combined both counterrevolutionary poles. He ruled through the military just as the dictatorships in Egypt or Algeria, but at the same time he did so in close collaboration with the Islamic fundamentalists. They were also part of the regime. That's why I referred to Bashir as a combination of Morsi and Sisi; I called him "Morsisi."

The fact that the Islamic fundamentalists were part of the regime prevented them from playing a role in the uprising; the people were actually rising up against them. So, they were in no position to hijack the uprising as they did in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Yemen, and Syria. This difference is very important, and it has shaped the revolt itself, which has had to challenge the fused poles of counterrevolution.

This has helped make the Sudanese protest the most progressive of all the uprisings we've seen in the region so far. It's the most advanced in terms of organization as well as politics. The coalition of groups leading it is called the Forces of the Declaration of Freedom and Change (FDFC). It includes originally underground professional and workers associations, and political parties from leftists like the Communist Party to liberal Muslim, armed movements fighting ethnic oppression, as well as feminist groups.

These progressive forces have shaped the politics of the revolt. In particular, women and feminist organizations, who have played a prominent role, have pushed for feminist demands to be included in the FDFC's program. It

now stipulates, for example, that the new legislative council must be 40 percent women.

But we should not underestimate the challenges the FDFC face. The coalition is locked in a tug of war with the military, who want to maintain power in their hands and only grant subordinate functions to civilians. The FDFC are instead demanding that sovereign power should be fully in the hands of a civilian majority and the armed forces limited to the apolitical defense role they ought normally to play in a civilian state.

So, the Sudanese revolutionaries are confronting the military, who are backed by all the regional and international forces of counterrevolution. Qatar, the Saudi kingdom, the UAE, Russia, and the US are all supporting the military in that tug of war. Add to the picture the Islamic fundamentalists who are naturally backing the military.

In this situation, the movement's main strength has been its ability to win over the rank and file of the armed forces and some of the lower-ranking officers. That has so far dissuaded the military from attempting to drown the revolution in blood. Bashir wanted the army to crush the uprising, but his generals refused, not because they're democrats or humanists, to be sure, but because they were not confident that the troops would follow their orders.

The military command knew that part of the soldiers and lower-ranking officers sympathized with the uprising to the point of even using their weapons to defend demonstrators from attacks by the regime's thugs and political police. The troops' sympathizing with the popular movement was determining in leading the generals to get rid of Bashir.

The most important thing now is for the movement to consolidate its support among the rank and file and lower-ranking officers of the armed forces. The success or failure of that effort will determine the whole fate of the revolution.

AS: Why have the Sudanese progressive forces been able to

make such a big breakthrough compared to the rest of the region?

GA: The FDFC are not much different in their political composition from the progressive forces everywhere in the region. But elsewhere, these progressive forces have been discredited by siding with one of the two counterrevolutionary poles. Where the Islamic fundamentalists were in the opposition they managed to jump on the bandwagon and hijack the movement thanks to the far superior means they had in organization, funds, and media.

Look at the example of Egypt. There the Muslim Brotherhood hijacked the popular revolt. They spread illusions about the military in 2011. At the time of Mubarak's overthrow and in its aftermath, the Brotherhood were working hand in hand with the military. That greatly helped the military defuse the popular movement.

Because the two counterrevolutionary poles were combined in Sudan, a space opened for the progressive forces to break through on their own. This is not entirely the case in Algeria. While Islamic fundamentalist forces are not playing any visible role in the uprising there, they retain a powerful network and can thereby still play a counterrevolutionary role if the occasion arises. Moreover, unlike in Sudan, there is no recognized leadership of the uprising in Algeria, and that makes the movement vulnerable to political manipulations.

AS Throughout this whole revolutionary process, various imperial powers and regional powers have played a major role in the uprisings. This was especially true after the relative decline of the US due to its defeat in Iraq; that gave all the other states greater leeway to pursue their own interests. Now Trump seems intent on reasserting American power by backing allies like Israel and Saudi Arabia as well as deploying ships and bombers to the Persian Gulf against Iran. What is Trump up to?

GA: Well, as of everything with Trump, his policy is very crude. That term "crude" is particularly well suited in

this case because his entire strategy, if it can be called one, is determined by crude oil. So, he is withdrawing troops from Syria because he's not interested in supporting left-wing Kurdish guerrillas and because the country has little oil. But he has not called for a withdrawal of US troops from Iraq. In fact, when Trump visited the US base in that country, he voiced determination to stay there. The alibi was the supposed need to surveil Iran, but that's really a mere pretext since the US already has plenty of bases all over the Gulf as well as sophisticated surveillance technology to watch Iran.

But, in his typically undiplomatic fashion, Trump had admitted the real reason he wants US troops in Iraq is oil. He actually stated that oil was the prize the US should have taken as a reward for its invasion and occupation of that country. He bluntly said, "we should have taken Iraq's oil." So, he's extremely "crude" in this double sense.

That's why he supports the Saudi kingdom and Washington's other client states among the oil monarchies of the Gulf. He treats them as running dogs and they go along with it. Even when Trump insults them openly as he recently did in Wisconsin, they didn't dare protest. They are just vassals of the US who depend on their overlord for protection.

The same oil consideration is behind Trump's sudden change of tack on Libya. He reversed what has been US policy, which was to support the UN-backed government in Tripoli, by suddenly backing Haftar openly. Why? Because Haftar is now in control of the oil fields in Libya.

That's the logic of what Trump is doing is very "crude" imperialism determined by economic interests above all else without any kind of ideological pretenses about democracy or human rights. In that regard, as he openly states, he actually envies authoritarian rulers.

Likewise, his aggressive stance against Iran is not only to please his far-right buddy, Israel's Netanyahu, nor is it for any democratic purpose, of course, not any more than his aggressive stance against Venezuela

is. Trump's focus on these two countries cannot be separated from their holding major oil reserves. Whatever one thinks of the regimes in both countries, countering the Trump administration's threats and gesticulations is crucial — especially in the case of Iran, where the risk of war is quite high.

AS : This much is clear. But what should the international left be doing toward Sudan?

GA: The most urgent need is solidarity with the uprising, which is dangerously isolated right now. It confronts a single counterrevolutionary camp backed by all imperial and regional state powers. In such a situation international solidarity is extremely important.

Any meaningful gestures of solidarity

will embolden and give courage to the Sudanese movement. The key in the US is to expose Trump's support for Sudan's military along with his buddies among oil monarchs. It would be important to compel the Democrats, even if just for electoral gain, to call that policy into question. This is urgent because it could greatly help the FDFC gain advantage in its tug of war with the military over the democratic transition in the country.

The US State Department has been recently pushing for a short transitional period whereas the Sudanese revolutionaries are demanding a longer one during which there would be transitional civilian institutions before elections are held in the country. They want time to develop their parties after decades of being subject to intensive repression.

They know from the experience in Egypt and Tunisia that the sooner elections take place, the more likely it is that those with the most organization, resources, and international backing will win. In those countries it was the Islamic fundamentalists. In Sudan it would likely be political forces developed out of the old regime including the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafists. They have far superior material means to those of the FDFC.

So, it's very important for left political forces in the US to rally in support of the Sudanese uprising and back the demands of its leadership. This is part and parcel of rebuilding a tradition of internationalist left solidarity with the global movement of exploited and oppressed.

[Jacobin](#)