IV536 - September 2019

Down with Sisi and Long Live the People!

30 September 2019, by Revolutionary Socialists of Eygpt

The courage of the women and men who have protested despite the consequences they will face, deserves to be saluted as well as prompting reflection. Without a doubt they have restored hope to millions who have succumbed to despair after the defeat of the January 2011 revolution. Although no-one knows exactly where courage without leadership or organisation will take us, we do know at least that the people are much stronger than they seemed until just a few hours ago.

The Revolutionary Socialist movement salutes who have demonstrated without knowing either their fate or the results of their protests. We salute those who have faced repression and detention by Sisi's Ministry of the Interior, because they have opened the way for the masses also to express their hopes, their aspirations and their anger.

During the six years which have passed since Sisi came to power in a counter-revolution following his coup against the late President Mohamed Morsi, the general has carried out as many crimes as possible – murders, torture, and enforced disappearances. Initially, he relied on popularity he created by spreading fear of the "danger of the Muslim Brotherhood" at times or of foreign plots at others. But little by little, under the pressure of a brutal process of impoverishment, the like of which the country has not seen for at least fifty years, his popularity has begun to fade away. Meanwhile, the fist of repression has crushed any attempts even to express a rejection of austerity and poverty, to the point that everyone is aware that Sisi runs the country just as an armed thug controls a group of unarmed people he has kidnapped.

During the last few days we have seen the intolerable provocation of leaked information circulating about the involvement of Sisi and his family in systematic corruption which diverts public resources towards building presidential palaces at the same time the official discourse still clings to a rhetoric demanding more patience in the face of price rises, austerity and poverty. This follows the official announcement about two months ago that poverty levels have risen from 27.8 percent in 2015 to 32.5 percent in 2017/8, according to research into levels of income, expenditure and consumption, carried out by the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics.

What has happened so far is only the beginning of the collapse of the wall of fear and despair, a beginning which can only be deepened and protected by vigilance on the part of the masses who must be prepared to fight to the end against dictatorship. They must learn not to rise up simply so that others can reap the fruits of their revolution and their sacrifices. Any change which does not remove the military from power, thus bringing freedom and justice for the people, will lead to the theft of the revolution from the masses once again, and this cannot be allowed to happen.
Down with military rule!

21 September 2019

Revolutionary Socialists

Among the right-wing governments, Bolsonaro's is the one with most neo-fascist

features

28 September 2019, by Michael Löwy

In this interview, Löwy discusses the advance of the far right in Brazil, capped with the election of Jair Bolsonaro, and the similarities between the situation in Brazil and that of the classical European Fascism of the 1930s.

Michael Löwy spoke to Brasil de Fato at the launch of a new Portuguese translation of the book, News from Nowhere, published by Editora Expressão Popular, for which he wrote the introduction.

Brasil de Fato: To begin, I would like to know in which terms and how you would characterise the government of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil.

Michael Löwy: What we see in Brazil today is a dystopia. The opposite of utopia. For those of us who form part of the Brazilian left and have fought for many years to advance the ideas, struggles and conquests of the workers, of socialism and of progress, it is very sad to see how Brazil reached the point of having a government that I would characterise as semi-fascist at least.

It will not be completely fascist because it does not have the aspects of the totalitarian State, of the armed groups like Mussolini's "fasci" [Blackshirts]. But it has many of the features of fascism. I think that Jair Bolsonaro is comparable, for instance, to Mussolini in the '20s. In those years, Mussolini still maintained the appearances of a parliamentary republic, there was opposition in parliament whose principal leader was a democrat, [Giacomo] Matteotti, and among the deputies was Antonio Gramsci. All this lasted until 1926, when he closed parliament, imprisoned Gramsci, who remained in prison until his death (1937), and ordered the killing of Matteotti. It finished there. I hope we do not reach that point in Brazil.

I see the figure of Jair Bolsonaro and a good part of his government as having fascist elements of authoritarianism, with that idea that the enemy must be "exterminated". The enemies being the left, feminists, indigenous, the MST [Landless Workers' Movement] etc. The hatred of "communism", which for him represents the whole left, is a characteristic of fascism, as is the idea that the only solution is repression.

Unfortunately, there are many extreme right governments in the world today, like [Donald] Trump in the United States, [Viktor] Orban in Hungary, [Narendra] Modi in India. But the one with the most semi-fascist or neo-fascist features is the government of Jair Bolsonaro.

Fortunately, he does not have total power, as the totalitarian States in Italy, Germany and Spain did. He has to negotiate with Parliament, with the Senate and even with the Armed Forces. That is a situation that differentiates him from the classic fascism of the 1930s. History obviously does not repeat itself, but it is very worrying.

Another difference in relation to fascism is that this figure was elected democratically by the population. There was no military coup, like we had in many Latin American countries in the 1960s and 1970s; it was a democratic election, and that is very sad.

On the other hand, we see that the people who fell for his scam are waking up. Bolsonaro's popularity has fallen dramatically, there is mobilisation and resistance. One of these, which for me is very important, is the union mobilisation against the Social Security reform, an ultra-reactionary reform.

Of course, the ruling classes are happy. There is a consensus among the oligarchs, landowners and bankers who think that Bolsonaro is a solution because he is constructing a neoliberal programme in the most brutal way, as the dominant Brazilian oligarchy has wanted to do for a long time.

Another resistance that I find very important is that of the indigenous in Amazônia, who are struggling to defend the rainforest and the rivers. The Amazon Rainforest is a good of the Brazilian people and of humanity. Without it, climate change will accelerate.

In Bolsonaro's government, it seems that socioenvironmental policies have lost importance. Since his assumption, licences for pesticides have been granted at an accelerated rate and deforestation has increased by almost 90% in the Amazon, for example. Even the progressive camp was late in understanding the importance of this issue. How do you view this problem today?

I am convinced that the question of the environment, or nature, or ecology, will become increasingly central in the 21st century. It is not just a question of defending the environment, our rainforests or animal species. It is a question of the survival of life on the planet. If the process of climate change and global warming surpasses a certain level, it will be irreversible.

At a certain moment, the question of whether there are still the conditions for human life on this planet arises. It really is a question of life or death. For that reason, it will become a central political question for any project of social change. It will be very important for the left, social movements, workers, rural workers, everyone, to take the environmental question as a fundamental political question and a central reason for fighting against capitalism. It is capitalism that is responsible for this.

It is very important that socialists understand this and assume this as something central, not as a detail in a list of 45 programmatic points. It is a central battle for the future of

humanity. That is my "message": we must appropriate for ourselves the ecological question as a weapon in the struggle against capitalism.

What is there in common between the advance of the right in Europe and Latin America?

Liberal globalisation and the economic crisis that it caused from 2008 created a favourable context for the spectacular ascent not only of the classical neoliberal right but also of the extreme semi-fascist right with racist and authoritarian features, in many countries around the world. From Japan to India, a large part of Europe, the United States and Brazil.

I have no single explanation for why this is happening. There are various elements: the crisis of neoliberalism is one aspect; the weakening of the left is another. But, for me, it is still an enigma to understand why – just in the last years – we are experiencing this phenomenon, which is not exactly the same as the 1930s because history never repeats itself, but is the resurgence of neo-fascist or semi-fascist forms.

On hope, to finish. Do you see a way through? What would it be?

The way through for me are the struggles and the resistance. Here in Latin America, the indigenous and rural workers are on the front line. Another element that gives us hope is the youth. The youth that, around the whole world, will mobilise on 20 September for a large international general strike over climate change, against the governments that do not take the necessary decisions.

We know that the youth is the future. If the youth mobilises, if it struggles, if it becomes conscious and raises the banner, "change the system, not the climate", then there is hope.

Verso Books

Let's win back our future: change the system not the climate

26 September 2019, by Fourth International Bureau

July 2019 was the hottest July ever recorded. Hundreds of thousands of hectares of irreplaceable forest have gone up in smoke in the Amazon, and unprecedented forest fires have ravaged Greenland, Siberia and Alaska. Hurricane Dorian in the Bahamas, typhoon Faxaï in Japan, torrential rains in southern Spain… the list is long, showing the dramatic effect of a 1.1°C increase in the Earth's average temperature over the past century and a half.

The 2°C is far from being a safe limit, it is imperative to stay below the 1.5°C indicated in extremis in the Paris agreement, thanks to the pressure of climate mobilizations and the first countries concerned by rising sea levels. But since 2015, greenhouse gas emissions have continued to increase, leading directly to the disaster with forecasts of up to 7°C.

The UN Climate Action Summit is being held this week in New York. Although countries are not meeting their already very inadequate commitments made four years ago, the UN Secretary-General is asking them for "plans to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050", "ways to fight fossil fuel subsidies", "carbon taxation" and "stopping the commissioning of new coal-fired power plants after 2020". We already know that nothing will come out of this umpteenth summit, capitalism will continue its climate crimes.

In order not to change the climate, we must change the system. Our hope is in what has changed, the global mobilization, led by young people. We urge all the forces of the workers' movement, the women's movements, the LGBTQI movements, the indigenous peoples all over the world directly massacred by predatory capitalism, the global anti-racist and anti-xenophobic movements, to wage together this fundamental struggle for a planet that is liveable for all.

Strikes and climate marches will again take place at the end of the week, on 27 and 28 September. Let us strengthen them, let us build together an international, massive and radical movement for social justice and climate justice.

Executive Bureau of the Fourth International

26 September 2019

The millennial generation's struggle for self-determination

26 September 2019, by Au Loong-Yu

Think Left: Is the current movement having any impact on the balance of political forces in Hong Kong?

Au: The main composition of this movement, on the one hand is the millennial generation and its most radical wing; the other is the Pan-Democrat parties (including right-wing localists and self-determinists on the fringe) represented by Civil Human Rights Front (CHRF) and other social organisations. There is no doubt that the former is leading the movement. It is their uncompromising determination that pushed the movement to its climax and finally forced the Chief Executive (Carrie) Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor to initially suspend and later withdraw the controversial extradition bill. However, we cannot deny the role of the latter. They have started to oppose the government's bill since March this year. They have been campaigning over the months, and the "militant faction" had not appeared then. The marches on 9th June and 16th June organized by CHRF,have played important supporting role, objectively speaking. At the same time, with the two currents deciding not to break away with the other, the anti-extradition movement possesses genuine popular character. Only the convergence of these two major currents effectively challenged the extradition bill. After the government compromised, we are still able to support the continuous fermentation of the movement until today.

Yet, when talk about developments after this, there is no doubt that the millennial generation's role is more crucial. In the first 150 years of Hong Kong's history, Hong Kong was a British colony; the latter 20 years, it became the colony of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The relationship between the CCP and Hong Kong is a form of internal colonization. It inherited from British the relationship between the centre and the periphery, to serve the economic goals of the colonial master/ Beijing through political control. Therefore, both did not allow Hong Kong, the economic city (the original obligation assigned by colonialism), to become a political city, and absolutely did not allow its residents to have genuine autonomy. The Pan-Democrat generation were willing to wait for the CCP to fulfill its promises, but by the time the millennial generation emerged, Hong Kongers had already waited for 40 years. Now the millennial generation comes out and says, "You are simply lying, and we are not going to wait again!" CCP only knows how to accuse those young people who are involved in anti-extradition bill protests for engaging in Hong Kong independence, but it does not realize that its act of "tearing down the bridge after crossing the river", violating its promise to grant autonomy for Hong Kong, and speeding up direct control over the city is causing the young generation to resist in desperation.

Standing together against foreign threats is a catalyst for forging a sense of belonging, identity and even national sentiment. This is something universal and Hong Kong is no exception. For the Yellow Ribbon masses, it is almost impossible to succeed without the identity of "Hong Konger". This identity firstly represents the desires of Hong Kongers to be their own masters and no longer bow down to others. The song of Hong Kong (which is the currently popular song "Glory to Hong Kong" written by netizens) can be seen as the representation of such sentiment. [1]

I have different opinion from equating "Hong Kong identity" to Hong Kong nationalism. Of course, most people who use this term now did not necessarily follow a rigorous definition. But I think a rigorous discussion on this would be worthwhile, analytically. At most you can say that many of the Yellow Ribbon masses already have a kind of sense of belonging to Hong Kong and even a Hong Kong national sentiment, but this does not mean "nationalism". Regarding "national identity" as the value that overrides everything, that is nationalism. But the Yellow Ribbon masses now, even some of the millennial generation, think it is not necessary for Hong Kong to be independent. For them, Hong Kong independence is just an aspiration, but also know that this is only part of a "dreaming". The movement today still limits its goal to the five main demands. If someone puts up a banner calling for Hong Kong independence or shouts slogans about that in the march, there will be people who will stop it. The adults know that Hong Kong independence is not very achievable (and only becomes imaginable if the Beijing government is defeated by the US imperialists). Whereas the radical youth are willing to compromise in order to unite with Yellow Ribbon masses in millions, and demand a greater autonomy, or at most only demand for self-determination – to decide their own fate in a broad sense – not independence, not pursuing independence at all cost.

Anyhow, this is the great leap in the thinking of Hong Kongers. Although the current movement is called the "anti-extradition bill protest movement", but in fact the movement has progressed far beyond opposition the extradition bill. Judging from the impact in the future, this movement can be called the "Millennial Self-Determination Movement", to distinguish itself from the previous democratic movement. [2]

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Think Left: What are the impacts of this movement to the ordinary citizens and civil society in Hong Kong?

Au: One of the contributions of the "Millennial Self-Determination Movement" is greatly politicized ordinary citizens, including the Blue Ribbon masses. Colonialism never wants the colonized people to be concerned about politics. Colonialism wants people to be comfortable in their position as subjects to the rulers. Hence, during elections, there are politicians who put up the slogan "don't talk about politics, only do practical things". Elections are inevitably political. The politics of not talking about politics, is in fact a desire for everyone to only concern themselves with "looking for food" (earning a living), and leave the politics to the rulers. This is indeed compatible with the humble mentality of many middle and lower class Chinese citizens: they want to maintain the social order to allow them to earn a living with peace of mind. This is also the foundation of the

thinking of the Blue Ribbon masses. In fact, a majority of the citizens thought like that previously. This is the consequence of 2000 years of absolute autocratic rule plus 170 years of colonial history.

The history of the Hong Kong democratic movement is actually quite short. It was mainly motivated by the '89 Democracy Movement. But when the United Democrats of Hong Kong (UDHK) won the most seats in the 1991 legislative council election, and after that demanding the colonial government to allow them to enter the Cabinet, they were scolded by the citizens. They said, "we elected you only to monitor the government, not for you to become part of the government". Many citizens, even those with democratic aspirations, still possess the mentality of a subject to rulers. Therefore, the transition to CCP rule in 1997 was very smooth.

But when the government wanted to legislate Hong Kong Basic Law Article 23 (on national security), only then did it stimulate the strong mentality among Hong Kongers to defend its autonomy. As many as 500,000 people took the streets. Although the CCP withdrew the bill, it continues to use different ways to shrink the autonomy, e.g. the implementation of so-called "National Education", using Putonghua (mandarin) as a teaching medium in school. Because the young generation are more sensitive to this, they continuously resisted, and this resistance developed to become the 2014 Umbrella Movement. It now appears that the Umbrella Movement was a rehearsal for the 2019 Millennial Self-Determination Movement. With 2 million people taking the streets in 16 June, this shows the movement has popular character. This is the second most powerful democratic movement in Chinese-populated territory in Greater China after the Democratization of Taiwan.

The ordinary Yellow Ribbon masses are even shifting gradually from sympathizing passively towards the radical youth who use force against police, to sympathizing actively and supporting such moves. This a massive explosion of masses after absorbing decades of lessons and experiences. With this massive explosion, our civil society has progressed to version 2.0.

Hong Kong civil society was not strong previously. There are indeed many political parties, trade unions, volunteer organisations etc in Hong Kong, but most of them are supported by full-time staff, and there is a lack of sufficient enthusiasm among their members, just support on paper. Initially in the Umbrella Movement, then in the current anti-extradition movement, we have witnessed the start of mass spontaneous action and strong volunteer work. This has become a great mass democratic movement.

Think Left: What is the class composition of the participants of this movement? What are the differences with the previous democratic movements in Hong Kong?

Au: This movement can be considered a popular movement excluding the capitalists and tycoons at the top. It includes petty bourgeois, middle class, working class, youth and students. But if we are talking about leadership, it is definitely the youth and students. I say youth and students here, because some militants or their active supporters, although young, are not students but already working. Youth and students tend to prefer an anarchistic model of movement – leaderless, without organization, emphasis on spontaneity, highly mobile. These are things that universal, not unique to Hong Kong. But such a model is not suitable for the working people. The militants have soon realized that without the participation of the working people, it is difficult for them to succeed. Hence, there is more emphasis on launching workers strikes and business strikes this time around compared to the Umbrella Movement.

The first political strike called (after the political strike in 1967 organised by Hong Kong communists) was in 1989 after the June Fourth incidents. The Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements in China called for a triple strike (workers strike, student strike and business strike) in 7th June 1989. But the Alliance cancelled the march on the day due the fear of alleged sabotage by CCP agents, and indirectly cancelled the triple strike. This has also predetermined that the workers movement in Hong Kong to only be the follower of Pan-Democrat parties, not able to have its own independent political voice. This is also why when the unions called for a strike during the Umbrella Movement it failed. During the anti-extradition movement, the unions called for a strike on 12 June and organized strike gatherings, but this was also not successful. Two months later when the movement gradually entered its climax, Hong Kong finally had its first political strike after 1967. The radical youth/students, trade unions and ordinary working people formed an actual alliance during the strike. About hundreds of thousands people did not report to work on the day, due to active or passive but sympathetic participation (because traffic was semi-paralyzed). The airline industry was half paralyzed because half of the members of Cathay Pacific employee union went on strike. Because of this political strike, the movement was pushed to a new climax. But after the bosses of Cathay Pacific reacted, the strike on 2nd and 3rd September was not successful. However, the successful strike on 5th August has already trained the young and working people of this generation. They have tasted for the first time the collective power as workers.

Yet, the future of a political workers movement is still very tough. Many left-wing friends from other countries ask: there is no demand about distributive justice in the five main demands, is it because poverty in Hong Kong has already been solved? Of course not. On the contrary, it is getting worse. But, although the workers movement in Hong Kong has its own elected legislators and political parties, it never took the initiative to decide on a political agenda, therefore it never proposed a workers program in the political democratic movement. This is of course not something accidental, and not solely the fault of the workers movement organisations. The working people in Hong Kong are deeply brainwashed by ideologies like free market and "individual responsibility", hence the real lack of class

consciousness. There was a survey lately which revealed that ordinary citizens are very concerned about the current political controversies, but not really paying much attention to whether we have enough social welfare or not. At the same time, some left-leaning youth tried to propose a sixth demand in the online forum LIHKG for discussion, to ask for attention on the problem of people's livelihood monopolized by corporations, but this was not able to get any response and discussion. We have a long way to go with regard to politicization of the workers movement. But a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step, and this moment has brought some opportunities.

Think Left: Can the current movement be compared to the struggle during the 1967 riots?

Au: In terms of the intensity of violence, what is happening now is far behind 1967. Hong Kong communists were setting up bombs all over Hong Kong then, now at most the demonstrators throw petrol bombs towards police during protests. The former injured many innocents, the latter is not comparable at all.

But the most important difference is political. The 1967 riots were the continuation of political struggle in Beijing, not the consequences of the intensification of internal class conflicts in Hong Kong. The starting point of the 1967 riots was a strike in a factory producing artificial flowers, but the whole movement in 1967 was called "anti-British against tyranny". How could a strike in a small factory develop into an armed struggle against the colonial government? When the Hong Kong communists talk about 1967, they like to say that the colonial government was so bad and thus caused the escalation of the movement. This is not the truth. After the June Fourth repressions, some high-level leaders within the former Hong Kong communist camp, like Jin Yaoru, have explained in detail the actual facts. It was during the peak of the Cultural Revolution, and the top officials in the Xinhua News Agency (China's national news agency) wanted to please the Gang of Four, and hence made use of the minor strike to create political riots in Hong Kong. It was the continuation of the mainland's Cultural Revolution in Hong Kong. At that time, the lower class citizens in Hong Kong really did not have a good impression of the colonial government, but the class contradiction then had no sign of intensification. Therefore the situation then did not allow a widespread political rebellion among the workers. The Hong Kong communists artificially created a mass political struggle, but ended up only sacrificing its own base, and caused the ordinary citizens to stay away from Hong Kong communists.

In contrary, the current anti-extradition movement is the consequence of the intensification of local class contradiction, which is the contradiction between the CCP's proxy group in Hong Kong and the majority of the citizens, the contradiction between the ruler and the ruled.

Think Left: We can see some rather right-wing symbolism during the anti-extradition bill movement, for example, some demonstrators carry the colonial flags, British flags or US flags, some even call for US intervention. What is your view on this? Is there inclination towards far-right ideology among the protesters? Moreover, some say that US imperialism was the mastermind behind this protest movement. What is your view on this?

Au: This question in fact is complex, and we can discuss it by dividing into few layers. Everyone knows, the number of people who carry US flags has increased in the current movement, but for a movement with the participation of millions it is only a very small minority. Of course we can further ask, why do the masses beside not intervene? They don't intervene because most of the people think that there is no specific need to go against it – the enemy of my enemy is my friend. This is the practical view of many people, but it is different from actively supporting it.

Secondly, Hong Kongers generally are not sensitive towards national flags and national emblems. Now they are only sensitive to things related to CCP. The experiences of Hong Kongers are very much different from most of the former colonies in the world. After WWII, we have never developed a local-born anti-colonial movement. The Hong Kong communists did engage in anti-colonial struggle in 1967, but after their failure, they quickly went back to the policy of "using Hong Kong in the long term", and collaborated with the British to keep Hong Kong "stable and prosperous". The kind of Young Left like us who emerged in the 1970s, feel very disgusted about the collaboration of Hong Kong communists with the British rulers. Our slogan during that time was "Anti-Capitalism, Anti-Colonialism, Anti-Bureaucracy". But the new generation Left was very small then with little influence. The Hong Kongers then were generally politically apathetic. The had no choice but to accept their status as colonial subjects, and not thinking much beyond that. The lack of anti-colonial experience made the ordinary Hong Kongers not very sensitive towards national flags which represent national identity, unlike other countries. Besides that, due to ignorance, they do not understand the political meaning represented by each national flag, except China's Five Star Flag.

Thirdly, we have to acknowledge that the average Hong Konger is close to the West. This is not surprising. This is the soft power of the West. Since the 1950s, everyone loves to watch movies from the Europe, US and Japan. Especially since the Cultural Revolution, how many people still like to watch movies from mainland China? The Hong Kong communists and their so-called patriotic film companies did make films that were popular among the lower class people before the Cultural Revolution, but when Cultural Revolution arrived, this destroyed the little soft power they had. The so-called patriotic films disappeared from the cinemas after the 1970s.

Behind this phenomenon, were the inevitable consequences of the total failure of the so-called socialism practised by CCP, which degenerated into a worse form of capitalism. The top leaders of CCP are also very pro-West, thus they send their children to

study in the Europe and US, and themselves also desperately move their wealth to the West. Today's Fenqing (literally means "angry youth", usually refers to Chinese youth who display a high level of Chinese nationalism) do not know about the dirty history of their top leaders, hence they blindly support their so-called patriotism. The Hong Kongers have been observing the mainland for 70 years, and this compels them to be pro-West and stay away from Beijing. Failure to recognize this means the refusal to acknowledge the fact.

Lastly, let's talk about the so-called "foreign forces". Beijing is continuously talking about the danger of "foreign forces". But Beijing itself is not against all foreign forces, it behaves in a highly selective way. Beijing is well aware about the advantages of foreign forces, it knows how to influence the autocratic state like North Korea to be its cheerleader. They do not mind that the British police officers in the Hong Kong Police beat up the Chinese protesters in Hong Kong. Why does Hong Kong still have hundreds of British police officers? This goes back to the root, back to Deng Xiaoping and Hong Kong Basic Law. The "One Country Two System" itself was the product of compromise between Deng Xiaoping and foreign forces. The CCP wanted to get rid of its poor conditions, but it wanted more to enrich itself through the capitalist restoration, and so definitely wanted to compromise with the British and US. Deng was sleeping with the enemy, and this gave birth to the baby called Hong Kong Basic Law.

The first thing guaranteed under the Basic Law is the interests of British and Americans in Hong Kong: whether the continuation of the use of English as the official language, or the continuation of the Common Law system, or to allow the Hong Kong courts to employ foreign judges, or to allow the Hong Kongers to hold British passports, or Article 101 that stipulates that foreigners can continue to hold positions as civil servants or advisors which in fact means the pledge not to clean up the existing colonial era civil service. Then you have the other side of the story, which is allowing British police officers to "beat up the Chinese". The One Country Two System promised by Beijing, is fundamentally to allow the foreign forces to flourish here, to allow the British and US to retain theirs strong influence, including the influence on the Pan-Democrat parties, media and middle class professionals. This is a historical privilege promised formally by Beijing to the Europeans and Americans.

We should not only read the mainland's propaganda, but should see the essence of the CCP's interests, that is they relied on the foreign forces to assimilate into the global capitalist system and become rich. Now Xi Jinping thought China has grown stronger, and can already "tear down the bridge after crossing the river", and abandon Deng Xiaoping's policies. He then introduced things like the extradition bill to push ahead of schedule the total direct control over Hong Kong. But when the CCP broke its promise to the Europe and US, at the same time hoping they are not going to retaliate. Isn't this foolishness?

From a left-wing perspective, we are not supporting the CCP. It has taken the capitalist path from the beginning. The historical interests of workers is to overcome capitalism, to build an egalitarian society. And what we mean by egalitarian, firstly is the withering away of the state apparatus and capitalist logic, not enhancing them. But the Left should not be just dream about utopia. The Left should first become realistic activists. In the face of the Sino-American struggle for global hegemony, we surely do not support either side. But in terms of the concrete situation in Hong Kong, the CCP is really worse than the British colonial government. I am not someone who is nostalgic towards the colonial era. On the contrary, I have been against colonialism since my teenage years. But at least the British were not forcing us to sing their national anthem, and did not mention any legislation related to national anthems. But the CCP insists on doing this, and this venomous measure is just a small part of many other more venomous policies.

This goes back to a fundamental question: We do not support free market capitalism. But CCP's capitalism is worse. I call it bureaucratic capitalism. It merges the two most important powers, which is the coercive power of the state and the unlimited accumulative power of the capital, into its own hand. This gives a new and more terrifying life to the term "totalitarianism". Such totalitarianism is far uglier than free market capitalism. Especially for us in Hong Kong, of course we have to spend 90% of our strength to resist the CCP, and we have to know how to strategically use international geopolitics. But this does not mean that we agree with the illusion that the US government is the real flag-bearer of democracy. At the moment the pro-US forces in Hong Kong are pushing the US Congress to pass the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act. I have written an article in Ming Pao recently, pointing out the problem of this act, which binds human rights in Hong Kong with problematic US foreign policy.

Think Left: What are the impacts of the current political crisis to the region's politics?

Au: The most important impact is on the general public in mainland China. We know from the media, that the CCP selectively blocked news reports and spread lies in mainland China, and already instigated many people to hate Hong Kongers. Everything has two sides – when you provoke too much, it could end up in a mess. When (Carrie) Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor announced the withdrawal of the controversial extradition bill, Beijing officials were embarrassed and had to deal with it in a low profile manner. But there are still people questioning. "Why do you compromise with the 'terrorists'? How are you going to answer to the Hong Kong Police who are trying to put down the 'riot'?" No wonder now the Beijing officials do not secretly organize marches like during the previous anti-Japanese movement, and only limit themselves to psy-wars on media. Its political weakness today has reached the level that it wants to fan the sentiment of narrow nationalism, but is also frightened that the latter might grow out of control.

There are more people in China who are not supporting the government, but keep silent to protect themselves.

Then there are several pro-Democracy people in mainland China who are still openly supporting the movement in Hong Kong despite paying a heavy price for it.

The most critical strategic choice for the Hong Kongers after this, is whether to appeal to the people of mainland China to be their ally, to fight for democracy in the mainland and in Hong Kong together; or continue with the principle of not interfering each other, or in the worst case by taking the position of the right-wing localists who attack all the mainland Chinese people as "locusts". Choosing the former, will be broad path, and the latter will be a dead-end. Looking back at the current movement, its character is that no political party has the leadership role; the way forward for the movement is spontaneously determined by masses who have not much political experiences and background. From their actual activities, the two tendencies mentioned above exist in a vague form. There was a march during the movement, to appeal to travellers from the mainland to understand the objective of this Hong Konger movement. At the other hand, there are some localized activities that are targeting traders from mainland, using discriminatory language. The task of the Left to encourage the progressive tendencies, at the same time resist all kinds of bad tendencies. Pointing fingers within the movement is the most useless thing to do.

Think Left: The Chief Executive has Carrie Lam has formally announced the withdrawal of the controversial extradition bill after three month of mass protests and uprisings. But it seems won't help much in calming the situations in Hong Kong as there are other important demands that put forward by the protesters not being met yet, especially the demand on universal suffrage. What do you think about the state of the movement now? How will it develop from here?

Au: From the beginning until now, the anti-extradition bill movement has two important components: the Yellow Ribbon masses and the radical youth. The latter as the frontline of actions, whereas the former as defenders. When both converge, the movement reaches its climax; when they diverge, it will decline. Since June 2019, the trend is to converging gradually. And since the end of August 2019, it seems the movement is crossing another hurdle, that is the ordinary citizens also sympathize with the radical youth who resist the police with force. If one day even the ordinary citizens participate in actual resistance with force, then it possibly will lead to a revolutionary situation. "The rulers can no more rule with the existing form, and the people are not going to tolerate this government". But now we have not seen the determination of the masses to cross this hurdle, because to completely cross over it will have to prepare for a much bigger price to pay, and it is still unknown how many of the masses are willing to take the risk. Secondly, although the political strike on 5th August was a success initially, the strike on 2nd and 3rd September was not successful. Thus it is not easy for the workers movement to continue to reach its peak. Because of this, the movement is at a bottleneck, although the momentum is not declining yet, it is also not able to escalate. Inability to escalate means that it will be more difficult to win the other four demands. Because Beijing today will not compromise easily. Under such circumstances, if the militants continue to increase its resistance, it could risk fighting alone.

Think Left: What is your hope for the future of this movement?

Au: I think the movement should realize now, that the difficulty of escalation is because of the inherent deficiencies of the movement. In fact, if it is able to escalate and develop into a revolution, within the city, it will be crushed by the CCP very soon. Under the situation that there is no political breakthrough in the mainland China, revolution in one city of Hong Kong will not succeed. And because this is so obvious, thus it is unrealistic to ask the adults and working people to overthrow the Hong Kong government at all costs. We had better abandon the thinking of "the final battle", to be clear about the long-term nature of the democratic struggle. We need to move towards long-term resistance, retaining the strength of the present movement and consolidating its coordination and organization. We especially need to be clear on the strategic positioning of the movement – whether to unite with the democratic movement in mainland China, or build a democratic movement with the Shenzhen River as the boundary?

September 25, 2019

Source ***Think Left*** *"The millennial generation's struggle for self-determination (Special interview on Hong Kong)".*

Footnotes

[1] *Think Left* note: Yellow Ribbon means the supporters of Pan-Demorats or anti-establishment camp who support universal suffrage; while Blue Ribbon means the supporters of pro-establishment camp.

[2] *Think Left* note: The five main demands of the movement are – 1. Full withdrawal of the extradition bill from the legislative process; 2. Establishment of an independent commission of inquiry into police behaviour; 3. Retraction of the characterisation of the protests as "riots"; 4. Release and exoneration of arrested protesters; 5. Universal suffrage for Legislative Council and Chief Executive elections.

The New York City Student Climate Strike

25 September 2019, by Barry Sheppard

Then CNN switched to the march and rallies in New York City underway. The reporter, surrounded by chanting and noisy young people with all kinds of signs, many homemade, was visibly affected, smiling and excited. He said there were hundreds of thousands converging on Battery Park at the lower tip of Manhattan island for a rally.

Then came reports of the actions in country after country around the world, in the imperialist centers and in many of the poor countries of the periphery, with estimates of a total of some four million participating. In some countries, including New Zealand, Spain and Canada, actions were postponed to the following Friday, September 27.

I had no idea that September 20 would be so huge. Greta Thunberg said to a reporter as she marched in New York, "I never predicted this."

It was just over a year ago that Greta, now 16 years old, began skipping school every Friday to protest in front of the Swedish parliament, demanding action to prevent catastrophic climate change. Her action sparked student climate strikes at first in Sweden and then in many countries, culminating in the greatest coordinated demonstration of students and youth in history. Her spark landed on the flammable tinder of millions of young people ready to embrace her message.

I do not know how it happened, but these snowballing actions were organized by young people locally, nationally and internationally, with some help from adult climate crisis groups. This fact alone shows that a layer of young leaders has emerged, and formed networks.

Greta's message was that the looming climate catastrophe threatens the future of young people everywhere, who will bear its brunt. Addressing the adult world internationally, one chant in New York was "You had a future, and so should we!"

Before the September 20 climate strike, Greta addressed the U.S. Congress. This what she said: "I have not come to offer any prepared remarks at this hearing. I am instead attaching my testimony. It is the IPCC [International Governmental Panel on Climate Change] Special Report on global Warming of 1.5 Degrees Celsius, the SR1.5, which was released on October 8, 2018. I am submitting this report as my testimony because I don't want you to listen to me, I want you to listen to the scientists, and I want you to unite behind the scientists, and I want you to unite behind the science. And then I want you to take real action. Thank you."

While there were actions in some 50 cities in the U.S., some in the tens of thousands as in San Francisco, the largest was in New York, on the eve of the September 23 United Nations Climate Action Summit.

The New York demonstration started in Foley Square, across from New York City Hall. Some 60,000 gathered there for a rally to kick off the march. Many joined as the march wound through downtown Manhattan toward Battery Park on the lower tip of the island. There were other feeder contingents on different routes, and people who went directly to the Battery, resulting in over an estimated quarter of a million demonstrators.

Democracy Now had reporters covering the marches and rallies. At the Foley Square initial rally, two of the speakers Democracy Now covered were Varshini Prakash, cofounder and director of the youth Sunrise Movement, and Vic Barrett from the Garifuna peoples of the Caribbean island of Saint Vincent. Here are short excerpts from their speeches.

Vic Barrett: "My people are an Afro-indigenous community…. Despite overwhelming adversity, we organized our community and emancipated ourselves from [French then British] colonization. My ancestors did this to protect the children to come. I am one of those children.

"But the struggle continues for me and my people. Again we are being pushed from the lands we settled, the lands that my family has inhabited for generations. That land will be underwater in a few decades if we continue on the path we are on.…

"Indigenous lands all over the planet are being flooded, poisoned and destroyed. My Black brothers and sisters are being gunned down by police. Migrant children are dying at the border. Trans folks are being murdered. Violence is in the air that we breathe ….

"Some would think that there's no more room for destruction. But I think that all of us here know that, for decades, our [United States] government and governments around the world have consciously put in place policies that have caused the climate crisis we find ourselves in, an emerging crisis threatening my generation with untold violence. But that is an old story, right? We're here to write a new story ….

"In 2030 the history books will show that faced with imminent destruction, people on the frontlines fought back; that young people rose up around the world to demand immediate action; that starting on this day, September 20, 2019, everything began to change."

Varshini Prakash: "When I first learned about the climate crisis as a kid …. I felt alone and small and powerless. And I know that is what many young people are feeling right now.

"We have grown up seeing the political establishment fail us. For as twice as long as I have been alive on this planet, we have known about the crisis. For just as long, the wealthy and the powerful have profited off pollution, have lied to millions of people about the science, have choked our democracy with their Big Oil

dollars and stolen our futures.

"Today, this generation is taking over! Our days of waiting for justice, our days of waiting for action, our days of waiting to be heard are over! Today we are putting our feet in the streets, and we are not stopping until we get it done! Today, kids don't have to feel small and alone and powerless, because we have a movement that is globally shaking the roots of our society…."

Along the march Democracy Now interviewed activists. Here are a few of them, interspersed with crowd chants around them:

Climate strikers: "Hey, hey, ho ho, climate change has got to go!"

Isabella: "I'm 12 years old. And I'm here today because I believe that age doesn't matter. And, sure, we can't vote, but we still have a voice here. The Earth is really messed up. We should have fixed it a while ago. And it's just not fair."

Crowd: "We are trying! Trump is lying! The Earth is dying!"

Isabella: "I get really worried about our future, because I keep seeing posts that say 'Oh yeah, by 2030, the world would be at its peak, that we can't do anything anymore.' And I keep thinking, 'Why don't people listen, when things are right in front of their face?' "

Daphne Frias: "I'm 21 years old. I'm a born-and-raised New Yorker from West Harlem. The reason I'm here is because I'm tired of climate inaction. I'm tired of our world leaders ignoring what's really happening to our Earth, and profiting off of the extinction of our planet, prioritizing profit over lives instead of lives over profit.

"Being Latina, my Latina community disproportionately faces climate change because of the institutions that are placed in our communities. We have fossil fuel plants. We have garbage waste plants and many other infrastructures that pollute our environment ….

"But also, my being disabled …. We don't have the privilege to up and leave when a natural disaster occurs …."

Crowd: "What do we want? Climate justice! When do we want it? Now!"

Alina Hassan: 'I'm from the Bronx High School of Science. And my sign says Exxon Mobile knew about climate change 50 years ago, and they did nothing about it. They actually paid money so they could deny it. They spread propaganda against climate change. And we need to hold them accountable."

Crowd: "Exxon knew! Exxon knew! We are unstoppable! Another world is possible!"

At the huge rally in Battery Park, two of the speakers were Artemisa Xakriabá and Greta Thunberg. Here are short excerpts from their speeches.

Artemisa Xakriabá: "I am 19 years old, and I am from the Xakriabá people in Brazil. I am here today representing the more than 25 million indigenous and traditional communities from the Global Alliance of Territorial Communities. This alliance is formed by four organizations [from Brazil, the Amazon Basin, Central America, and Indonesia]. Together, we protect 600 million hectares of forest.

"But I am also here as a young woman, because there's no difference between an indigenous young female activist like myself … and a young female activist like Greta. Our future is connected by the same threads of the climate crisis.

"The Amazon is on fire. The Amazon agonizes year after year for the responsibility of the government and its destructive policies that intensify deforestation and drought …. Climate change is a result of this, and it also helps to make the fires stronger. And beyond the Amazon, there are the fires of Indonesia, Africa, North America, whose suffering has such and impact in my life and in your life.

"We, the indigenous peoples, are the children of nature, so we fight for Mother Earth …. We are fighting for your lives. We are fighting for our lives. We are fighting for our sacred territory. But we are being persecuted, threatened, murdered, only for protecting our own territories. We cannot accept one more drop of indigenous blood spilled."

Greta Thunberg: "Right now we are the ones who are making a difference. If no one else will take action, then we will …. But we are not just some young people skipping school or some adults who are not going to work. We are a wave of change. Together and united, we are unstoppable …. We will hold those most responsible for this crisis accountable, and we will make the world leaders act. We can, and we will. And if you belong to that small group of people who feel threatened by us, then we have some very bad news for you, because this is only the beginning. Change is coming, whether they like it or not."

On September 23, the UN Climate Action Summit of world leaders was held. The New York Times reported, "Despite the protests in the streets, China made no new promises to take stronger action. The United States … said nothing at all [Trump listened for ten minutes, then left]. A host of countries made only incremental promises."

Greta Thunberg attended the meeting, and spoke. Her voice quivering with rage, she attacked those present for their inaction. One thing she said was "People are suffering. People are dying. Entire ecosystems are collapsing. We are in the beginning of a mass extinction, and all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth. How dare you!"

She concluded, "The eyes of all future generations are upon you. If you choose to fail us, I say we will never forgive you."

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The Day After Macri's Downfall

24 September 2019, by Martín Mosquera

By
Martín Mosquera

The thumping electoral defeat of neoliberal president Mauricio Macri is a major political event that marks the opening of a whole new situation in Argentina.

By voting overwhelmingly for the Peronist candidate Alberto Fernández in the August primaries, the country's popular classes discovered a way to censure the governing right-wing coalition and express their wholesale rejection of austerity politics. The outcome also carries strong implications for the rest of the region, hopefully foreshadowing the defeat of Trump, Bolsonaro, and the wider Latin American right, whose continental plans are now partially destabilized by the loss of a strategically vital associate in Macri.

The tentative victory (October's general elections will confirm what is already a near-irreversible numerical advantage) is also a popular triumph insofar as it injects the working class with a greater sense of confidence, lifts up social expectations previously trampled under Macri's administration, and, looking ahead, may very well provide the spark needed for a renewed struggle for social conquests lost in the intervening period.

In a sense, the election itself was a belated expression of four years of popular struggle against the Macri government. However, this victory is also deeply ambiguous, contradictory, and could quickly dissolve if not accompanied by mass social mobilization.

The defeat of Argentina's right was achieved by channeling popular support towards the moderate figure of Fernández. Leading up to that moment were several key episodes. In the months before the primaries, ex-president Cristina Kirchner decided to cede the presidential candidacy to Fernández in an act heavy with symbolism, its intended audience being first and foremost the ruling class.

To understand the significance of that gesture, it is important to recall that Fernández and Cristina Kirchner had a serious falling out in 2008, when then-president Kirchner entered into open hostility with the "establishment." Fernández jumped ship at the precise moment when Kirchnerismo declared war with the rural oligarchy and the media monopoly of Grupo Clarín.

More than a reconciliation of differences, the new Fernández-Kirchner ticket is the crowning achievement of a strategy pursued by Kirchnerismo to adapt to the current conjuncture. That strategy has in its sights: restoration and reincorporation with the traditional Peronist apparatus, renewed commitment to the IMF and international finance capital, and assurances of governability and mutual understanding with local dominant classes.

Much has been made of Cristina's "power play" opting out of the presidential race and handpicking as her presidential running mate a moderate figure from outside the Kirchnerist rank and file. Her true cunning, however, was to recognize that Cristina herself, widely despised by part of the middle and upper classes, was her own greatest obstacle to the more moderate governing strategy she wished to pursue.

A fine-tooth reading of the electoral results reveals both the strength of Argentina's anti-Macri, anti-neoliberal struggles and the limits of those same struggles. With little to show in terms of significant social victories over the last four years, the neoliberal offensive in full swing, and a lack of an alternative mass politics that could embody a radical solution to Argentina's crisis, it seems that a "minimalist realism" has become widespread among the populace. And that mood plays into the hands of the type of governance offered by the current moderate Peronist vehicle.

That's all to say, there is a tension within the popular consciousness: between elevated expectations for a return to the redistributive politics of the "Pink Tide" (more ideological, although more progressive in its effects) and a certain "possibilism" (more realist in terms of its expectations for the future government, but also more demobilizing) that would be content to soften the current austerity regime. In other words, Fernández's victory is progressive to a great extent for what it sets out to attenuate, inspiring a sense of confidence among popular sectors that the neoliberal onslaught can at least be halted in its tracks.

Managing the Crisis

Macri's defeat has reignited an ongoing crisis that, until relatively recently, appeared to be momentarily contained. The day after primary elections the Argentine peso was devalued by 25 percent and the price of stocks and bonds plunged to historic lows. The term "financial terrorism" became commonplace: the behavior of the "markets" had revealed capital's impersonal, authoritarian side, betraying its narrow conception of democratic politics. The interests of concentrated capital, unhappy with the election outcome, acted decisively with their customary methods to impose strict conditions on the incoming government: runs on the stock market and capital flight.

But there was another, simpler story behind the shock-and-awe of "financial terrorism." With Macri's defeat it has become painfully clear that the country's debt and the financial architecture holding it up are simply unsustainable, no matter how much Trump and the IMF attempted to

provide a lifeline for Macri's reelection and the continuance of the current economic policy. Desperate, Macri himself effectively allowed the latest run on the national currency to follow its course when he could have intervened, acting instead as the political instrument for the market's "faceless authoritarianism." "Vote that way and you face the consequences" the president announced in a press conference the day after elections.

The Argentine head-of-state issued an apology for that statement two days later, in what amounted to a confession of the government's political isolation and disorientation as it rapidly loses support among its capitalist backers, mainstream media, and even key partisan alliances, all of whom are now calling for an orderly transition to the incoming Peronist government.

The peculiar nature of the Argentine electoral system, with obligatory primaries that hardly qualify as primaries, is feeding into a political crisis whose outcome is anyone's guess. The government's downfall is irreversible and yet there is no new authority invested with the formal power to govern, much less any elected parliamentarian bloc representing the incoming political force. And this intensified crisis could produce a spectacular collapse within Macri's already debilitated party coalition.

There is also the prospect of the current chaos escalating into an economic crisis of even larger proportions. The 25 percent devaluation of the national currency in just one day is an enormous blow to popular income. But that shock was already anticipated and even encouraged by Alberto Fernández, who during his campaign declared on more than one occasion that the Argentine peso was overvalued. Fernández's goal is clear enough: let Macri do the "dirty work" in the months to come, depressing wages and letting austerity follow its course, so that the economy can rebound when he assumes office.

Moreover, the collapse of Macrismo and the national economy will also grant Fernández more political currency, greater presidential authority, and an excuse to assume a posture of passivity in the face of continued austerity measures.

However, faced with the possibility that Macri could leave the nation's fiscal situation in the red, particularly after having launched a series of "populist" measures to attenuate the escalating social crisis, or that the crisis itself could become so severe as to jeopardize future governability, Fernández also needs to subtly temper confrontation with cooperation and work in concert with the outgoing conservative administration.

With his hand forced by the escalating crisis, Macri has adopted a set of interventionist measures: capital controls (a true "cultural defeat" for Macrismo, whose flagship opposition to market interventionism distinguished them from Kirchnerismo) and the declaration of a partial default on short-term debt, both of which will lay the groundwork for the next government.

The Fernández-Kirchner ticket is buoyed by the rapid implosion of Macri's Cambiemos coalition. Different from other episodes in national history where a major crisis served as a pretext for austerity, the "Kirchnerist model" never saw the kind of major explosion that would have justified the type of measures implemented by the Argentine right over the last four years. Instead, the current course of events begs the question whether the kind of "catastrophic crisis," of the type that Macri would have preferred for the administration before him, will not cut short Argentina's short-lived and unprecedented experiment in right-wing "democratic" governance.

The Specter of Inflation

Should the national economy go into an inflationary spiral, or the crisis reach hyperinflationary levels and destroy the national currency (still a distant possibility), the consequences would introduce an added dimension of unpredictability. As Perry Anderson once remarked while speaking in Buenos Aires: "there is a functional equivalent to the trauma of the military dictatorship, inducing a people through democratic and non-coercive means to accept the most drastic neoliberal policies: hyperinflation."

Hyperinflation acts as a collective trauma whereby the entire social order as such begins to break apart, opening the door to appeals for stability at any cost and a generalized, paralyzing sense of fear. As Adrían Piva notes regarding Argentina's hyperinflationary spiral of 1989: "In a society where relations between individuals are mediated by monetary exchange, a crisis of the currency is, at the same time, a process of generalized social dissolution."

The current inflationary spiral is not necessarily attributed to the government and is often portrayed as a "spontaneous" process with no immediate guilty parties. This makes any type of unified political struggle difficult. In such a scenario, capital looks to bend the will of the working class with the threat of spiraling prices and a devalued national currency, undermining popular income and social relations at large.

Still, an inflationary spiral can fail in its disciplinary goals if the working class succeeds in pushing against established wage limits. This took place in Argentina during the crisis of 1975, and again between 1981-1982. Faced with that challenge, the dominant classes sometimes will accommodate and opt for stability rather than fanning the flames of an intense wage battle. And when this does take place, not only is the blow to wages softened, the existing material loss of the working class is compensated with greater consciousness, combativeness, and class autonomy.

1975, 1981-82, 1989, 2001-2; the successive crises to the national economy have repeated the same basic pattern that Argentina is currently witnessing: violent devaluations, high inflation, a fall in wages, and worsened labor conditions. But the outcome of these crises was not always the same for the working class.

In 1975, the Argentine workers' movement defeated the economic plan of Isabel Perón and Celestino Rodrigo, waging an intense class battle that was only put down by the imposition of a military dictatorship. The 2001 crisis likewise marked the beginning of a watershed moment in Argentina's modern history, producing a popular uprising that saw the power of the dominant classes significantly curtailed.

By way of contrast, the crisis of 1989-1991 inaugurated the infamous decade of neoliberal restructuring led by president Carlos Menem. In other words, crisis is a moment of radical uncertainty in which the relation between social classes can be redrawn in a decisive manner.

That said, Argentina's left — its social movements, trade-union organizations and political parties — needs to place a wager on the current conjuncture: that Macri's defeat, bringing with it a renewed level of confidence for popular struggles, can be extended into a deeper cycle of struggles capable of preventing the destruction of wages and a broader social defeat.

And this in turn means giving a hard look at the "new Peronism" that will soon be taking the reins of government. Here, for the Left, the issue is not only the political class — it also means analyzing the powerful Peronist apparatus that steers mass politics through its intermediaries in trade-union leadership and social movements.

Peronism's Eternal Return

One again, due its enduring relevance in the political arena, the present time is as good as any to revisit the theoretical and political enigma posed by Peronism. And to do so we need to consider one of its fundamental pillars: Argentina's organized labor movement.

According to much of Marxist literature, trade-union bureaucracy serves a dual function. It acts on the one hand as a force of containment, pacification, and integration of the workers' movement into the state. On the other hand, in order to accomplish that it needs to maintain a real presence in the working class, mobilizing certain struggles and satisfying certain demands.

This dual nature also applies to the contradictory status enjoyed by the trade-union bureaucracy. On the one hand, the bureaucracy is situated at a strategic location to exploit its dual nature (drawing on the strength of the state and the workers' movement as needed), while an attack on the workers' movement can just as well turn into an attack on the bureaucracy's own survival.

Argentina's trade-union bureaucracy, like most, is deeply conservative, but the conservation of its status has often been tied up with the defense of the victories of the workers' movement. Today in Argentina, where the working class is more heterogeneous and fragmented than in the "old workers' movement", this aspect of the trade-union bureaucracy often extends to the leadership of the country's "new social movements" (the feminist movement is the exception, where much of its dynamism and combativeness can be explained by its resistance to institutionalization and bureaucracy).

Latin American populism, like classic European "worker reformism," reproduces a number of the contradictory features of trade-union bureaucracy. Better still, a classic instance of populism like Peronism can be understood as the state representative of trade-union bureaucracy.

In Argentina, Peronism fulfilled the role that European social democracy played during the welfare state era. Increased productivity during the "Fordist era" and postwar growth allowed for a transaction that was as much typical of Argentina as other Western states: the working class accepted discipline, monotony, and exploitation in exchange for greater access to consumption.

In more general terms, the working class managed to politically subordinate aspects of the capitalist regime in exchange for the workers' own social subordination. This transaction brought with it an institutionalization of the class struggle, with trade unions being integrated into the state in a manner typical of that era's class compromise between labor and capital (be it through social democracy, Latin American populism, labor parties, etc.).

But Peronism is an opaque and complex phenomenon that resists facile comparison. One feature setting it apart is its incredible political elasticity.

Like so many other dependent nations of the time (the mid-1940s), Peronism was characterized by an admixture of anti-imperialism and nationalist ideology. Lacking any connection to Marxist mass-based politics or democratic workers' culture, Peronism was from its origins subject to the personal control of a charismatic caudillo.

Its principal ideological sources were heterogeneous but overwhelmingly anti-communist: social Christianity, military nationalism, and popular conservatism. Those values, combined with political verticalism, cultural conservatism, and a carefully managed, economically empowered working-class, formed what has come to be known as "historic Peronism" or the "First Peronism."

But the story of Peronism did not end in the mid-1950s when Perón was overthrown in a military coup. The ensuing decade saw the heavily Peronist working class transform into a clandestine resistance force, fighting against the military dictatorship and their own political proscription. The late 1960s and 1970s witnessed another renovation of the Peronist identity, this time reaching a new generation of radicalized youths who would lead what is known as "revolutionary Peronism." That process of radicalization was finally interrupted in 1976 with the military junta.

Peronism would go on to experience further mutations in the post-dictatorship period. It was ultimately Carlos Menem, a lifelong Peronist, who during the 1990s spurred the aggressive capitalist restructuring of the national economy along neoliberal lines, effectively altering the developmentalist pattern of

accumulation that Peronism itself had developed since the 1940s.

Within the Peronist tradition, the phenomenon known as "Menemism" should serve today as a cautionary lesson against the logic of lesser-evilism. Menem managed to resolve Argentina's hyper-inflationary crisis in a peculiar manner, pegging the national currency to the dollar and pursuing a program of aggressive economic liberalization that, in the first years of his government, enabled the formal sector of the working class to enjoy considerable consumption benefits. The trade-union sector largely accompanied this process.

But Menem was also radically dismantling national industry and his liberalization program was causing the ranks of the unemployed to grow. All in all, a brief period of enhanced consumption power for the working class was enough to buy their consent, active or passive, for the country's savage neoliberal restructuring.

In some cases, the very same political leadership that the masses recognize as their own are the ones capable of imposing damaging policies that go against their interest, particularly through control of the trade unions. Gramsci analyzed such processes under the name of "transformism."

Under these conditions, it is just as often demoralization and a sense of a "lack of an alternative" — even more than explicit consent — that turns these political formations into an effective tool for the capitalist offensive. An example: it was Margaret Thatcher's historic rival, the Labour Party, that installed the idea that There is No Alternative — Thatcher herself, ever the lucid conservative, recognized that her greatest political triumph was the neoliberal incarnation of Labour under Tony Blair.

Generally speaking, when these types of restructuring processes are carried out by political phenomena characterized by "class conciliation," they are also accompanied by what Gramsci called "attenuating measures." For example, it was Mitterrand's Socialist Party, coming off the back of the PCF-supported, progressive "Programme commun," rather than Gaullist conservatism that introduced neoliberalism in France. That historical background explains to a large extent the so-called "French exceptionality," basically bypassing the anti-popular shock measures of Thatcher and allowing for the continuance of worker conquests in the midst of the neoliberal offensive.

For and Against Hope

These examples need to be kept in mind as we await the next incarnation of Peronism, which will no doubt be different from both of its post-transition incarnations: Menemismo and Kirchnerismo. The next administration will be seeking to impose a settlement between wages and prices in the hopes of taming inflation, favoring wage and currency depreciation so as to encourage exports and reactivate the economy based on the competitivity afforded by a devalued currency.

But unlike the economic scenario in which Néstor Kirchner took office in 2003 — following a 300 percent mega-devaluation of the peso — there are no guarantees that austerity and the combination of depreciated salaries and wages will be sufficient to kick-start a cycle of growth.

The future government will have to renegotiate with the IMF, in a scenario that recalls similar situations in Greece and, more recently, the Ukraine. Argentina's debt stands at nearly 100 percent of GDP and the nation is clearly incapable of servicing short-term debt commitments.

Some argue that the unprecedented amount of loans granted to Argentina by the IMF pose a risk to the organism itself, suggesting that the entity might even adopt a more lenient attitude than in the aforementioned cases. Whatever the case, Fernández has given abundant signs of his eagerness to negotiate, meaning that there will be no recourse to using a potential "unilateral suspension of payments" as a negotiating chip (the same "Plan B" was lacking in the case of Syriza).

Moreover, it is hard to imagine that the IMF will be more benevolent with a government that, unlike the Macri administration, is not "one of its own." All signs point to a quid pro quo in which any type of renegotiation of debt payment will be conditional on some form of "structural adjustment": labor and fiscal reform, albeit in a more moderate version than would have been the case under Macri.

The new Peronist government will immediately face the challenge of tamping down an inflamed struggle for the distribution of wealth, only momentarily placated by the electoral cycle and the expectations of a new government. While running a serious, competitive campaign, Peronism has been careful to temper the elevated social expectations that their own victory might stimulate: no "compromise" on wage regression is possible without also taking measures to control the ensuing social conflict, and with it, popular expectations.

Hence the leading voices of Peronism are eager to discourage popular mobilization (effected through the trade-unions and social movements under their influence). Meanwhile popular and working-class wages continue to deteriorate.

Only by combating these tendencies towards social pacification does it become possible to unlock the explosive potential of Argentina's current political moment. The popular sectors are restless and Peronism itself is not immune to pressures from below. Although hesitant and tepid, some sectors of Peronist trade unionism and social movements are beginning to pronounce their action plans.

Argentina's piquetero movement (unemployed and informal workers) may once again take center stage, acting as the "weak link" in a chain that is meant to uphold a policy of social demobilization. If the country enters into an inflationary spiral, the likelihood of a return of the piquetero figure will only increase and could prove of vital importance in preventing a neoliberal solution to the crisis like the one taking place in 1989. But the history of the piquetero movement itself has not been immune

to national history, and in recent years it has shown signs of accommodation, particularly through forms of social assistance. All the same, it contains semi-insurrectional reserves that might again be activated when "there is nothing left to lose."

Left-wing trade unionism in Argentina faces the uphill battle of advocating for broad, unified spaces where the regression of wages and living conditions can be effectively challenged. For the most radical sectors of the workers' movement, this will mean engaging with Peronist trade unions and resisting the time-honored tradition of denouncing from a privileged, minoritarian position.

The electoral defeat of the right wing and the renewed sense of confidence among Argentina's popular sectors is a foothold from which to launch a new cycle of struggles. Already, this cycle has been launched with an active contradiction between elevated social expectations unleashed by the defeat of Macri and Peronism's plans for social containment.

Today, Argentine society can once more show the dominant classes that in this country, like almost no other, they are up against a working class whose historic insubordination is a force to be reckoned with.

*Source: Translated by Nicolas Allen for **Jacobin**.*

Striking General Motors Workers Aren't Backing Down

23 September 2019, by Dianne Feeley

The ongoing United Auto Workers (UAW) strike against General Motors (GM) — now in its third day — will be remembered for the corporation's aggressiveness. Usually details of negotiations are kept under wraps. But as the UAW announced it was striking, the corporation outlined its offer. Dangling an $8,000 ratification payment in front of workers, it didn't mention that temps, who make up 7 percent of the workforce, wouldn't even be eligible.

The company touted the offer as generous because it offered five thousand new jobs and $7 billion in investments — with wage increases or lump-sum payments in each of the four years of the contract. Corporate spokespeople maintained there was no reason to strike. They remained silent on the hot-button issue of tiered wages and benefits and sidestepped the question of job security.

After all, the just-expired contract had a "no plant closings" clause — but three of five North American plants tagged as having an "unallocated" product are now shuttered. The Detroit-Hamtramck plant is slated to close in January. For months, when skilled tradespeople needed to replace a part at D-Ham, they found the storeroom empty; they had to put in a requisition order and pick up the part at a Flint plant more than an hour away.

Walking the picket line outside the D-Ham plant, strikers told me they see themselves as GM's hostages. They believe the company intends to keep the plant open. The corporation has installed solar panels, just finished constructing a system to recycle their water, and suspended plans for building a new paint shop. They ask: What are the concessions the company wants in exchange for keeping the plant open?

As if in response, GM dropped strikers' health coverage yesterday. And earlier today, they threatened to arrest picketers in Flint.

The Scourge of Two-Three-Many-Tier

GM temps earn $15 an hour, receive three unpaid days off per year, and can be fired at any time. They accrue no seniority, meaning they are assigned the hardest jobs and the most onerous shifts. During the 2015 negotiations, many were already working alongside union members who make twice their pay. In addition to the more than three thousand "permanent" temps, GM has fifteen thousand "in progression" workers. These second-tier workers were first hired in 2007 at $15.50 an hour.

When tiers were first negotiated in 2007, UAW officials insisted it was a concession that membership must support in order to save jobs and preserve higher standards, at least for the current workforce. Those of us who opposed this concession pointed out the danger: abuse on the part of the company, permanent inequality, and a fraying of solidarity. In fact, the UAW constitution states that the union's purpose is "to create a uniform system of shorter hours, higher wages, health care and pensions."

By the 2015 contract, GM and Fiat Chrysler had recovered from bankruptcy. The Big Three were doing well. Yet UAW officials failed to negotiate parity, and workers rejected the deal. Newspapers later reported that the UAW negotiating team was celebrating their victory at a fancy downtown restaurant when they learned the tentative agreement was voted down. Forced back to the bargaining table, they worked with management to build an eight-year bridge to advance the second tier. It would take eight years (the life of two contracts), and the benefits remain inferior. When these workers retire, there will be no company pension or health-care plan. For those who

worked in parts plants and distribution centers, the wage ceiling was lowered.

Many also questioned whether the contract really passed the second time around. At Chrysler, workers were intimidated into voting for the contract by officials who later went to prison for taking bribes; at one of the last Ford plants to vote, ballot boxes were left unsealed.

What Concessions Brought

When two-tier wages went into effect in 2007, GM had a workforce of seventy-three thousand. Labor costs supposedly ran about 8 percent of total production costs. Today GM has forty-six thousand workers, and labor costs have been reduced to 5 percent. That has been accomplished by shaving off a few minutes per day in break time, implementing differentiated wages and benefits, shrinking overtime pay through weekend shifts, and using teams to maximize production. GM points out that it spends a billion dollars a year on health care. Its demand: workers pay 15 percent of health-care costs instead of 3 percent.

GM has also outsourced a number of vital jobs, including janitorial, food service, and storeroom work. However necessary, these positions don't produce a product for the company and are treated as dispensable. In the places where these workers are still part of the UAW bargaining unit — as with the 850 janitors at five Michigan and Ohio plants — their top pay is $15 an hour.

While UAW negotiators point out that some of these workers make so little that they receive food stamps, they do not demand an end to this inequality. Maintenance workers employed by Aramark have been under a contract that has been repeatedly extended since March 2018, but union officials have organized no informational pickets or campaigns to bring their story to the public. When their contract was up the evening of September 14, they were told to walk out, even though production workers were to report for work. UAW members in those plants actually walked through picket lines just one day before they themselves were on strike. Most didn't think they should, weren't happy about it, and many brought food to the strikers or walked the picket line before they did report for work. A few refused to cross the line.

Since the last UAW-GM contract, the company has raked in $35 billion in profits, including almost $11 billion last year. Like Ford and Fiat Chrysler, GM claims they need workers to be "flexible" in order to compete with other firms. But flexibility means that GM workers are expected to take any shift or move to any place in the country where needed.

What we need is a different kind of flexibility: the nimbleness to shift away from manufacturing cars and instead construct the infrastructure for a sustainable economy. GM's proposal that D-Ham produce electric vehicles, Lordstown reopen to manufacture battery cells, and the sprawling Oshawa, Ontario plant work on aftermarket stamping and parts isn't an adequate solution. Nor do the UAW or its sister union in Canada, Unifor, have a bold plan.

A network of autoworkers called Autoworker Caravan (of which I'm an active member) had the right idea a decade ago during the economic crisis. They called for retooling plants to build mass transit, solar panels, and wind turbines — all while reducing the intensity and length of work. This doesn't seem possible in our present market economy, but frankly this economy is unsustainable.

The Strike This Time

With GM losing an estimated $50 million a day and teamsters refusing to cross the picket lines, the pressure is on to settle a contract. But many workers feel they must take a stand against concessions. They want the temps to be made permanent; they want to end inequality in pay and benefits that tiers and outsourcing have brought.
Many also see through the self-serving statement GM issued just three days before the strike: "GM is outraged and deeply concerned by the conduct of union officials as uncovered by the government's investigation and the expanding charges revealed today. These serious allegations represent a stunning abuse of power and trust. There is no excuse for union officials to enrich themselves at the expense of the union membership they represent."

This, too, is part of the propaganda GM has unleashed to get workers to accept another round of concessions. Yet strangely enough, it is GM that needs UAW officials to sell the agreement. Strikers are less likely, this time around, to trust their own team. They know that one of the officials charged with embezzling UAW funds, Vance Pearson, is at the bargaining table. So the UAW negotiators will have to produce for the strikers or face a massive "no" vote.

In the meantime, pickets are up at all the GM plants. Trucks and cars honk as they drive by. People come with food and drinks and join the picket for a while. Jobs with Justice and Democratic Socialists of America are calling everyone to come out and walk the picket lines. Solidarity is alive in the hearts of the strikers and their supporters.
18 September 2019

*Source : **Jacobin**.*

Lexit will not dismantle Fortress Europe

22 September 2019, by Sabrina Huck

Those who have followed Brexit discussions on the left will be familiar with the argument that the EU policy of free movement mainly favours white European immigrants whilst movement of people from the Global South to the continent is restricted by immigration control. The Mediterranean has become a deadly, violent border as refugees crossing the sea are left to drown and European powers scramble over whose responsibility it is to take in those who make it to our shores.

It is true to say that European immigration control upholds structural racism and classism, which prevents people to move freely – this is true of both the EU's common migration strategy as well as individual member states' national policies. If Britain decides to leave the EU and stop any participation in the EU's external border protection regimes, UK left-wingers might be able to rest easily knowing that their country was not directly involved whilst Fortress Europe continues to operate as before. Of course, this will not make any material difference to refugees and migrants.

Dismantling Fortress Europe is probably one of the most complex and ambitious political projects for the left. It can only be a successful if it is approached on a multi-dimensional level: mobilising European civil society movements, changing political approaches on a nation state level and lobbying of the European institutions.

The population of forcibly displaced people stood at 65.6 million in 2016, up from 33.9 million in 1997, according to UNHCR. There is no hiding from the fact that sheer scale means nothing short of a complete rethink of our current global order can deliver justice and equality. It must come in the form of a radical restructuring of the global trading system, as capitalism has created the social, environmental and economic conditions of exploitation of workers and resources in the Global South for the benefit of the Global North. These are often the root cause of refugee movements and migration. British socialists who are serious about internationalism can no longer avoid an honest conversation about the power of capitalism exercised through the nation state, migration control and borders globally.

Current policies on asylum illustrate how – in the context of the intersection of violent conflict, capitalism and climate change – the system is unfit for purpose. When politicians speak about asylum seekers, they commonly associate refugees with those fleeing war zones. But war and violent conflict is only one driver of migration. The exploitative economic conditions created by global capitalism, exaggerated by the impacts of climate change, have fuelled the "refugee crisis".

People forced to leave their homes because of these economic conditions are often referred to as "economic migrants" – and politicians are open about their belief that those coming here for better jobs and living conditions should not be given the right to asylum in the same way as people fleeing war and prosecution. This is why, for example, the government is dragging its feet when it comes to refugees' right to work: they do not want to ease access to employment and create "pull factors" for economic migrants.

Instead, those who want to come here and work must contribute something valuable to the UK economy, such as being able to invest or bring specialist skills to fill jobs on shortage occupation lists. Such visa systems for "the best and brightest" workers will not be sufficient to provide a safe route to move for those impacted by irreversible climate change over the coming decades. Open borders – the right to move freely, unrestricted by visa or skills conditions – is the only solution that can realistically deliver safe ways to migrate.

Some of the most prominent supporters of leaving the EU in the Labour Party are opposed to open borders and have linked freedom of movement and immigration from Eastern Europe with workers' exploitation and wage depression. It will be difficult for any Lexit movement that wants to advocate for a more liberal immigration regime to accommodate "climate refugees" and break the anti-migrant worker narrative that it has fuelled.

As long as the interest of the nation state trumps the desire to develop a common political answer based on solidarity, Fortress Europe will prevail. Although some Lexiteers claim otherwise, European migration policy decisions are not taken in a vacuum, detached from democratically accountable representatives of the nation state.

Failed attempts to reform the Dublin agreement have shown how national governments were able to push a harsher external border control scheme, rather than redistribution of refugees within the EU. Even if the EU would cease to exist, the European nation states hostile or unwilling to accept refugees would still guard their borders, both at the frontline of the Mediterranean and on the mainland. Refugees would be passed along between different nation states that don't think of themselves as responsible.

Although the political response to refugees has often been bleak, civil society movements offer a glimmer of hope. The volunteer-led sea rescue missions show that opposition to Fortress Europe is prepared to take direct action in the face of prosecution threats. In Germany, the 'Seebruecke' movement has organised thousands-strong mass demonstrations against Fortress Europe and the criminalisation of sea rescue and for secure paths to migration for refugees. Alongside it, councils have passed motions to become a "safe harbour" for those rescued at sea and

to campaign actively in support of voluntary sea rescue missions.

Our focus should be on building links with these social movements to create the conditions of solidarity in civil society, to work with our European left parties in the push against Fortress Europe on an EU level whilst supporting our comrades in struggles against anti-migrant right-wing populist parties at home.

Some might argue this is utopianism. But as we experience a political moment of rupture, others will seize this opportunity for change if the left fails to do so. Rather than stepping aside and pursuing individual solutions as a nation, there was never a more urgent moment for British socialists to be involved and ambitious for the future of European left than now.

13 August 2019

*Source **Labour List**.*

Why build a global climate strike in Brazil?

21 September 2019, by Fernanda Melchionna, Samia Bomfin

The most serious consequences of global warming are related to the environmental imbalance of the planet. We run serious risks of devastation due to hurricanes and floods; the melting of glaciers in the poles, responsible for the sea level rise, can cause the disappearance of islands and the flooding of coastal cities; agricultural activity, the production of food, can be severely compromised or even made impossible by the increase in temperature and the desertification.

Global warming and the international mobilization in defense of the environment pressured governments to elaborate and execute documents such as the Kyoto Protocol (1997) and the Paris Agreement (2015), guidelines for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. In the world, industrial activity is the biggest responsible for the emission of these gases and because of this the implementation of agreements with this content collides with the thirst for profits of the largest companies' businessmen. According to NASA, the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere continues to increase, with the concentration at the beginning of the 20th century at less than 300 ppm (parts per million) and in 2019 at more than 400 ppm2.

The climate crisis shows the most destructive face of contemporary capitalism. In addition to the human degradation caused by labor exploitation – even over-exploitation in large areas of the globe – the degradation of nature is a catastrophic consequence of the logic of infinite accumulation of capitalism, especially in its globalized and financial phase. The destructive production that characterizes the current regime of capital accumulation is producing a destruction of the planet with immeasurable consequences. In short, the environmental crisis is not only a characteristic of the global economic crisis, but the most brutal evidence of the destructive effect of capitalism as a mode of production.

In Brazil we live in a critical situation. In recent decades the country has been increasing its participation in the emission of greenhouse gases3, and in our country the main responsible for this increase is deforestation, promoted by the agribusiness sector4. With the Bolsonaro government and the Ministry of Environment controlled by Ricardo Salles, the situation has rapidly worsened. High-ranking members of the government have gone so far as to put the existence of global warming on the back burner5 or even question it6. Since January we have been living under constant attacks and the weakening of IBAMA and ICMBio, attacks that are directly responsible for the reduction in inspection that has allowed the existence of outbreaks of fire like the one that has hit the Amazon in recent weeks.

By being omissive and turning a blind eye to the deforestation of the Amazon, the Bolsonaro government is responsible for the increase in the emission of greenhouse gases, privileging only agribusiness, which in turn is concerned with its profits and exports, to the detriment of the global climate situation or even the production of food and the creation of jobs for the Brazilian people.

The international repercussion of the deforestation of the Amazon has put Brazil even more on the road to the construction of the Global Climate Strike in September 2019, an international movement articulated and convened by Fridays For Future7 that aims to denounce global warming and the connivance of the governments.

In the coming days we will march all over Brazil, in line with the Global Climate Strike. We will march alongside the indigenous people and quilombolas for the demarcation of lands, in defense of biodiversity, the Amazon, the Cerrado, the Pampa, for another world and for another system that privileges life and nature and not the profits of a handful of rich people! There is no Planet B, we must put an end to disaster capitalism.

18 September)

Left on the Move

Pakistan: Capitalism and climate change

20 September 2019, by Ammar Ali Jan

Over 2600 events are taking place around the globe to demand that world leaders pay attention to the looming climate catastrophe that threatens our existence. The event is also unique as it is being spearheaded by school students, with a 16-year-old Swedish girl, Greta Thunberg, emerging as the symbolic voice of the movement.

These radical actions are taking place in the backdrop of "a warning to humanity" written by climate scientists in 2017. These scientists summarized the catastrophic consequences of human activity on the planet, in particularly our civilization's dangerous addiction to fossil fuels. Humans have already induced about 1 C warming in global temperatures and we are headed to over 2 C in the near future. Such an increase can lead to a self-perpetuating cycle of warming on the planet, with melting glaciers and rising sea levels threatening entire eco-systems. The stakes could not be higher.

Yet, the global community remains in denial about the scale of the impending disaster even as it pays lip service to addressing the undeniable science of global warming. The self-designated 'leader of the free world', Donald Trump, fails to even recognize climate change as a scientific phenomenon and has consistently promised to increase investments in fossil fuels. China, now known as the chimney of the world for emitting the highest number of greenhouse gases, continues to invest in coal projects in Third World countries, such as the monstrosity known as the Sahiwal Power Plant.

There can no longer be a discussion about climate change without laying bare the system that (literally) fuelled it – ie: global capitalism. What is unique about capitalism as compared to previous systems is its tendency to measure wealth in monetary terms by turning products into saleable commodities. The aim is neither to create material goods nor engage in long-term sustainability but to create private profits through the circulation of commodities. The uniqueness of this system can be gauged by the fact that prior to the advent of capitalism in late 18th century, much of the world's material wealth was communally owned with detailed codes of rights and responsibilities towards present and future generations.

Capitalism's advent was a disruptive event in the long course of human history rather than an evolutionary path inscribed in 'human nature'. Detailing the history of violence and loot that preceded the rise of capitalism, Marx demonstrated how an attack on communal property was central to the formation of a society based on commodity production. It was not human nature but the displacement, abandonment and starvation faced by millions that set the conditions for the emergence of global capitalism.

Capitalism is an expansionary system that cannot remain in equilibrium with its surroundings. The perpetual search for profits requires the extraction of more natural resources as well as new markets to sell their products. John Bellamy Foster, an expert on climate politics, famously called this tendency the "Treadmill of Production" in which one must continue to run, even accelerate, in order to maintain a place on the treadmill.

On the production side, it means engulfing more and more resources for commodification, even if it has negative social/ecological imperatives. On the consumption side, the $1.2 trillion advertising industry directed at us ensures we feel incomplete without the latest gadgets that we probably do not need. This vicious cycle engulfs not only our environment, but objectifies even our social relations as objects symbolize the social worth of an individual.

In the Third World, capitalism arrived through the force of colonial violence, abruptly breaking our historical trajectories to open natural resources to the 'free market'. Today, it is the exorbitant debt propelling the deepening of capitalism in poorer countries. In her excellent study titled 'The Debt Boomerang', Susan George explains that since the debt crisis of the 1980s, poor countries have been forced to improve their balance of payments ie increase their exports. Since many do not have large-scale industrial production, they are forced to open up their natural resources to foreign companies in order to pay back the impossible debts they have accumulated. Moreover, the drive to increase exports also leads to unsustainable practices of agriculture that produce quick profits in the short term but result in ecological ruin in the long term, adversely affecting the poorest sections in the countryside.

Much of the deforestation taking place around the world is geared towards giving access to mining companies or to the furniture industry in the West. The latest fires in the Amazon also appear to be a deliberate attempt to clear land for cattle grazing in order to export beef to Western countries. That the 'lungs of the planet' can be sacrificed to ensure that those living in the Global North can have uninterrupted access to their hamburgers shows the irrationality of a system that weighs private profits above social responsibility.

This explains why we are unable to phase out fossil fuels despite scientific warnings. The big fossil companies have made massive investments and buy the support of Western governments to ensure their future profits remain safe. Third World countries are looking for investments in natural resources to pay back their debt, opening their economies to the worst environmental and labour practices. Capitalism has locked us into a logic that is forcing humanity to participate in its own spectacular self-annihilation.

These examples also show that, while individual lifestyle changes are

important, they cannot replace collective action necessary to confront the systemic crisis. Fighting climate change is today inextricably linked to reinvigorating a vibrant democracy that is responsive to the demands of the citizenry.

For Pakistan, climate change and the broader ecological break down are no longer abstract issues. Only two months ago, farmers from Thatta participated in a Long March against the rising sea levels that have engulfed their lands. Last week, we visited the villages of Kulalanwala and Kot Asad Ullah near Lahore, where the waste from adjoining factories is producing bone deformities in children. The villagers know the names of the polluters, but recognize that they are too powerful to be held accountable. Such areas represent what Naomi Klein has called "Sacrifice Zones", as the lives of the locals are sacrificed to ensure that a few can sustain their opulent lifestyles.

UN experts have claimed that we may be heading towards a climate apartheid where the wealthy will cordon off their areas from those affected by the ecological breakdown. That process is already underway and cannot be meaningfully addressed without questioning the underlying logic that propels it. In other words, the key to fighting climate change is not to condemn an abstract process but to identify the social relations of exclusion, domination and exploitation that shape our context. Only a new social system that privileges sustainability and planning over the destructive chaos of late capitalism can provide a way forward.

We can either witness a climate catastrophe that intensifies the construction of walls and borders around the world, sending millions into militarized forms of social control. Or we can build an alternative system that brings back the control of production and consumption in the democratic control of communities across the world. The stakes have never been higher. It is time to organize and fight back.

The News International

Scottish independence grows nearer

18 September 2019, by Mike Picken

The constitutional crisis that has erupted over the coup proroguing parliament and ignoring legislation preventing No Deal Brexit from the EU is not just about 'parliament versus the executive'.

It's also a crisis of legitimacy for the entire state of the United Kingdom.

Scotland voted 55:45 to stay in the UK in the 2014 Independence referendum, but this was on the back of a 'solemn' promise from Tories, Labour and the LibDems that it was the only guaranteed way of staying in the EU and that further powers would be devolved in future to the Scottish Parliament. Support for independence rose from 25% to 45% during the 2014 campaign and working class and young people influenced by the Radical Independence Campaign increasingly moved to support independence.

In the EU referendum in 2016, Scotland voted strongly to remain in the EU – and the UK government has not only ignored this outcome but refused to grant further devolution.

A new independence movement has developed demanding a second referendum on Scottish independence, which recent polls now indicate is likely to be carried if the UK leaves the EU and Tory rule continues. Overwhelmingly young people are 70+% in favour of independence. 16-18 year olds now have the vote in Scottish elections and there are progressive proposals to extend the franchise beyond EU citizens to all non-UK nationalities. The Scottish Parliament has introduced legislation to organise a new referendum and a mass movement is being built through massive demonstrations, culminating in a planned major march in Edinburgh on 5 October 2019. A similar march last year attracted over 100,000 Scots demanding independence, overwhelmingly working class in composition.

This rise in support for independence is reflected in the rise in vote for the moderately social democratic Scottish National Party, now the dominant party. At their historic victory in the 2015 General Election the SNP won 56 of the 59 Westminster MPs. It was inevitable that they would fall back in the snap general election of 2017, but they still held 35 seats and a commanding position in Scottish politics, despite being the governing party in the devolved parliament for ten years.

The thirteen Scottish Tory MPs elected actually contributed more to backing up Theresa May's government than did the DUP but are not likely to last much longer. Polls are now showing that the SNP will once again win over 50 seats under the vagaries of Westminster's 'First Past the Post' system – with the Tories and Labour, once again, facing a complete wipe-out of Scottish MPs. It's hard to believe today that in 1955 the Tories won a majority of votes in Scotland. The resignation of Ruth Davidson as leader of the Tories in Scotland, in protest against the leadership of Johnson, is a bitter blow to them. It reduces whatever modicum of talent they had but more importantly as a working-class lesbian Davidson had gone some way towards rebuilding the Tories into the second party from their traditional reactionary base, overtaking Labour in a country overwhelmingly supportive of progressive and modern social norms. Despite Johnson's pretensions to being 'Minister for the Union', he is a toxic figure for Tories in modern Scotland.

The Scottish Labour Party is a pale

shadow of the party in England. Its small membership is one sixth the size of the SNP's and it was the only part of the Labour Party where the membership voted against Jeremy Corbyn for leader. Membership has failed to grow and electorally it is likely to drop below 20%, in a country where it was for decades the dominant party. It fell to fifth place in the recent EU elections and was sixth in the Scottish capital. The reason is not difficult to see: Scottish Labour not only strongly opposes independence but even opposes allowing a referendum. The majority of left wing activists and voters have long abandoned the Scottish Labour Party to support independence, and despite the narrow election of Corbyn-supporting Richard Leonard as leader against a millionaire right-winger, it comes across as hapless and useless to the majority of the Scottish working class population.

The SNP is not a socialist party. It has a chequered record of government and its recent Growth Commission report would drag Scotland into austerity. Despite trying to display 'Green' credentials, it strongly supports the oil, fossil fuel and aviation industries for which it is being heavily criticised by environmental campaigners. The SNP's support for the EU and its neo-liberal policies is unconditional – only muted criticism is directed at the EU's past behaviour towards Greece and its support for the flagrant anti-democratic attacks on the Catalan independence movement. But despite its cautious approach, it has strongly opposed Brexit from the beginning in line with overwhelming view in Scotland and looks set to reap an electoral reward from predominantly working class voters in the forthcoming general election.

Labour's John McDonnell recently rightly argued that it was entirely a decision for the Scottish Parliament as to whether there should be another Independence referendum. The Scottish Labour leadership has protested and tried to water this down in an anti-democratic direction; but Scottish Labour and the UK party still stand firmly against independence and for this they will pay a significant electoral price as their voters further decamp to the SNP.

Most people who support Scottish independence do not so because of a narrow view of 'nationalism'. They support progressive ideas of freedom of movement and open borders – internationalism. Migrants are welcome in Scotland. The school strikes over climate change received major support the length and breadth of the country.

For most of the left in Scotland, Socialist Resistance supporters included, independence opens the possibility of ridding the country of the vestiges of backward Tory rule from London and building class-struggle, solidarity, ecological action and support for free movement. While it is still a shadow of its former size and needs to find new directions and tactics, the Scottish Socialist Party nevertheless continues to build this struggle. New mobilisations and social movements are arising on climate change and the ecological crisis, international solidarity and against xenophobia. An ecosocialist group has emerged within the Scottish Green Party and there are left activists in both the SNP and (a few) Labour. A radical united left is more than a pipedream.

A new stage of the struggle for an independent socialist Scotland is opening up.

12 September 2019

Socialist Resistance

Ecosocialism & Just Transition - System Change

16 September 2019, by John Bellamy Foster

The idea of a "just transition" is appearing everywhere these days, most notably in the preamble of the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement, which refers to the need to take "into account the imperatives of a just transition of the workforce and the creation of decent work and quality jobs in accordance with nationally defined development priorities. [1]

Superfund for Workers

Just transition first arose as a guiding principle in the labour movement in the 1970s-1990s during the leadership of Tony Mazzocchi within the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers International Union (OCAW), which pioneered in the creation of the labour-environmental movement. Mazzocchi sought to find a way around the "job blackmail" in which workers were constantly told that if they supported environmental measures, they would lose their jobs. In response, he helped popularise the notion of a just transition and proposed a "Superfund for workers." This was meant to compensate workers for the costs of environmental transition, providing financial support and higher-education opportunities for displaced workers. In Mazzocchi's words, "There is a Superfund for dirt. There ought to be one for workers." Yet, all efforts to create a Superfund for workers (in contrast to the Superfund for corporations) was blocked at every point by the dominant capitalist interests. [2]

The labour-environmental cause and the idea of a just transition were to be

carried forward in the early 1990s principally by the United Steel Workers (USW). The USW's environmental policy statement, adopted in 1990 under the title Our Children's World: Steelworkers and the Environment, declared that "we believe that the greatest threat to our children's future may lie in the destruction of their environment." Human beings now had "the power to alter our environment irreversibly." On global warming the report stated:

"The burning of fossil fuels like petroleum and coal generates billions of tons of carbon dioxide every year. This gas and others trap heat in the atmosphere. The resulting global warming could melt the ice caps, flood our coastal cities, and turn huge agricultural areas into deserts. The problem is made worse by the widespread destruction of our forests, which help to absorb excess carbon dioxide. The loss of forests and other habitats threatens many species of plants and animals with extinction. Even our oceans are at risk from toxic runoff, oil spills and waste dumping at sea. Added together, these problems may threaten the ultimate capability of our resources to sustain civilization.... We believe the greatest threat to our children's future may lie in the destruction of their environment. [3]

In perhaps its most memorable observation on the nature of the just transition, the USW's 1990 report added: "In the long run, the real choice is not jobs or environment. It's both or neither." [4]

Looking back at the original Our Children's Future report, in its 2006 environmental report, Securing Our Children's World, the USW observed: "Our original report identified global warming as the single most important environmental issue of our lifetime and warned about the risks of doing nothing." [5] The chief enemies, the USW underscored, were multinational corporations.

The concept of just transition spread globally in the present century, and was adopted by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), while also receiving backing from the International Labour Organisation. For the ITUC, the just transition could be conceived, as "a tool the trade union movement shares with the international community, aimed at smoothing the shift towards a more sustainable society and providing hope for the capacity of a green economy to sustain decent jobs and livelihoods for all." [6] Most importantly, it was necessary in the ITUC's view, to face up to the realities of global environmental inequality reflected in the simultaneous existence of carbon-intensive developed countries, increasingly carbon-intensive emerging economies, and low-carbon, highly climate-vulnerable developing countries. [7] No solution was possible without recognising the differentials in how labour was placed globally in the face of climate change and energy needs.

Green New Deal?

The concept of just transition, meanwhile, has spread far beyond labour, and is seen today as also encompassing issues of Indigenous rights and environmental justice. For the Indigenous Environmental Network, based primarily in the United States, a just transition must confront "a legacy of exploitation, ecocide, and environmental, energy, climate, and economic injustice." Hence, it must encompass "the recognition of Indigenous rights and the rights of Mother Earth." Further, "a just transition calls for the rejection of all market-based mechanisms that allow the quantification and commodification of Mother Earth's natural resources and processes, rebranded as 'ecosystem services,' carbon trading, carbon offsets, conservation and biodiversity offsets, and financialization of Nature." [8] The Climate Justice Alliance meanwhile emphasises that a just transition must deal with environmental injustices, such as environmental racism, deeply embedded in present-day society. [9]

The main current proposal for a Green New Deal—associated with democratic [Democratic Party] socialist Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez—includes the recognition of the need for a just transition, in the sense of recognising the needs of labour, Indigenous peoples, and the environmental justice movement. But it is precisely the more radical notions of a just transition that are coming under attack and are in most danger of being negotiated away at the outset in attempts to mainstream the Green New Deal in capitalist society. It was for this reason that the newly reemerged Science for the People has issued its Peoples' New Deal Campaign, dedicated to underscoring the idea that nothing can be accomplished without a struggle that incorporates the demands of labour, people of color, Indigenous populations, women, LGBTQ people, and the populations in the global South. Moreover, this must start with opposition to militarism and imperialism. This also means the rejection of eco-techno fixes such as nuclear power, geoengineering, and other false and destructive "alternatives." [10]

System Change

Yet, it is precisely when the call for a just transition becomes universalised, taking into account the needs of the world populations, future generations, and the diversity of life on earth itself, that it becomes obvious that any such transition is impossible under capitalism. Indeed, it represents the concrete negation of capitalism. Here the message of the ecosocialist movement, embodied in organisations like System Change Not Climate Change in the United States, are indispensable. [11] A just transition, if it is to be more than words, demands another mode of production altogether, one no longer based in the logic of "Accumulate, accumulate! That is Moses and the prophets!" [12]. It is thus necessarily intertwined with the class struggle, while intersecting with struggles over social reproduction, racial capitalism, and militarism and imperialism—all of which question the very foundations of capitalism. If we are to save our children's world, we will have to be more revolutionary than at any time in human history, directing our efforts at sustainable human development, i.e., complete socialism, encompassing the needs of the entire chain of human generations, as well as the protection of the earth itself. In the end, there can be no other meaning to a just

transition.

Footnotes

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The future demands environmental justice

15 September 2019, by Solidarity Ecosocialist Woking Party

Solidarity Ecosocialist Working Group

As ecosocialists we see capitalism's demand for continuous growth and the exploitation of our natural resources creates agricultural and industrial models rooted in profit for the 1%. In destroying the balance that must exist on planet Earth, this economic system also fails to meet the material and social needs of the vast majority. As a result, growing inequality and changing weather conditions have already led to more than 70 million refugees, with more to come.

Youth are demanding an end to subsidizing destructive industries: stopping the construction of pipelines, halting resource extraction on indigenous lands, decommissioning coal, gas and nuclear facilities and building a free and public mass transportation system to replace the individual car. We stand with them in requiring that investors and polluters who bankrolled and built this chaos pay for the transition, not workers and their communities. They recognize that pollution, like other aspects of capitalism, impacts people of color most severely. It is the most vulnerable who have been on the front line.

We need a "just transition," one that retools and repurposes manufacturing, replaces the inadequate system of food production and builds communities where people have the right to good, healthy and meaningful work. In short, youth are demanding a future for themselves and for the planet!

We believe it is possible for humanity to break with the destructive logic of the capitalist system. The break will come as millions join in the fight to stop fossil fuel emissions and the pollution of land, water and air. September 20 and the actions over the following week represent a new stage in the fight to end the exploitation and inequality capitalism breeds.

Build the Climate Strike

Solidarity National Committee Motion

We encourage members to help build the Friday, September 20 international strike against climate change called by Greta Thunberg, the high school Swedish student calling for students to strike every Friday for climate justice. (See Global Climate Strike.)

The action will take many different forms around the world: striking students, targeting polluters, organizing direct actions, marching in the streets and maybe even some worker strikes. We note that there is a particular role for teachers to support their students.

September 20 is the kickoff of a week of activities that will go through September 27. Environmental justice organizations, 350.org, DSA, Rising Tide and many others will be working to build these actions. We particularly encourage members to assist in building coalitions where possible.

September 20 is just three days before an emergency climate summit being held in New York. Youth in the Fridays For Future network are mobilizing for their largest global climate strike ever. [1] They have invited everyone to join them on September 20 and again the following Friday, September 27 when they will join Earth Strike for a general strike. (See Earth Strike.)

Footnotes

[1] https://fridaysforfuture.org/.

British politics in tumult

14 September 2019, by Susan Pashkoff

The Tory government had a working majority of 1 at this point (including the MPs of the Democratic Unionist Party; DUP). Johnson lost this the very same day when Phillip Lee (a Tory remainer MP) dramatically crossed the floor to join the Liberal Democrats while the Prime Minister was addressing Parliament. The Parliamentary Conservative and Unionist Party continued to shrink further over the days ahead.

Parliament closed again on September 9 after sitting for only 6 days. During that time Johnson suffered 6 consecutive defeats at the hands of both MPs and the Lords, provoked continued demonstrations across Britain and presided over what looks like the worst crisis the Tories have ever suffered.

And to add insult to injury, The Scottish court has found unanimously that the Prime Minister misled the Queen and that his actions were illegal. In effect, the court has held that Boris Johnson lied to the Queen so as to obtain prorogation. Some MPs are taking their normal seats, while others are demonstrating outside. Keir Starmer has demanded
Parliament is recalled immediately, prior to the Supreme Court considering all three legal judgements next week,

What led to this?

Before Parliament reconvened, Tory privy councillors asked the Queen to prorogue (suspend) Parliament for 5 weeks, which she agreed to do. [1]

It's normal for Parliament not to sit when the main parties hold their conferences but this was a significant extension – and at a time of constitutional crisis. The idea this was to allow a 'new government' to prepare legislation for a Queen's speech was not taken seriously by anyone despite constant repetition by the government and Tory MPs. And the timing of the measure was telling – clearly an attempt to thwart any chance of blocking a no-deal Brexit.

When the possibility of prorogation was mooted by Dominic Raab during the Tory leadership elections, it was dismissed by others (including Boris Johnson and Michael Gove) as undemocratic and simply impossible. [2] Yet, this act was not only concluded during recess, it later came out that it was already being planned weeks earlier. [3]

This attempt to undermine Parliamentary sovereignty and hence democracy, led to protestors flocking onto the streets as soon as the plans were announced on August 28 and the opposition acted once Parliament returned.

The Labour Party, Scottish National Party (SNP), Liberal Democrats, Plaid Cymru, Change UK and the Greens as well as dissident Tories took control of the commons order paper. Johnson had stated that this was a vote of confidence in his government. But 21 Tory MPs, including the former Chancellor of the Exchequer Phillip Hammond, the "Father of the House" Ken Clarke, former Attorney General Dominic Grieve, former Cabinet member Rory Stewart, Oliver Letwin (who advanced the motion for debate and Winston Churchill's grandson, Nicholas Soames) voted against him to allow a Bill against no deal to move forward. They were expelled from the Parliamentary Tory party – leaving Johnson with a majority of minus 21 and his first Commons defeat as PM.

The Commons then supported a bill in the name of Labour MP Hilary Benn to block no deal – til then was the legal default position for October 31. Another Tory MP, Caroline Spelman, joined the previous day's rebels and voted for the Bill. She said she would step down at the next election citing "Brexit abuse". [4]

The Bill was rushed through all stages in the Commons on September 4 and then went to the Lords. After 100 hostile amendments were submitted there was a fear it would be talked out before prorogation but in the end it cleared the Lords on Friday 6 and became law on Monday 9 after receiving Royal Assent.

More humiliation

On August 29, the day after prorogation was announced, Scottish Tory leader Ruth Davidson had resigned from the party citing family issues and the handling of Brexit (Scotland strongly voted Remain in the EU referendum). [5] Given that she was responsible for the increase in Tory MPs representing Scotland in Westminster – essential to Tory numbers in Westminster – this spells trouble.

Facing his first Prime Minister's Questions on September 4, Johnson was asked by Labour MP, Tan Dhesi, when the inquiry on Islamophobia in

the Tory party would commence (Johnson promised this during the leadership election) and demanded an apology from Johnson for his racist comments about Muslim women wearing the burqa looking like bank robbers and letterboxes. [6]

His stinging attack led to applause in Parliament. Johnson spluttered about his own ancestry and tried to turn the focus onto alleged antisemitism by the Labour Party. The "how can I be a racist given my family " defense cut little ice given his history of racist and misogynist statements. [7]

Once the Benn bill was sent to the Lords, Johnson introduced a call for a general election; under the Fixed Term Parliament Act (FTPA; passed by the Con-Dem government in 2011), needing 2/3 majority to succeed). [8] The government was defeated with the Labour Party abstaining in the vote. That was the fifth vote he lost in a week.

Johnson's use of a homophobic and misogynist slur ("a big girl's blouse") against Jeremy Corbyn and calling him a "chlorinated chicken" for not agreeing to a general election was yet another example of the sophomoric behaviour of the current Prime Minister'. [9] Mooching around like a schoolyard bully, one actually was waiting for him to "double dare" Corbyn to agree to an election.

The failure of nannies to teach appropriate behaviour was also raised against Jacob Rees-Mogg's slouching in the House of Commons which spawned a whole host of wonderful memes on social media; Rees-Mogg's devotion to his nanny (who is raising his 6 children) is well known; he actually took her campaigning in his first attempt to become an MP in Fife. [10] The exhibition of such gross levels of privilege by Johnson and Rees-Mogg has not only led to many memes; it has reminded so many working class people exactly what it is about the Tories that they find repulsive).

Still on September 4; the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sajid Javid, introduced his spending review. This followed the trailing of announcements by Johnson that much money would be given to education, the NHS and to policing, looking like the launch of a general election campaign. And few of the announcements contain new money so should be relatively easy to challenge when anyone has a chance to draw breath.

Johnson's week and Tory fortunes continued to worsen. On Wednesday, Boris Johnson's brother Jo Johnson (a remain Tory who was also a member of the government) resigned from the party (and hence the government) and from Parliament (Tory "majority" now at minus 22). [11]

His plan to take the Brexit debate "to the people" with an appearance in Yorkshire was a fiasco with one member of the public politely asking him to leave the town and another man haranguing him in demanding to know why he wasn't in Brussels negotiating with the EU. [12]

A public statement in front of new police recruitments added to the shambles. A female police recruit became ill after waiting for him to begin for 20 minutes and was forced to sit down; after a quick glance at her, he continued his speech. [13] The use of the police as a backdrop in a political speech (undermining their neutrality) does not sell well at all in Britain. He came under criticism not only from other politicians and commentators but also from the Police chief in West Yorkshire. [14]

As if things could not get worse on Saturday, September 7, Tory MP Amber Rudd (who threw herself on her sword to protect PM Theresa May over the Windrush Scandal when she was Home Office Minister) quit both the Tory party and the government (she was Minister of Works and Pensions). She believed that Boris Johnson was not trying to get a deal with the EU and was instead concentrating on a no deal Brexit and also criticised him for the sacking of 21 MPs.

On Monday 9, Johnson introduced another motion for a general election in October but was upstaged by the resignation of Speaker John Bercow – who has been a thorn in the Brexiteers side all the way through the process. This followed the extraordinary announcement earlier the same day from Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Andrea Leadsom that contrary to convention the Tories would put up a candidate against him. This is particularly significant as Bercow was elected as a Tory prior to being elected speaker.

Johnson suffered yet another defeat on the election date meaning that while election will happen soon; it just will not be at a time of his choosing. Rumours that he could put a one line bill circumventing the FTPA which would only need a simple majority came to nought – probably because there was no likelihood of him getting even that much support.

While it would be politically preferable for the next election to follow a second referendum on Brexit in which Labour campaigned strongly for Remain, such an option is not open now given the way the last few weeks have panned out. Given the cards Labour were dealt, it is unclear whether it ever was.

The Implosion of the Tory Party

While there is great pleasure watching the implosion of the Tory Party, we need to understand that what is happening is a fight over the heart (if they have one, dried up desiccated as it is) and soul of the Conservative Party.

There is an attempt by the Tory right to rapidly move the party from a centre-right broad church to a decidedly right-wing party (This is similar to what was done to the US Republican party without the participation of the religious right. This took decades in the US, following the creation of Ronald Reagan's coalition). This is what lies behind the purge of the 21 MPs; some of the most well-known and respected members of their party.

Part of this is strategic. It fits well into the furthering of the agenda by the international right putting them in control over what is currently a centre-right party; this puts them in

the same camp of political leaders like Donald Trump, Matteo Salvini (Italy), Viktor Orbán (Hungary), and Binyamin Netanyahu (Israel; who "coincidentally" dropped in to visit Johnson on the September 5).

The attempt to drag the Britain out of the EU on a no deal Brexit is an attempt to create an Atlanticist alliance with the US, furthering the continued deregulation and privatisation of the British public sector. Britain would clearly be the junior partner in this scenario – so much for the sovereignty nonsense that was such an important part of the referendum campaign. All economic, environmental, agricultural and employment regulations that exist in Britain as a result of to EU membership would be swept away. This is the real aim of the Tory right; a deal is of no interest to them, they want to eliminate the public sector and regulation for ideological reasons.

We know exactly how Johnson is planning to do this (he is about as subtle as an elephant); staging the next general election as "the people versus Parliament." This is risky; there is no guarantee that "the people" will recognise the Tories as their allies. The privileged behaviour of Tory MPs may backfire – their arrogance turning to ashes when working class people remember who have screwed them over for decades. It was mostly the Tory party that destroyed industry and manufacturing in Britain and promoted austerity with some help from the Lib Dems – not the EU.

Whether this will succeed or lead to a split in the Tory Party still is unclear. Whatever happens, as an understatement, Johnson is not off to a good start. The Tory right seem to be prepared to eliminate moderate Tory MPs which will strengthen the hand of the Liberal Democrats who will sweep up the votes of Tory Remain voters. There are many parliamentary seats where the Tories and Lib Dems are competing which Johnson et al seem would leave Johnson condemned to permanently dancing to his tune – which is not only a distressing prospect for us but for Johnson himself.

Unionism under challenge

There is another area of political difficulty for the Tories. The use of English nationalism and quasi populism enabled the Brexit victory in the referendum and has been used to be happy to cede in areas where the Remain vote was strong.

Johnson's focus seems to be on competing with the Brexit Party. He hopes either to neutralise Nigel Farage's party by convincing Brexit supporters that his party is the party of Brexit or enter into an electoral agreement with them. He believes that he can win the next general election given the results of the referendum and the political divisions in the country; including by winning seats in some traditional Labour heartlands which voted Leave.

A pact with Farage or his neutralisation will only work if Johnson succeeds in pushing through no deal. Anything else would see the Brexit Party on the offensive against him. And further the Brexit Party is essentially a one man (sic) band under Farage – which by many Brexiteers since, but this does not translate into support for Brexit outside of England and parts of Wales. Scotland and North Ireland voted remain and there is no evidence whatsoever that they have changed their minds. With Davidson's resignation, the Scottish Tories are even more certain to lose seats which could undermine the Tories across Britain.

Johnson's push for a no deal is strengthening demands for another independence referendum in Scotland, with significant marches across the country in August and September; moreover Corbyn's team has indicated Labour at Westminster would not block such a call. [15] We have even seen some not insignificant protests supporting Welsh independence. [16]

Moreover, the main sticking point in Theresa May's Brexit Withdrawal Bill relates to the Good Friday Agreement and the British border in Ireland between the Irish Republic and the six counties. This is not up for negotiation by the EU and there are no proposals from the Tories to actually replace the Irish backstop which they claim to loathe.

Socialist Resistance supports the demand for Irish reunification, though we don't think it is on the cards given the opposition of the main parties in the Republic to a border poll. We campaigned for a Yes vote in the first Scottish independence referendum and would do so again given a second chance. That's because we believe the break-up of the imperialist British state is in the interests of all those who live under the butcher's apron.

We will cry no tears if we see the disintegration of British state brought about by the Conservative and Unionist Party. We also welcome the opportunity that the Queen's involvement in prorogation has brought to discuss republican ideas with a wider audience. We also think proportional representation should be pushed by the left, rather than leaving the Liberal Democrats to champion this democratic measure.

The Labour Party

Corbyn has played good role in the fight against a no deal Brexit his stock has risen as a result.

On August 21 he proposed that to avoid no deal, others should back a no confidence motion against Johnson. Corbyn would then lead a caretaker government, ensuring the extension of Article 50 and a rapid general election. On August 27 a meeting took place among forces who opposed no deal but was unable to come to agreement due to the Lib Dems refusing to back a Corbyn government for however brief a period of time.

The fact that Corbyn finally moved; coming out clearly for a public vote on Brexit was an important turning point – but one long in the making. But the time it took to do so has weakened Labour's chances of winning an election.

One problem is whether Labour can recover voters lost to the Lib Dems and the Greens in the general election. Reminding people of the Lib

Dem role in the coalition which brought in austerity and their broken promises over tuition fees which has made university attendance far more difficult for working class children is essential but not necessarily sufficient. Voter registration campaigns – especially amongst young people who largely support remain will be critical. The BBC reported that 200,000 people registered to vote in the 72 hours up to September 5 and more than 50% are under 35. And Lib Dems sectarianism to Corbyn will not improve their position.

On the other hand there is still some lack of clarity as to whether Labour would try to negotiate a deal with the EU if they get into government. There are still people who believe that a Labour Brexit which defends working people is an achievable goal and the fact that Corbyn has still not confronted this myth makes the job of those of us who have said from the beginning that it is a contradiction in terms much harder.

Rather interestingly, while the Lib Dems and Tory rebels seem rather uncomfortable having Jeremy Corbyn as Prime Minister, the financial sector in Britain seems far more comfortable with the possibility of a Labour government especially compared to a no deal Brexit. [17]

What's next?

The term "rebel alliance" (from Star Wars) has been used to describe those working together to stop no deal. But while all members of the alliance want to stop a no deal, they have big differences on other issues. The fact that Corbyn has been sure footed since Parliament returned has quietened some attacks on him from 'allies' (and the PLP) but Tom Watson seems to be restarting that dynamic.

Labour, SNP, Plaid and the Lib Dems want a general election but not on Johnson's terms. For Change UK, if it still exists, it is less clear. For the most part they will lose their seats at the General Election which is why some of them joined the Lib Dems in the past few days. Tory rebels will either fight the election as Independent Conservatives or give up their political careers like Jo Johnson, Nicholas Hurd and Caroline Spelman.

Johnson's unpredictability and the fact he is a liar poses further challenge. While his mendacity is not at Trump's level (and Trump's lies often are to cover his own personal inadequacies), he has lost 3 jobs through lying and has lied consistently since May stood down. During the Tory leadership campaign (where prorogation was already being discussed) and in claiming that he is seeking a Brexit deal with the EU and that progress has been made – that was news to the EU). He has spent his life lying and seems to have no conscience whatsoever in doing so. As a result, his word is worthless and no one trusts him.

While many are hoping that he winds up dead in a ditch rather than ask for an extension; if he doesn't, he will be breaking the law. Much as many of us would love to see him carted off in handcuffs by the police, perhaps he thinks being a Brexit martyr could get him re-elected. This of course we want to prevent.

Whether he will submit the letter and ask for an extension to Article 50 is an unknown. If he does not, then he is appealing to the Brexit Party base. But this tactic could destroy the legitimacy of the Tory party and lead to a split with its centre-right base (This happened in the past over the Corn Laws in 1846, and over Tariff Reform in the early 20th century).

The lack of a written constitution does not help while the introduction of the FTPA has muddied the waters. The issue comes down to the fact that Boris Johnson is not behaving according to the rules that Prime Ministers are expected to follow. No other Prime Minister would have suggested that they would refuse to follow the law and not give the request for an extension of Article 50 to the EU. Who knows whether he is serious or just faffing about?

Here is a nightmare scenario: If Johnson quits right before the letter must be submitted (the October 19), we will not have a government to submit it to the EU unless a short-term government is agreed by the "rebel alliance" – will the Lib Dems and rebel Tories move beyond their distaste for Jeremy Corbyn's politics and allow the leader of the opposition to form a short term government or will we go out on a no deal Brexit in the absence of a government?

The Queen will certainly ask the opposition to form a government if Johnson quits (two weeks are allowed to form a government which if unsuccessful will result in a general election). Moreover, the letter cannot be submitted by the Head of State (the Queen) in the absence of a government. Will a technocratic government of senior civil servants be appointed (is that even possible in Britain, we are not Italy)? Elections take around one month; that is far too long a time when Britain is facing an imminent no deal Brexit.

There is always the nuclear option of revoking no deal as this could be voted by Parliament; but I believe that must be submitted by the government to the EU. That would certainly not help in "reuniting the nation" but I doubt that will be an easy task anyway. Your guess is as good as mine … who knows?

Meanwhile Labour retains important assets in terms of a forthcoming general election. The 2017 manifesto, together with the huge campaigning membership to get out that message on the doorstep, can and must be repeated in spades in any forthcoming poll. All those that joined Labour to campaign for Corbyn as leader, including some that have become somewhat disillusioned since with bureaucratic manoeuvres and slow pace of change, need to be involved in throwing out the Tories and establishing a radical Labour government and continuing the battle against the Labour right who want to undermine the dynamic of that project.

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Hong Kong’s protest movement must stop ignoring migrant workers

13 September 2019, by Promise Li

Migrant domestic workers from Southeast Asia occupy a unique, but rather neglected, position in the city’s current struggle. Almost 400,000 migrant workers (more than the size of the general strike), mostly from the Philippines and Indonesia, work for extremely low wages in Hong Kong. Most come to the city to seek better jobs, but almost 80% are in debt and beholden to the exploitative practices of recruitment agencies. According to a recent report, migrant workers contribute more than $12 million to Hong Kong’s economy. [1]

Many of these workers are supportive of the protests, and migrant unions, some of which are affiliated with the pro-democracy Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU), have strongly encouraged their members to get out on the streets. [2] But various pressures limit their participation and protest demands have not directly addressed their material concerns. Some are compelled not to participate in fear of their work visas being revoked; the Philippines consulate has sent out notices discouraging migrant workers from participating in the protests. [3]

Clarisse*, a Filipino migrant worker, says that many employers disapprove of their participation in the protests, and some have even prevented them from taking their legally mandated rest day. In addition, she points out that the areas where migrants usually congregate have become key sites for clashes between the police and the protestors.

One message threatened to attack Nepalis, Indians, and Pakistanis if they participate in the protests.

Fake government notices, and even

death threats, have been anonymously circulating in migrant workers' social media platforms like WeChat and Whatsapp, according to Fish Ip, the regional coordinator for International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF). One message specifically threatened to attack Nepalis, Indians, and Pakistanis if they participate in the protests, many of whom are not even domestic workers, showing how different racial minorities in Hong Kong are conflated and targeted. Reports of the Hong Kong police harassing and arresting a Filipino dancer on the eve of the general strike further exacerbated these fears. [4] Other threats were framed as retaliatory stemming from rumours that some ethnic minorities were involved in the attacks on protestors in Yuen Long. [5]

Widespread indifference to migrants

Hong Kong is still considered a better place to work and organise than other major hubs for migrant workers like Dubai, despite lacking many basic employment rights. [6] Hope*, a Filipino who has worked in Hong Kong since 1996, fears that the extradition bill would open the way for policies that would further affect both migrants and locals alike. Above all, she worries that the right to unionise and freedom of assembly would be jeopardised. Hope was told by the Philippines consulate that the demonstrations are not a concern for domestic workers. But Clarisse rejects this stance, "We are living and working in Hong Kong, this is our second home and whatever happens we will be affected."

There is widespread indifference to the plight of migrant workers in Hong Kong, their voices have largely been ignored by both the pro-Democracy movement and the government. In spite of this, interviews with migrant workers demonstrate the complex ways in which migrants do see Hong Kong as a home away from home. [7] And a recent report shows that migrant domestic workers enable more East Asian women (especially mothers) to participate in the workforce. In other words, migrants, despite their limited participation, already play a central role in the demonstrations: their work enables more families to be involved.

"Hong Kong's woes are deeply tied to a globalised economy of exploitation, and the structural effects of colonisation in new forms."

While the protests have afforded an opportunity for the general populace to renegotiate their understanding of the city's structural issues, migrant workers rights have remained a blindspot. For example, the increasing distrust of policing is a new and critical step toward radicalisation. But the silence towards migrant workers' conditions reveals a persistent weakness in the protestors' demands: the inability to recognise that Hong Kong's woes are deeply tied to a globalised economy of exploitation, and the structural effects of colonisation in new forms.

Sring Atin, a domestic worker and member of the Indonesian Migrant Workers Alliance (IMWA) who is generally supportive of the protests, says that the movement's demands do not concretely address migrants' issues. The fight against the new extradition policies, which she sees as the prime focus of the mobilisations, must "bring in workers' demands to ensure quality and decent working conditions for the most marginalised communities."

The myopia around this issue reveals the exclusionary, xenophobic sentiments that are often constitutive of localist ideologies. A sense of ethnonationalism tied to 'Hong Kong identity' has been inseparable from many localist groups such as Hong Kong Indigenous, who promote blatantly uncritical xenophobia against the Mainland Chinese as a whole. This exclusionary sentiment manifests more subtly and variously when it comes to migrant workers, whose issues are seen as auxiliary to Hong Kong's struggles.

Class and race: the movement's blind spots?

Hong Kong is wedged between a geopolitical struggle between China and the US. Wilfred Chan asks in *Dissent* what it would mean for the city to "reimagine an anti-capitalist, anti-authoritarian politics of survival from the perspective of this in-between place?" [8] The answer lies in the city's working-class movements and will require imagining new coalitions. The potential for a transnational anti-capitalist politics is already here, in a city where migrants and locals rub shoulders on every other block contesting Hong Kong's identity as a global financial hub.

However, ethnic divisions in the protest movement prevent a deeper understanding of the colonial heritage of the city's labour economy and institutional structures. It is Southeast Asian women domestic laborers who bear many of the effects of Hong Kong's incomplete process of decolonisation. The city has a long history of gender-specific exploitative labour practices: for example, during the colonial period, affluent families often relied on *mui tsais*, unpaid or underpaid Chinese female domestic labourers. [9]

Today, diasporic Southeast Asian women, pushed out of their countries because of factors like gender and economic inequality in their home countries, continue to do essential care work. Migration scholar Rhacel Parreñas describes this as the "international division of reproductive labour". She writes in her book *Servants of Globalization*:

In both sending and receiving countries, most women have not achieved a gender-egalitarian division of household work; instead, they have used their race and/or class privilege to transfer their reproductive labor with responsibilities to less privileged women.

Despite the fact that migrants and transnational networks have shaped the city's cultural identity, an

uncritical and exclusionary idea of belonging continues to reinforce racial divides. A radical movement that truly can challenge the city's deep injustices must go beyond demands for universal suffrage, and build links between different marginalised groups.

"To highlight migrant workers' demands would not be a distraction from Chinese authoritarianism."

To highlight migrant workers' demands would not be a distraction from Chinese authoritarianism. On the contrary, it forces us to look at labour in all its complex dynamics – both within and beyond post-colonial Hong Kong. Why are wages so low for Southeast Asian women workers in Hong Kong, and even lower in their home countries? How are the governments of Hong Kong and China complicit or actively facilitating this network of oppression? How accessible are the protests to marginalised identities? These are the questions that the protestors must reckon with if they want liberation and democracy for all of Hong Kong.

Migrant unions and organisations have played an important in foregrounding these issues. But while they have had victories throughout the years, they have not been able to mobilise a mass movement in solidarity against neoliberal globalisation. Their demands to make the current protests more inclusive poses a challenge to the movement. As a recent petition by self-organised housewives in support of the protests suggests, domestic care labour is not only legitimate work, but the kind that establishes the conditions for widespread struggle.

Who is included in the "??" (*myself*) of the protestors' chant: "???????" (*We alone will save our own Hong Kong*)? What happens to our activism and analysis when some of the "??" include diasporic identities that are as local as they are transnational? These questions are not merely academic and speculative: they determine the concrete limits of Hong Kong's struggle for liberation.

Combatting all kinds of oppression in Hong Kong under Chinese authoritarian capitalism must entail unpacking Han chauvinism, Hong Kong ethnonationalism, and other exclusionary ideologies. And to combat China's colonial ambitions, we must look inward: freedom lies not only in the vanguard in the black masks, but also in the many who are absent from the front lines. We need to rethink who is included in the local, and how the local is tied to the transnational. For Hong Kong, a critical link to the global, grassroots fight against capital, are its migrant workers.

**Names have been changed to protect identities.*

Source ***Open Democracy****.*

Footnotes

[1] *Time*, 6 March 2019 "Here's How Much Migrant Domestic Workers Contribute to Hong Kong's Economy".

[2] *The Diplomat*, 5 July 2019 "Why Are Migrant Workers Joining the Hong Kong Protests?".

[3] *Rappler*, 15 August 2019 "PH Consulate in Hong Kong reminds Filipinos to avoid protest venues".

[4] *South China Morning Post*, 4 August 2019 "Filipino and South Korean working in Hong Kong arrested in Mong Kok – the first foreigners detained in extradition protests".

[5] *South China Morning Post*, 30 July 2019 "Ethnic minority groups in Hong Kong harassed and discriminated against amid online rumours pinning blame for Yuen Long attack on them".

[6] *South China Morning Post*, 30 July 2015 "Helping Hands: The Two-Week Rule".

[7] Nicole Constable, *Maid to Order in Hong Kong: Stories of Migrant Workers, Second Edition*, Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2007.

[8] *Dissent*, 8 August 2019 "Hong Kong's Fight for Life ".

[9] *South China Morning Post*, 17 October 1999 "Childhood lost to a tradition of slavery".

Feminists on the front lines of the Algerian uprising

11 September 2019, by Leïla Ouitis

When in early February Algeria's ailing octogenarian president Abdelaziz Bouteflika announced his intention to run for the presidency for a fifth term, millions of Algerians took to the streets in response. After weeks of rallies, Bouteflika was forced to resign on April 2, only to be replaced by a triad of government cronies: Abdelkader Bensalah as interim-president, Noureddine Bedoui as prime minister and Major General Ahmed Gaid Salah, who has emerged as the key power broker in the country.

Despite the arrests of two of the country's former prime ministers and several business leaders on corruption charges, the protests have been continuing for over seven months now, with protesters demanding a radical

overhaul of the military-backed regime. Fresh elections that were originally planned for July 4, were postponed by the constitutional council in early June, allegedly due to a lack of candidates.

The postponement of the elections was seen as a victory by the protesters, who feared that hastily organized elections in the short term would benefit the old powers and leave little opportunity for civic parties to prepare. Proposals for a national dialogue led by former speaker of the lower house Karim Younes to pave the way for presidential elections have been met with little enthusiasm by the opposition. Gaid Salah has demanded that the date for the elections should be announced by mid-September.

Leïla Ouitis, a feminist, housing activist and a French-Algerian teacher working in Seine-Saint-Denis, close to Paris, regularly travels to Algeria to visit her family. She has witnessed the protests first-hand, and in this three-part series she offers her reflections on the socio-economic roots of the popular uprising, the background of the different groups and individuals involved with the movement, and the role played by feminists and women's rights activists in the protests.

In this second part of the series, Ouitis looks at the popular movement that has filled the streets since February 22. How are people organized? Who is protesting? Can we even talk about a "popular movement" in which people are following a common program beyond the demand for an end to the regime of Bouteflika and his cronies? [1]

No specific group is directing these demonstrations. On the contrary, as was the case in other countries in the region in 2011, this moment is one of sudden upheaval (even though some analysts tried to sound the alarm mere weeks earlier [2] Some have attempted to attribute the beginnings of the contestation to the stadiums and homes of football supporters, given the sport's long political and decolonial history in Algeria.

The first calls in December 2018 to demonstrate in the working-class neighborhood of Bab El Oued in Algiers went unheeded. Mid-February, larger marches took place in Kherrata (near Béjaïa), in Khenchela, then in Annaba, where the portrait of the president was torn down and trampled.

The extent of the February 22 demonstrations was really surprising: the protests emerged simultaneously across the country in most of the major cities and several mid-sized cities. The movement even reached scarcely populated oases and wilayas (provinces) like Djelfa, Adrar and Tamanrasset.

Unlike the recent uprising in Sudan, which is more politically homogenous, in Algeria no organization or leadership has taken shape. [3] This facilitates a mass movement: at their peak, according to police figures, the weekly protests brought together nearly 10 million people, or nearly a quarter of the population. [4] Their democratic and peaceful nature is notable given the more riotous forms of past decades (see the first part of this interview}.

One of the slogans is "silmiya, silmiya" or "peaceful, peaceful." Another is "handeriyya" or "civilized." These are protests where volunteers maintain order and clean the streets after the demo, where families protest together with children and babies in strollers — which reassures the older adults among them — where bottles of water and candy are handed out, and until recently, where freedom of speech had been reclaimed by protesters and relatively respected by authorities.

But since the government's failed attempt in June to divide the movement by banning the Amazigh (Berber) flag, repression has been intensifying at an alarming rate [this will be elaborated upon in the upcoming third part of this interview].

Nevertheless, in the streets, people are talking: small public forums take place each Friday before the demos in some of the major cities. For example, Oran's main square, Place du 1er Novembre, is still the site of frequent public debates. During Ramadan, the wilaya decided to judiciously set up a craft fair there but the next day, protesters came in mass and took down the fair tents.

"ALL OF THEM MUST GO!"

Responses to the political class's participation in the protests are proportional to the politicians' proximity to power. We have seen figureheads close to the regime, like Saïd Sadi, founder and former leader of the Rally for Culture and Democracy party, or Louisa Hanoune, founder and current leader of the Workers' Party, get expelled from demonstrations.

It is remarkable how hostile the movement has proved to any type of ideological or political slogans. It has found icons in figures like Djamila Bouhired, a celebrated national liberation militant, or Ramzi Yettou, a 23-year-old protester who died Friday, April 19 after being beaten by police. In early June, Kamal Eddine Fekhar, a Mozabite minority activist who had protested segregation in the south of the country, died from his two-month hunger strike, drawing wider attention to lesser-known prisoners of conscience beyond the activist circles of Algiers.

Embryonic organizing efforts are no doubt afoot with labor and interest groups, but people march individually or as a family, side by side with feminists, victims of the civil war, recognized veterans or forgotten members of "Patriot" militias from the décennie noire (Black Decade). Generally, constituents from across Algerian society come together to protest every Friday, united by one slogan: Yatnahaw ga' ("All of them must go, every last one").

Indeed, over several decades now, Algerian society has become polarized between a social minority dependent on the rentier state who continue to get richer thanks to their deep ties to the global valuation of capital and a large majority who continue to be pauperized in different ways. The rent-seeking nature of the economy lends a political tenor to all the social demands. In this context, the "everyone must go" slogans, both radical and vague, allow for a

unification of all the social segments into a vast interclass movement.

From the young women and men of the informal proletariat to the middle classes and even the bourgeoisie [see the upcoming third part of this interview], each class has for the moment used this movement as a way to denounce the pressure it has suffered under an incredibly corrupt system.

SHOULDER TO SHOULDER, VEIL OR NO VEIL

Although there were few at the very beginning, women have been massively present since February 22, and even more so since International Women's Day on March 8. Women of all ages and classes have been extremely visible, but the majority are young, urban and highly educated. And despite their degrees, they find themselves unemployed, like many men, but in even greater numbers. So every Friday, they have been protesting shoulder to shoulder, veil or no veil, in the dense demonstrations.

Their very presence in public spaces has changed the movement. Now, when some women launch general slogans, men are following their lead and chanting alongside them. These women are unafraid of being arrested by the police.

From the first weeks of the movement, feminist collectives have been organizing meetings in major cities across the country. Tactics are discussed in French, Arabic or in Darja, the local Arabic dialect. Some women wear the veil, others critique the religious norm as part of their demands for more equality. To grasp what is at stake in Algerian Islamic feminism, see Feriel Bouatta's recent work [5]

Most women are asking for the abolition of the Algerian Family Code but don't know how to accomplish that. These feminist collectives are well aware of the greater risk they face of being accused of dividing the movement.

On March 16, the Algerian Women for Change Toward Equality collective decided to organize a feminist square in front of the Central Faculty in Algiers. Journalist Daïkha Dridi later reflected, "No one asked me for my opinion on the feminist square, and it isn't an idea that I would have defended if I had participated in the organization, but now that this square exists, I support it totally in solidarity."

Two weeks later, on March 29, the square was overtaken by several men who tore up signs and verbally attacked some women. The feminists held their ground. On April 3, an Algerian man living in England posted a video on Facebook threatening women who demand equal rights of acid attacks. His identity was quickly verified, activists lodged complaints, and he immediately apologized.

TOWARD A REPEAL OF THE FAMILY CODE?

Despite the fact that demands for gender equality do not please everyone, feminist groups large and small continue to march and coordinate; new groups pop up each month. Most of them demand the abolition of the Family Code.

The duality of secular and religious sources has prevailed in Algerian law ever since the colonial period. Juridically, Algerian women are torn between two worlds: a constitutionally defined status as equals to men and an inferior status under the domination of the father and the husband, as defined by the 1984 Family Code, which forces them to seek approval from a wal?, or guardian, in order to be married.

Divorced women lose custody of their children if they remarry, a marriage is nullified if the husband is a confirmed apostate and certain forms of polygamy are still recognized, as are repudiations. The law of succession remains subject to normative religious law, creating inequality between inheritors on the basis of their gender.

Pressure from women and feminists has led to some improvement of the law over the last 10 years, like the 2015 law that allows women to press charges in cases of domestic violence. Still, that law contains an unacceptable clause in which the charges against the aggressor are dropped if the victim "pardons" him. This law opens a back door to all sorts of pressure.

In a context where the West — that is, the centers of accumulation threatened by the crisis — uses feminism to strengthen its grip at home and abroad, several antagonisms become clear when Algerian women mobilize as feminists. Algeria is a rentier country, dominated by the rent seeking that allows it to participate in global capitalism. Entire sectors of its economy have yet to be privatized and thus entice the appetites of international powers.

Given the West's obsession with culturalist and racist lies about Islam (see our text on this topic and especially Issue 26 of Théorie Communiste), we need to consider critically how the Family Code was part of the perestroika in the 1980s.

During the so-called "socialist" period, Algerian women benefited from the campaign for public education. Widely unemployed, they do not benefit from a more proactive national employment policy for women. As the feminist economist Fatiha Talahite has shown, "without abandoning the ideal of emancipation through work, generations of women were sacrificed in exchange for the promise that future generations of women would be able to work."

And yet, contrary to some Latin American countries where industrialization has led to jobs for women, the Algerian economy remains a prisoner of rent. In the early 1980s, faced with an immense reserve of educated yet unemployed women's labor power, government leaders would use the pretext of tradition to put the Family Code into place: the powerful status it accords men over women functions to mask the trouble with unemployment and housing in a context of accelerated liberalization.

The rigid structuring of the family as site of reproduction is a trend that accompanies general pauperization. In this way, leaders at the time deliberately chose to juridically accentuate the submission of women to men in order to ease the shock of the transition to a market economy. When rent revenues collapsed in 1986, women had no other choice but to go look for work in a market in crisis, in a situation of deindustrialization where only precarious, low-paying, mostly informal jobs were still available. This was the terribleBlack Decade.

After the civil war, the increase in oil profits allowed for a reduction in poverty, and with that, a soaring birthrate. Since 2001, female employment has considerably declined. More and more women have been limited to informal labor. According to the National Office of Statistics, of Algeria's 11 million workers, only 1.9 million are women.

Women make up 60 percent of Algerians with college degrees, yet over half of them are unemployed and identify as such. Indeed, despite the re-Islamization of the country, gender relations have enormously evolved over the last 20 years, especially in the major cities where women manage to establish themselves through work. As Fatma Oussedik has observed, "With or without a hijab, the women are out."

Despite laws that are still unfair for women, and to the great chagrin of the most conservative Algerians, divorce has skyrocketed in recent years, notably in urban areas.

THE FIGHT IS FAR FROM WON

After a marked absence during Ramadan, women have returned for Friday marches. But in a context of generalized unemployment and diminished oil profits as the rent economy teeters, in a context where publicly advocating for abortion rights remains a punishable offense, the debate with some self-proclaimed representatives of "civil society" over equality before the law and at work continues to be tense.

For example, the Wasilla network, which brings together women's rights organizations, had to announce its withdrawal from June 15's national conference that took place and brought together several groups, organizations and unions — often autonomous — to propose "a way out of the crisis and a democratic transition."

The fact remains that, as the sociologist Nacer Djabi points out, "Unions are conservative. They reflect Algerian society. They are middle class and coming from across the country, not only from major cities." So the political tendencies covered everything from the secular extreme left to Islamism. The Wasilla network pulled out of the conference, rightly in our opinion, because it "does not clearly and without ambiguity state the fundamental and non-negotiable political principle of equality between men and women."

However, June 20–22 in Tigrhemt (near Béjaïa) representatives from around 20 women's organizations and collectives, as well as independent participants, met. As W. Zizi put it, such a variety of ideological tendencies, with leftist feminists, right-wing feminists, underground LGBTQI activists and women who do not separate religion from the state, can create debate that sometimes resembles "a huge mess."

In addition, new collectives from the South (Ouargla, Ghardaïa and Tamanrasset) could not come for logistic reasons but managed all the same to issue a common declaration against precarious work and for the repeal of the Family Code. Some collectives have even managed to organize in the villages with working-class women around issues of domestic work or the lack of childcare services for employees in the public sector, for example.

The fight is far from won, though. Despite efforts during the socialist period, and due to its specific colonial history of "Dutch disease," Algeria didn't have the economic development in the 1970s and 1980s that had emerged in Southeast Asia and Latin America. Hence mass unemployment and a severely heteronormative society in which reproduction is still often guaranteed under pressures of an extended family or even clan.

The sociologist Rose Schembri, who recently described the "difficult homosexual affirmation in Algeria," uses as a counterpoint the work of the historian John D'Emilio, who correlates the emergence of a gay identity in the United States with the long history of the industrial revolution. D'Emilio shows how the arrival of a labor market and mass employment partially permitted a break from the family structure in capitalist centers of accumulation (which are still today structurally racist and patriarchal): exactly what was not able to take place in Algeria.

A BITTER FIGHT AHEAD

In a situation of declining rent and general unemployment, one can imagine the extent of the task of Algerian feminists. Though few in number, these women are very visible and must struggle in an international context where Western capitalists instrumentalize feminism to racist and Islamophobic ends, while at the same time pressing for an economic "opening" and an acceleration of privatization on the backs of poor Algerian women.

Now that the elections have been canceled, some on the left are calling for a national conference or a constituent assembly, but no one can predict what will happen. Fortified by the long history of Algerian feminism (brilliantly evokedby a new generation of women filmmakers and oral history documentarians), feminists will perhaps be able to rely on new generations recruited from the hirak to oppose liberal elites and to brave the negotiations with a largely conservative Algeria.

But with the economic crisis accelerating in Algeria, which, like everywhere else, is being negotiated on the backs of women, the fight will be bitter.

Roar

Footnotes

[1] Read the first part of the series here- http://www.europe-solidaire.org/ecrire/?exec=article&id_article=49436.

[2] https://www.algerie1.com/sante/situation-economique-politique-et-sociale-en-algerie-les-mauvaises-previsions-de-la-carnegie-endowment-pour-2019.

[3] http://www.europe-solidaire.org/ecrire/?exec=article&id_article=50327.

[4] https://www.express-dz.com/2019/03/08/pres-de-10-millions-de-personnes-dans-la-rue-ce-vendredi/.

[5] http://www.koukou-editions.com/catalogue/islamo-feminisme/.

Public Transport Can Be Free

10 September 2019, by Wojciech K?b?owski

If we are to believe transport experts and practitioners, abolishing fares for all passengers is the last thing public transport operators should be doing. For Alan Flausch, an ex-CEO of the Brussels public transport authority and current Secretary General of International Association of Public Transport, "in terms of mobility, free public transport is absurd."

According to Vincent Kauffmann, a professor at University of Lausanne and one of key figures in sustainable mobility, "free public transport does not make any sense." Getting rid of tickets in mass transit is judged "irrational," "uneconomical" and "unsustainable."

However, if we turn to commentators from outside the field of transport, the perspective on fare abolition changes radically. Social scientists, activists, journalists and public officials—often speaking from cities where fare abolition has actually been put to the test—fervently defend the measure.

For Judith Dellheim, a researcher at Rosa-Luxemburg Stiftung in Berlin, providing free access to public transport is the "first step towards socio-ecological transformation." For Michiel Van Hulten, one of the earliest proponents of free public transport in Europe, "it is about returning to the commons." Finally, according to Naomi Klein, this is precisely what cities around the world should be doing —"to really respond to the urgency of climate change, public transport would have to become free."

Fare-Free Experiments

In spite of the controversy that it apparently creates, the number of cities experimenting with fare-free public transport (FFPT) is on the rise. In 1980, there were only six. By 2000, the number had grown to fifty-six. Today, FFPT exists in "full" form in at least ninety-eight cities and towns around the world. Full fare abolition means that ticket-free rides are available for the vast majority of local public transport routes and services, for the vast majority of users, and for most of the time. In several hundred more cities, fares are suspended in a partial way — either in specific city areas or modes of transport, or in specific periods of the day or year.

The United States is where the first reported case of full FFPT system occurred — in 1962 in the town of Commerce, in the Los Angeles suburbs — and where most FFPT programs could be found throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. At that time, the proponents of fare abolition in North America relied on social and political arguments, pointing to the anticipated social benefits of abolishing fares, and claiming that zeroing out fares could help increase the use of public transport and counter the high investment in automobile infrastructure.

The largest cases of that time — now discontinued — were located in Mercer County (New Jersey) and Denver (Colorado). Today, FFPT exists in twenty-seven localities across the United States: small urban/rural areas (e.g. Edmund, Oklahoma; Kootenai County, Idaho), university campuses (Chapel Hill, North Carolina; Macomb, Illinois) and natural parks and tourist resorts (Crested Butte and Estes Park, both Colorado).

The first European experiment with abolishing fares began in 1971 in Colomiers, in the suburbs of Toulouse (France), and was soon followed by Rome and Bologna. Perhaps the most renowned historic case of fare abolition is that of Hasselt, in Belgium. Faced with the problem of high traffic congestion, its mayor declared in 1996 that "we don't need new roads, we need new ideas." Hasselt dropped plans for constructing a new ring road and instead eliminated fares and reformed the network of collective transport, giving it clear priority. Increases in operational costs and changes in the local government have subsequently led to the cancellation of Hasselt's fare-free policy in 2014.

Ever since the 2000s, a plethora of fare-free systems emerged in Europe, where most (fifty-six) of the world's cases of full FFPT are found. A particularly large number of them are located in Poland (twenty-one, all of which have emerged since 2010) and France (twenty). Many European municipalities justify FFPT as a strategy for reducing car usage (e.g. Avesta, Sweden; Be?chatów, Poland) and car-related pollution and noise (Tórshavn, Faroe Islands). In many towns, socio-political arguments are

used: FFPT is explicitly conceived as a social policy aiming at helping disadvantaged groups (as in Lubin, Poland; Colomiers and Compiègne, France), or as an attempt to re-define collective transport as common good (Aubagne, France; M?awa, Poland).

The geography of fare abolition thus embraces small or mid-sized towns with less than one hundred thousand inhabitants. Most of them rarely make the news — have you ever heard of Ko?cierzyna or Vitré, Hallstahammar or Lugoj, Velenje or Akureyri? An important exception is Tallinn, the Estonian capital, which is the largest city (440,000 inhabitants) to currently host a ticket-free program, providing a strong argument that FFPT can work in a larger urban areas.

Still, transport experts seem convinced that fare abolition is irrational, senseless, and irresponsible. How to understand the fact that it nonetheless exists in nearly a hundred cities worldwide? Below I turn to the debate, and illustrate some of the arguments with examples from actually existing FFPT programs in Tallinn (Estonia) and Aubagne (France). The choice of these cities is not accidental; each of them is important in studying FFPT. Aubagne, located in the suburbs of Marseille, is among the most widely discussed cases of fare abolition in France, an important centre of FFPT. Tallinn, meanwhile, promotes itself as "the capital of free public transport," and is actively promoting this policy domestically and abroad.

Harmful and Irrational?

Most transport academics and practitioners discuss FFPT in terms of its utility, efficiency, and contribution to economic growth (or lack thereof). The idea of abolishing fares is criticized for threatening the financial stability of public transport networks. Free access to buses and trams eliminates revenue from tickets while increasing the cost of maintaining security and responding to higher passenger demand. As a transport official from Montpellier (France) explains, zeroing fares is a policy that "deprives public transport of resources essential for its development." Furthermore, according to many transport engineers and economists, public transport should function as a self-funded or for-profit agency subject to market mechanisms.

FFPT is therefore a "fake good idea" based on the illusion that "there are goods or services that have no cost." In other words, reducing the price to zero allegedly devalues the service to both its operators and passengers-clients. Finally, FFPT is often portrayed as an irrational idea. Supposedly, fares are not only a source of economic revenue, but also as a mechanism that controls passenger behavior. Without tickets, passengers would make trips that engineers deem marginal, "non-productive" or even "useless." Put simply, the existence of tickets is what keeps passengers from going insane.

However, some analysts point out that abolishing fares can help decrease equipment and personnel costs. Getting rid of the various devices and machines used to sell, validate, and control tickets saves money. No money has to be spent on secure cash management systems that include counting rooms, cameras, cash pickup, and deposit services. No commission is paid for third-party ticket sales, paper or electronic tickets, and accounting services.

At the same time, the lost revenue from ticket sales usually constitutes only a part of total public transport budget. This means the actual costs of maintenance and investment in a public transport system are never fully covered by its passengers — the public subsidy plays a much more important role in this regard.

These arguments are supported by the evidence from Tallinn and Aubagne. Before Tallinn switched to a fare-free system, only one-third of the operational budget of its public transport network was covered by revenue from fares, while the remaining two-thirds were provided by a direct municipal subsidy. Crucially, free fares are offered only to registered residents of the city.

As a result, between May 2012 (seven months before the implementation of FFPT) and May 2016 the number of Tallinn residents increased from 415,000 to 440,000, visibly attracted by access to free rides. Since Estonian municipalities have the right to collect part of their residents' personal income tax, and the average tax contribution per resident amounts to â‚¬1600 per year, gaining twenty-five thousand new residents meant generating â‚¬40 million of additional revenue per year. This largely covered the money lost from fares (â‚¬12.2 million) and investments made to respond to increased demand (â‚¬11.7 million). As a result, instead of losing money, Tallinn gained â‚¬16.3 million per year.

In Aubagne, revenue from fares was even less (8.6 percent of the operational budget) and fare-dodging was common. A switch to FFPT in part enabled local authorities to increase the versement transport — a tax that French municipalities can collect from local companies with more than eleven employees. Following French law, the tax could be increased from 1.05 percent to 1.8 percent once Aubagne committed to building a right-of-way tram line — a project that should be seen as integral to the shift to a fare-free network, which, besides zeroing fares, meant a thorough redesign and improvement of public transport services. The increase in the versement transport raised revenue by â‚¬5.7 million, which together with operational savings (â‚¬160,000) largely covered the cost of fare abolition (â‚¬1.57 million).

Unsustainable?

Another set of arguments regarding FFPT revolves around the question of its capacity to contribute to "sustainable" mobility. In this perspective, transport is seen as key component of the "good city," which is not only economically strong, but also socially cohesive and diverse, environmentally friendly, healthy, and participatory. To increase "quality of life" and "livability," the proponents of sustainable mobility focus on the challenge of facilitating a shift from cars to public transport and "soft" modes such as cycling and walking.

From this perspective, sustainable transport researchers claim that disincentivizing the use of cars — through parking policy, congestion charging, or increasing fuel taxes — is more effective in terms of regulating car mobility than abolishing fares in public transport. Moreover, it's assumed that new passengers attracted by FFPT are pedestrians and cyclists, rather than car drivers. Consequently, for many public transport operators, reducing the price of tickets to zero works against efforts to increase the quality of their service.

None of these claims seem valid when looking at the data from actual cases of FFPT. First of all, each and every fare abolition program appears to generate a significant increase in the number of passengers. In Tallinn, within three years of fare abolition the number of passengers increased by 14 percent. In the same span of time in Aubagne, whose public transport network had clearly been underused, the number of passengers went up by a stunning 135.8 percent. Can such an increase in passengers — whether they previously used cars, bicycles, or walked — be considered a negative phenomenon?

Although it was clearly not the among the main aims of the policy, FFPT nonetheless attracted some car users to public transport. In Tallinn, the share of public transport increased by 9 percent, and that of cars decreased by 3 percent. In Aubagne, although no precise data is available, a smaller shift to public transport has been observed in passenger surveys: 20 percent of new passengers who used to drive claim to have abandoned their cars precisely because of free rides. Finally, while in Tallinn as well as Aubagne the quality of public transport significantly increased before fare abolition, it continued to do so not just despite, but precisely because of FFPT. Providing free rides to passengers generated even stronger political support for developing public transport, which in both cities stands at the center of the political agenda.

Socially Just, Politically Transformative

The third set of arguments in the debate about FFPT views the policy not in terms of its economic viability or contribution to sustainable development, but its potential to facilitate a profound and long-term social and political transformation. The fundamental value of fare abolition lies in simplifying the way public transport is used: it can be taken by anybody, at any time, according to any needs they may have. Public transport is thus imagined not as a commodity, but as a "common good" — similar to many other public services such as health care, education, parks, roads, sidewalks, cycling paths, streetlights and lampposts, libraries, schools, kindergartens, or playgrounds.

Just as in the case of these services, we could imagine public transport being continuously provided free of charge, regardless of whether it's needed in a given moment or not. After all, you don't have to insert coins to light an individual lamp posts on your way home at night, or pay for every minute spent in a park or library.

In this sense, FFPT introduces a different logic into transport. It moves away from the market-oriented focus on profitability and demand management. It directly challenges a free-market dogma that "continues to envisage payment as a way of assuring that infrastructure is respected."

For some municipal officials, it fits the socialist vision of transport as a public, accessible and affordable service. For others, it expresses a more radical, anticapitalist principle of de-commodifying common goods and services, and signals a transition from "customer-passengers" to "citizens." Abolishing fares may be seen as way of challenging bio-political control over passengers exercised through ticketing and surveillance, which is often accompanied by policing strategies that focus especially on undocumented users.

Finally, providing unconditional access to public transport has been praised for directly addressing the issue of social exclusion, inequality, and transport poverty. Increasing accessibility for lower-income passengers means creating a more socially just transport system. A fare-free network "shows solidarity with the weak, with those who cannot afford a car, with those who are dependent on public transport, who are particularly affected by its drawbacks."

That outcome is clearly visible in Tallinn. Providing unconditional access to public transport resulted in increased use among the unemployed (32 percent) and low-income groups (26 percent among residents with income less than 300 euros per month). Buses and trams are used more heavily by residents on parental or home leaves (21 percent), and pensioners (17 percent). This phenomenon is visible across age groups, and particularly among the youth (21 percent among fifteen- to nineteen-year-olds), the middle-aged (16 percent among forty- to forty-nine-year-olds) and the elderly (19 percent among residents between sixty- and seventy-four-year-olds).

The use of public transport has increased in post-Soviet housing estates where a large share of Russian-speaking Tallinners live, facilitating integration for that ethnic group. At the same, use has also been on the rise in middle-class neighborhoods, showing that free rides are not just attractive for the poor.

It is clear, however, that FFPT "would not solve all of our problems; rather, at best it would represent the first step" towards a wider transformation of the power relations that shape transport. Against mobility experts who claim that passengers are more concerned with issues of safety, frequency, reliability, and availability of transport, a variety of organizations and movements have campaigned for fare abolition.

One of their many examples is the Movimento Passe Livre ("free fare movement") that emerged in Brazil during protests against an increase of

public transport fares across the country in June 2013. The question of increased ticket prices was important not only as a sign of stark inequality between highly mobile car-driving urbanites and the urban poor who have no choice but to use public transport. FFPT also constituted a rallying cry against the continuing commodification of public services and their imposition of purely economic, "rational," and "sustainable" considerations.

What About the Workers?

In addition to this debate, the issue of FFPT reflects on the position of transport workers. How does a switch to a fare-free system affect them? In many cities, including Tallinn and Aubagne, FFPT has been applauded by drivers for improving their labor conditions. Even if working hours and salaries remained the same, drivers no longer have to sell and monitor tickets, which used to be a source of considerable stress.

The shift to FFPT also means that drivers no longer have to count cash at the end of their working day. In Aubagne, one driver told me that FFPT "is heavenly. It means no more stress . . . about fare-dodging, checking tickets . . . With [FFPT] the driver can focus on driving and welcoming passengers, that's it." The policy "transformed the the job of the bus driver, who now has only one question in mind: driving the bus well."

The shift has not been entirely positive for all workers. In Tallinn, as many as seventy out of eighty ticket controllers were made redundant. In Aubagne, ticket inspectors were made responsible for maintaining security aboard buses, since initially there were widespread concerns that fare abolition would result in vandalism. Once security issues were quickly understood to be minor, inspectors were further directed to supervise the drivers' attitude and performance — instead of monitoring passengers, they now monitor other workers.

The decreased scope of duties under FFPT leaves the position of drivers within their respective transport agencies the same, if not weaker. In Tallinn, although drivers can join a company-based trade union, their actual capacity to engage in collective bargaining continues to be severely limited by a system in which individual salary bonuses aren't awarded to employees who raise objections to company policy. As one driver told me, "with or without fares, there is fixed bonus every month: if you drive on time, the bonus comes, but if you make a [complaint] then the bonus can be reduced."

In Aubagne, FFPT was introduced in the context of a shift from a family-like business to a privatized network run by a local branch of Veolia, a French transnational company. For one local trade unionist, there is "a major contradiction between abolishing fares and letting a private company . . . manage it." Although Veolia adhered and adjusted to FFPT, it simultaneously implemented a series of measures "rationalizing" the PT network. For instance, drivers' individual punctuality began to be measured by a GPS system, and their responsibility for managing the company gradually diminished. The introduction of FFPT complicated their situation rather than empowered them in their struggle to join trade unions of their choice, and to have a voice in the debate about the company's policy.

Transport Is Not (Only) About Transport

The controversy created by the question of fare abolition reveals a wider problem regarding how urban transport is conceived and analyzed. The debate about transport seems to be dominated by technical and economic narratives, while the explicitly social and political dimensions of mobility are often sidelined. In the particular case of FFPT, approaching the policy as a transport mechanism generates a series of myths and misunderstandings that are not substantiated by the evidence from actually existing cases of FFPT programs. Although fare abolition is assumed to break the bank, in reality it may help generate new revenue, by attracting new tax paying residents (Tallinn), or raising local taxes (Aubagne). While it's attacked as a measure that fails to make cities more sustainable and livable, there is evidence that free rides are to some extent attractive to car drivers, and thus help increase the use of public transport, which in turn means less air pollution and noise. The quality of free transport services is not necessarily worse than paid transport — FFPT can act as a powerful symbolic statement of political support for collective transport.

In other words, transport policies are not (only) about transport. It is when looking at FFPT as an urban policy rather than a transport policy that we can begin to fully understand its ambition and impact. This requires seeing it not in a vacuum of mathematical modeling or analysis of traffic flows, but in the context of the specific place in which it is designed and put into practice — undergirded by power relations and political struggles, interacting with its spatial and social context, affecting the labor conditions of its workers. This means that, while the policy of abolishing public transport fares is obviously related to the field of transport, it cannot be understood as a transport policy alone.

“The Feminism of the 1 Percent Has Associated Our Cause With Elitism”

9 September 2019, by Nancy Fraser

RM: What exactly is Feminism for the 99% — and why launch such a manifesto now?

NF: The manifesto is a short piece of writing that’s intended to be popular and accessible rather than academic. I’ve written it together with the Italian feminist Cinzia Arruzza, who lives in New York, and Tithi Bhattacharya, an Indian-British woman who teaches in the United States.

This is the first time since I was a ‘68er — an activist in the 1960s and 1970s — that I have written a piece of real agitational political writing. I am, after all, mainly a philosophy professor. But the times now are so severe, the crisis of politics so acute, that I really felt that I had to jump in and try and reach a broader audience. So, the manifesto attempts to articulate a new path for the feminist movement, which has been dominated for the last couple of decades by a liberal-corporate wing of feminism, as personified in the United States by Hillary Clinton.

That was the feminism of the professional-managerial class, of relatively privileged women — middle- or upper-middle-class women who are highly educated and mostly white — who are trying to get ahead in the worlds of business or the military or the media. Their project was to climb the corporate hierarchy, to be treated in the same way as the men of their own class, with the same pay and prestige.

This wasn’t a genuinely egalitarian feminism — it wasn’t a feminism with much to offer for the vast majority of women who are poor and working class, who don’t have those privileges, who are migrants, who are women of color, who are trans or non-cis women. And this feminism of the 1 percent or maybe, at best, the 10 percent, has really tarnished the name of feminism. It has associated our cause with elitism, with individualism, with corporate life. It’s given feminism a bad name, associating us with neoliberalism, with financialization, with globalization, with anti–working-class politics.

The three of us thought this was a good moment to jump in and try and create a short, accessible statement of a vision and of a project of a feminism that takes the situation of poor and working-class women as its starting point, and asks what we really need to do to improve women’s lives. Of course, the three of us aren’t alone, in this — there are other left-wing feminists who’ve been trying to develop an alternative.

This is, indeed, emerging in the huge marches and demonstrations around March 8 [International Women’s Day]: these protests have an anti-systemic character, for they protest austerity and the assault on social production. The movement to meet women’s needs can’t be focused only on women’s issues as traditionally defined, like abortion rights — though those are very important. It also has to think more broadly about the larger crisis of society and articulate policies and programs for the benefit of everyone. That’s why we call it a feminism for the 99 percent. That doesn’t just mean 99 percent of women but 99 percent of human beings on the planet.

RM: You mentioned March 8 and the feminist strikes that have been organized since 2017 in many countries, including here in Spain. Indeed, even beyond that, in Spain in recent years most labor protests have been waged by women, for instance domestic workers and nursing-home workers. So, are we facing a new wave within feminism? And to what phase of neoliberal capitalism does it respond?

NF: I do think it’s a new wave, or at least has the potential to become one, if it can make a split with this liberal corporate feminism. And I think it shows lots of signs of doing that.

Neoliberalism has engaged a fierce assault on what we call the sphere of social reproduction. That means all the activities and programs that support people and their reproduction: from birthing and raising children, elder care and the work that goes on inside the private household to things like public education, health care, transportation, retirement income, and housing. Neoliberalism has squeezed all of that. It says that women need to be working full-time in the paid workforce and at the same time that states need to cut spending on social programs as part of austerity and financialization.

So here we have both the withdrawal of public support in these areas, and the insistence that women put their time into producing profits for capital. That means a real crisis of care and of social reproduction. This sphere is where — as you said — the most militant strikes and fightbacks are.

In the crisis of the 1930s, the center of militant revolt was industrial labor — the forming of unions, the struggle for labor rights, and so on. Today the situation is different, partly because of deindustrialization and the relocation of manufacturing to the Global South. Now social reproduction is at the center.

You mentioned some important strikes led by women; I’d add that in the United States we have had a major wave of teachers’ strikes. It’s extraordinary: teachers are paid so little that many of them have to take second jobs working at Walmart in the evening in order to have enough to live on for themselves and their families. But these teachers’ strikes were not only for higher wages — they were also for increased funding for education, to make the schools better. So, they’ve gotten a tremendous amount of support.

That's an example of the sphere of social reproduction as a major site of struggle. And I understand that the huge March 8 marches and strikes in Spain were also protests against the cutting of social spending in all of these areas. Today struggles over social reproduction are at the cutting edge of left-wing, anti-systemic, anticapitalist struggle, and women are at the forefront. This fact needs to be at the center of a new way of thinking about what feminist politics is.

RM:How would you say this struggle over social reproduction interacts with class struggle and with antiracist and LGBTQ movements?

NF: First of all, I think we need to rethink what we mean by class struggle. Again, our image of the class struggle is still rooted in the 1930s — the white, male industrial worker with a union. But I would say that these struggles over social reproduction are also class struggles. For you can't have production and industrial work if you don't have somebody doing the work of producing and replenishing the workers and caring for the next generation that will replace them. Social reproduction is essential to capitalist production.

The work that produces those people and forms of sociality is every bit as much work as the work that goes on in factories. What makes class is not just the relationship of work in the factory but also the relations of social reproduction that produce the workers. So, this is all part of class struggle.

Our idea of class struggle in the past was too narrow. I don't think that feminism for the 99 percent is an alternative to class struggle. It's another front in the class struggle, so it should be allied with more familiar labor movements as well as the other things you mentioned — antiracist struggles, the struggle for migrant rights, and the struggle for LGBTQ rights.

This also matters because of the new class and racial division among women. The educated, upper-middle-class women that beat discrimination and rise to the top in corporations are working sixty hours a week in very demanding jobs. They're hiring women of color, often migrant women, to pick up the slack of care work, childcare, cleaning their houses, cooking for their children, caring in nursing homes for their parents, and so on. These liberal-feminist women are thus leaning on the labor of racialized women. These latter are vulnerable: they don't have labor rights, they are paid very little, and they are vulnerable to assault and abuse.

All of this class-race dimension within feminism needs to be put front and center. Feminism for the 99 percent has to be an antiracist movement. It has to take the situation of poor, working-class, and racialized women — the majority of women — and put their needs at the front, not the needs of corporate-climbers who want to crack the glass ceiling.

Similarly, within the LGBTQ movement there is a liberal wing which has been hegemonic and then a broader mass of people whose needs and issues have been marginalized. So, I think there's a comparable struggle going on within LGBTQ movements over whose issues are going to be front and center. I'd like to see our feminism for the 99 percent speak for trans, queer, and lesbian women, and I'd like to see an LGBTQ movement for the 99 percent, which would be its natural ally.

RM: It's clear that the struggle over social reproduction could build a bloc against neoliberalism and capitalism. But what about patriarchal relationships — can we fight male violence within the terms of the fight over reproduction? Can we use this front to change our relationships with other women and, above all, with men?

NF: Let me start by mentioning the #MeToo movement. The public image of this movement is focused on Hollywood, highly paid actresses, entertainers, the media, and so on. But the broad mass of much less privileged women is even more vulnerable to sexual assault and harassment at work. I'm talking about agricultural workers, some of whom don't even have papers, and whose lack of power and resources makes them very vulnerable to the demands of bosses and foremen. The same is true of hotel workers — for example, the case of Dominque Strauss-Kahn — or workers who clean offices. People who work in private homes as domestic workers are notoriously subject to rape and sexual assault.

The #MeToo movement, if you think about it more broadly, is a labor struggle. It's a struggle for a safe workplace where you are not subject to abuse. That the media focuses only on the top tier is unfortunate, for it makes it look like it's not a class struggle. But the social reproduction issue also has to do, at bottom, with changing the relations between production and reproduction and, therefore, changing the balance of power within households.

Social reproduction should not be gendered as women's work only. It's important work in society, some aspects of which are very pleasurable and creative. Men should have access to that and should feel responsibility to do their share and pull their full weight. This, too, is about changing dynamics within households. And of course, a feminism for the 99 percent is against all violence against women, against trans people, against non-cis people, against racialized people, and so on.

Patriarchy is a word, I should say, that I don't myself like to use, for it suggests an image of power that is dyadic — you have a master and then a servant who is their subject. Some of that still exists, there is no question. But the really central forms of power in our society exist in a more impersonal and structural way, constraining the options of working-class and poor people.

So, I think it's important to have a different image of power. It works through the banks and the IMF, through the organization of finance and industry, and through the construction of gendered and racialized labor markets. This is what determines who has access to resources, who can vindicate their claims and function as equals even within families and personal

relationships.

RM:When you talk about social justice you distinguish among three levels. There is distribution (the economy) but also recognition (culture) and representation (politics). To what extent are these three levels present in the new cycle of feminism?

NF: I think we're concerned with all these things, and they're sort of interrelated. You can't change the economic sphere and distributive relations if you don't change these other things, too.

What counts as a political issue is often defined in terms of what counts as an economic issue. The forces of capital insist that issues concerning the workplace should be decided by the markets, by the bosses, that these are not issues for democratic, political, collective self-determination. There's a line between what the private owners of capital decide and what we as democratic majorities decide.

A lot of this has to do with questions of culture — with the languages available to us to understand our situation. Do we have concepts like sexual harassment and date-rape, the terminology with which to talk about what the wrongs in society are, to talk about our experience and to make our claims?

Feminism has done a great deal to create new language and, in that sense, to change culture, to change people's understanding of what they are entitled to and don't have to put up with. So, it's broadened the sphere of political discourse and what is potentially a question for democratic decision-making and not the private decision for the family or the firm.

At present, we've made more progress at this cultural level than we have at the level of institutional change and transformation, both in the political sphere and in the economic sphere. But it's always about the interrelations among these three things.

RM:You've pointed out that neoliberalism has appropriated some of the critiques developed and demands raised by second-wave feminism and other 1970s movements, incorporating them to its own benefit. Could this happen again with the emerging forms of feminism — and what can we do to avoid this?

NF: Liberal feminism along with liberal antiracism and liberal LGBTQ movements and what has been called "green capitalism" were hegemonized — incorporated into — a hegemonic ruling bloc which in the United States took the form of what I call "progressive neoliberalism."

These movements lent their charisma, their ideology, to give these horrible policies — financialization, the precarization of work, and the driving down of wages — the veneer of being pro-gay, pro-women, and so on. That definitely happened, and this is why it is so important that the new wave of feminism should break with that kind of feminism and chart a new path.

It's always possible to be hegemonized and recuperated by more powerful forces whose ultimate aims are deeply at odds with one's own. It is always important for emancipatory and left-wing movement to be wary of this.

Today, we are told that we really have only two options — either right-wing authoritarian populisms, which are racist and xenophobic, or else go back to our liberal protectors and progressive neoliberalism. But this is a false choice — we need to refuse both options.

This is a moment of huge crisis in which we have the chance to chart a different path, building a truly anti-systemic movement for the 99 percent in which feminism for the 99 percent is one current along with labor movements, environmentalism for the 99 percent, the fight for migrant rights for the 99 percent, and so on.

RM: You have written that the nation state (in what you call the Westphalian-Keynesian framework) has entered into crisis with neoliberalism and that its borders are now more diffuse. You call this the "deframing" policy. But what is the role of the nation state today. Can we say that it has disappeared?

NF: No, it hasn't disappeared. Historically the main force that has provided any level of protection and security to working people from capital has been the nation state. And it's still the case that the nation state remains the principal addressee of claims. When we want protection, when we want social support, who do we ask? We demand that our government respond to us.

This is understandable when politics is still largely organized on a national basis, that national election campaigns are the principal activities for national-level politics. But it remains the case that this is ultimately inadequate.

We can see this when we look at migration, which is a huge point of conflict, indeed a crisis. We have people from all over the world who don't have states that can protect them or give them anything like what we in the wealthy countries are asking our states to give us. They are living in failed states, in refugee camps, they are forced to leave by political violence, by religious persecution, by the fact that the United States has invaded and destroyed their countries, by climate crisis, by many features of the global crisis that we live in.

When these people come, the right-wing populist movements double down on their politics of nationalism and exclusion. What's Trump's slogan? "Make America Great Again" — like it was before all these dark people started showing up and ruining our country. That's the ideology of this populist movement. So, we need to think in a transnational and global way about how we can ensure social rights for all people in the world. They need those rights, so that they don't have to get into a boat and risk their lives just to find a decent place to live, somewhere halfway around the planet.

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Do Remainers want to abandon the working class?

7 September 2019, by Phil Hearse

Cruddas takes as a key example of this false position articles by Paul Mason. He says:

"…recently both the social-democratic and radical left have sought to assert a new progressive 'base'. A leading advocate of this historic rethink, Paul Mason, recently suggested that 'a new strategy must be based on the realisation that Labour's heartland is now in the big cities, among the salariat and among the globally oriented, educated part of the workforce'. He identifies this as the 'new core of the Labour project', a distance away from the classical left proletariat. The new 'base' is to be formed around 'networked individuals' residing in 'Remainia'."

We come back to some of Paul Mason's more florid language later, but let's look here at the Cruddas counter-argument. He maintains that Labour can only win by being firmly based on its traditional (and pro-Brexit) working-class support, which is one that cleaves to old-fashioned ideas, like the importance of work – unlike all those people in social classes ABC1, where Labour had a big lead in 2017.

In the Cruddas account, there is no clear explanation of what the working class actually is today and its social and occupational diversity. His article reads as if his concept of the working class is that it is a mainly white social grouping working in factories, mines, steel mills and on the railways. This flies in the face of all known facts about the social and occupational diversity of the working class today.

The argument has been put about by left Brexiteers that the Liberal Democrat majority in Jeremy Corbyn's Islington North, in the Euro elections, was a middle-class vote, because ABC1 voters are the majority there.

But these are not Marxist class categories, but marketing target groups. As it happens C1 includes most clerical workers and a big majority of non-manual workers. So, for example medical secretaries, school administrators, low-paid civil servants, library workers, armies of low-paid local government workers, teachers and many others are in C1 and are in the main working class; and this group probably has a majority of women and millions of ethnic minority people. This is the reality of much of the working class in urbans centres today. They are not trendy infotech start-up owners linked to globalised networks and earning £100,000 a year. Far from it, many of them are very low paid, even if many of them have university degrees. And they are precisely the working-class group which together with students delivered huge votes for Corbyn and Labour in the 2017 election.

There is one glaring omission from Jon Cruddas' article that will surely strike anyone, irrespective of their position on Brexit. There is no discussion whatever of the social and political content of Brexit, and no mention for example of English nationalism, xenophobia, anti-immigrant prejudice or the growing racism that has mushroomed after the 2016 referendum. There is no mention of the fact that Brexit is, and has been for more than two decades, a project of the hard right of the Tory party, one which they have successfully used to seize control of that party.

Jon Cruddas says, well of course we can't be all about wining elections and 'triangulation', we have to stick to our core principles and values.

Thus:
"In any case, political parties do not just exist to chase votes. They are traditions built around competing theories of justice and democracy; alternative approaches regarding how society should be organised. For Labour, the Brexit dilemma goes to a tension at the heart of the party regarding its character and purpose; even existence."

All very well, but surely the core traditions of justice and democracy include the fight against racism and in favour of multiculturalism; opposition to xenophobic nationalism; and support for the rights of immigrants and migrant workers? The issues of racism and immigration are not touched on in the Cruddas article. This is indeed a symptomatic silence, a deafening one. And in any case why should a commitment to social justice imply opposing Remain?

Cruddas talks about a Labour working class base without reference to the fact that, as Wayne Asher explains:

"The generally accepted idea that working-class areas voted massively for Leave is only partially correct; many did, but traditional working-class areas in London delivered the highest Remain votes (peaking at 75 percent in Haringey and 78 percent in Hackney and Lambeth). Remain won in most of the great working-class regional capitals (Bristol, Cardiff, Leicester, Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds, Newcastle-upon-Tyne.) Only three cities of similar importance voted Leave and even then they did so by tiny margins (Birmingham, Sheffield, Nottingham). Working class Scotland voted massively for Remain of course."

In addition:

"Two out of three Labour voters voted Remain. (I suppose that voting Labour rather than Tory counts as the minimum entry level of class consciousness.) A majority of those in work voted Remain, irrespective of whether they were in part-time or full-time work. Two-thirds (67 percent) of those describing themselves as Asian voted Remain. Four out of five black voters (73 percent) voted Remain, and 70 percent of Muslim voters did so too. These voters obviously

understand the real dog-whistle message during the referendum campaign." [1]

This is not to deny that millions of workers did in fact voter Leave, or that many of them would back a hard Brexit. But it puts in perspective the idea of real workers backing Lave and the globalised urban petty bourgeoisie voting g Remain.

There is something else that is equally disturbing. Trying to draw a class line between the working class Leavers and the globalised Remainer elite – as not only Cruddas but some other left-wing Brexiteers do – is a caricature that has nasty echoes of what UKIP and the Brexit Party argue (not to mention the Daily Mail). It's the globalists, the elites, that want Remain.

Jon Cruddas says that it's true that in the Euro elections Labour lost more voters to the Liberal Democrats and the Greens than to pro-Brexit parties, but looked at over time Labour is losing more voters in Leave-type areas – presumably he has in mind places like South Wales, some south Yorkshire towns and his own constituency of Dagenham, which in recent times has elected BNP councillors.

Long-term decline in Labour support in these places has a lot to do with the collapse of traditional industries and the defeats suffered and subsequent decline of the labour movement as a whole. Left-wingers are quite right to be angry at the failure of successive governments, and in particular the 1997-2010 Labour government, to take the radical action needed to rescue these areas from penury and social misery. This failure indeed opened the door for political reaction.

The attitude that 'none of them care about us' is widespread in the 'left behind' areas and has been mercilessly used by the extreme right. But how? Not just in the assertion that both left wing and right-wing elites don't care about the working class, but also that the poverty and destitution of these areas is the direct result of immigration and the prioritisation of aid to immigrant areas over 'our people' (the same argument is made about foreign aid). Talk to pro-Leave people in left-behind towns and check out how many of them agree with the formulation 'there are too many immigrants over here'. A very high percentage.

Ask the self-same people about their attitude to Donald Trump or hanging. It is surely an elementary procedure to separate why people adopt a political position and the social content of that position. Votes for Donald Trump in the Mid-West rust belt were surely in many cases a function of distrust and hatred of the neoliberal elite that Hilary Clinton embodied. But it was still and utterly reactionary vote. And those many middle class and some working class people who voted for the Brexit Party in the Euro elections, also cast a reactionary vote.

Long-term decline in Labour voting in some poorer areas pre-dates the Brexit referendum. It is a major problem, of course; and it's true that it poses some difficult tactical choices for the Labour leadership.

But prevaricating is going to get nowhere. In the Euro elections many canvassers reported that Remainers thought Labour was for Leave, and Leavers thought it was for Remain. Labour has to shore up its base among socially progressive voters who opted for the Liberal Democrats and Greens this time. The Corbyn leadership must repeatedly point out the Liberal responsibility for austerity, and that the only way to get the Green Party's pro-environment policies implemented is to vote Labour.

Actually the question of a second referendum is not the central one. The key is No Tory Brexit! Effectively this resolves itself into No Hard Brexit! And the logic of that is crystal clear. Better Remain than a Hard Brexit.

And that is the question that will separate out the true xenophobic core. There's absolutely no point in being diplomatic here. We are absolutely saying that racism is widespread in some sections of the working class: the point is to fight it.

Paul Mason uses some flowery and speculative language about the newer working class in the big urban centres. But the rational core of Mason's speculations can be simply extracted. The new working class is younger, more female and more ethnically diverse. Most of them voted Remain not because they love the institutions of the EU, but because they are pro-multiculturalism, pro-feminist, internationalist-minded and because they hate Nigel Farage and everything he stands for. They are also the base of the growing movement for climate justice. It is by fighting for these values that the base of Labour and the Left can be extended outwards.

28 June 2019

Socialist Resistance

Footnotes

[1] Wayne Asher, *Socialism International*, #161, January 2019 "In a hole and still digging: the left and Brexit".

Stop the repression in West Papua

7 September 2019

On August 17, Indonesian Independence Day, armed Indonesian police, soldiers and radical Islamic militia stormed a student dormitory in the Indonesian city of Surabaya (on the island of Java), which housed West Papuan students, arresting 43.

The attack reportedly took place

because the students had allegedly refused to raise the Indonesian flag.

Indonesia invaded West Papua in 1962 and has continued a brutal occupation since. It has conducted military attacks in areas populated by civilians, under the cover of targeting West Papua's pro-independence forces. It is illegal to raise the West Papuan flag (the Morning Star — a symbol of independence).

Reports of human rights abuses, extrajudicial killings, torture and displacement are rife.

West Papuans are regularly subject to racism and according to eye-witness reports, students were tortured and called "monkeys", "pigs" and "dogs" during the attack on August 17.

Following the attack, protests have continued in West Papua and thousands of people have taken to the streets to protest Indonesia's systematic racism, and to demand freedom and a referendum on independence.

In the Indonesian cities of Medan and Bandung the students have also received support.

In response to the protests, Indonesia has sent more than 1200 troops into West Papua, including the notorious Detachment 88 and Brimob (mobile police units). Detachment 88, which is trained by Australia, with the United States and Britain was reportedly involved in the attack in Surabaya and has been regularly used in a counter-insurgency role in West Papua. It was reportedly responsible for the killing of West Papuan independence leader, Kelly Kwalik.

Protesters and activists are being repressed by Indonesian forces. The internet has been cut off and journalists are prevented from entering the province, which is preventing information from coming out of West Papua. Surya Anta, spokesperson for the Indonesian People's Front for West Papua was also arrested on August 31.

This statement on behalf of left organisations in the Asia-Pacific raises the following demands:
1. Stop the repression against West Papuan activists and protesters and release all those detained during the protests, including Surya Anta.

2. Respect the right to self-determination of the Papuan people by agreeing to an internationally monitored referendum on independence.

3. Immediate withdrawal of military forces from West Papua.

4. Stop racism and systemic racist discrimination against the Papuan people.

5. Restore internet access in West Papua.

6. Allow international journalists access to West Papua.

Signatories:

Socialist Alliance (Australia)

Socialist Party of Malaysia - PSM

Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation – CPI(ML)

Party of the Laboring Masses - PLM (Philippines)

Korean House for International Solidarity (South Korea)

Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières (ESSF), France

Asia Monitor Resources Centre, Hong Kong

Socialist Workers, Thailand

Sedane Labour Resource Centre (LIPS), Indonesia

International Movement of Catholic Students Asia Pacific (IMCS AP)

Socialist Party of Bangladesh

Jammu Kashmir Awami Workers Party

Radical Socialist, India

Left Voice, Sri Lanka

Fightback Aotearoa New Zealand

The Alliance Party of Aotearoa New Zealand
Australia-Asia Worker Links

Socialist Alternative (Australia)

New Anticapitalist Party of France

Ash Brennan from the Free West Papua Campaign Australia

Cambodian Civil Society Partnership (CCSP)

Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC)-Southeast Asia

Initiatives for International Dialogue (IID)

Southeast Asia Conflict Studies Network (SEACSN)

Socialist Aotearoa (New Zealand)

Peoples Empowerment Foundation - Thailand

Left21, Hong Kong

WorkerCom, Hong Kong

Borderless Movement, Hong Kong

Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Red Star

To add your organisation to the list of signatories, please email:

national_office@socialist-alliance.org

#ProtestToo: the women at the forefront of

Hong Kong's anti-government movement

5 September 2019, by Raquel Carvalho

Jordyn, 23

Jordyn sleeps at night cuddling her teddy bear, while surrounded by dolls. She keeps her voice low and slow – and gets easily startled by loud noises.

"I am not a brave person at all," says the 23-year-old.

But on recent weekends, she has mustered the courage to take to the streets – sometimes by herself – equipped with goggles, a respirator, filters and bottles of water to extinguish tear gas canisters.

"I am not physically strong, and I don't do sports," she says. "So I feel quite surprised how girls, including myself, have reacted in these situations. I think we have all toughened up."

Jordyn, an NGO worker, is among the millions of Hongkongers who have protested against the city's government since June 9 [1], with weekend demonstrations increasingly boiling over into violent clashes between protesters and the police.

The leaderless movement, now entering its 13th week, has mostly been represented by male faces. But women joining the protests have become more daring, with many increasingly willing to go on the front lines and actively engage in a face-off with the police, according to more than a dozen female and male protesters interviewed by This Week in Asia.

Protesters and scholars closely watching the movement say it has helped empower women and combat certain stereotypes about female Hongkongers, who are sometimes described as materialistic.

Yet there is a dark side to this apparent gender parity [2]

As the movement has progressed, fears have emerged of women being more exposed to sexual violence and other forms of harassment. The role of female protesters has also become politicised, with allegations being made of sexual violence by the police. Such accusations prompted thousands to rally on August 28 [3] adopting the cry #ProtestToo as a form of solidarity and resistance.

Hope renewed

Jordyn joined the 2014 pro-democracy Umbrella Movement [4] – when thousands occupied the city's streets for 79 days – but was left angry and disappointed after seeing it end with no progress made on universal suffrage.

After June 9 this year, she says she "finally saw hope in Hong Kong again". That was the day 1 million people, according to the organisers, attended a protest against the now-shelved extradition bill that would have allowed the transfer of fugitives to jurisdictions such as the mainland, Taiwan and Macau.

Jordyn, who gave only her first name, began the summer going to protests with her parents. But as the movement evolved and grew more violent, she started taking to the streets whether or not she had company. "If I go with my friends or alone, I will get closer to the front line and try to help … I believe that if you want justice, you need to fight for it."

The first time the NGO worker was tear-gassed, she was wearing only a surgical mask. She could not see or breathe properly, but – to her surprise – did not panic. Instead, she tried to help a group of younger girls who were screaming next to her. Since then, she has learned how to build roadblocks and extinguish tear gas canisters by covering them with a traffic cone and pouring water over them.

When she thinks back to her weekends, all she hears are sounds of protesters groaning after being hit by tear gas, and the rhythm of riot-police boots chasing after her.

"I am not afraid of getting arrested – perhaps because I think that I will be lucky enough to get away," Jordyn says. "But I am scared of being beaten up. I've seen their facial expressions and their eyes while beating people up … it's like witnessing someone trying to kill you."

She intends to continue taking to the streets until the government meets the protesters' five demands, which include a formal withdrawal of the extradition bill as well as an independent inquiry into police's use of force.

"I see much anger and sadness among the protesters," Jordyn says. "I also feel sad for myself because I did not hate anyone this much in the past … I blame it on the police and [chief executive] Carrie Lam. Why do you have to turn me into someone I don't like to be?"

Testing the limits

What began as a leaderless protest to halt the extradition law's introduction has evolved into a mass anti-government movement demanding genuine universal su!rage and a pushback against what it sees as Beijing's encroachment on Hong Kong's basic freedoms and rights.

Graffiti has appeared on the walls of different neighbourhoods where protests have taken place, bearing messages such as "Liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our times", the election slogan of a pro-independence activist now in prison.

While the city's leader has previously suggested that the violence is the product of a "small minority of people" who "have no stake in the society", a recent study by scholars from three Hong Kong universities shows that most of those taking to the streets are middle-class, under the age of 30, and have some higher education. Nearly half, or about 46 per cent, of them are

female.

Stephy, 21

Stephy is wearing black full-body motorcycle armour, with a grey fabric mask covering her face. “We are ready to fight the triads" , she says firmly, referring to suspected gang members who clashed with protesters in North Point [5]

The 21-year-old is sitting in the middle of Hennessy Road in the bustling commercial district of Causeway Bay, which is swarming with protesters, while watching some of her friends testing their equipment.

More often than not, her group of about 20 friends, including three women, is at the front lines. Throughout the protests, Stephy – who gave only her first name – has seen some of them arrested, and others getting hurt.

More than 800 protesters have been detained since the movement began, and over 130 are facing charges, including for rioting.

The level of violence has also escalated. More than 2,000 rounds of tear gas have been fired, in addition to rubber bullets and beanbags, while water cannons have recently been deployed. Protesters have also resorted to bigger weapons, from throwing projectiles like water bottles to hurling bricks, bamboo poles and petrol bombs.

But far from being cowed by the increasing violence, protesters like Stephy have in fact become more galvanised to fight tooth and nail for their cause. “After two or three protests, I started seeing many more girls coming out and standing in front, instead of hiding in the back,” she says.

Stephy, who works as a freelance designer, says she has played multiple roles in the movement, including assisting those hit by tear gas and scouting the protest areas to check if there are any police around. “We usually see what we can do on the day of the protest. Every day tends to be different.”

Yan, 23

Yan, a 23-year-old graduate who works in property management, says that while her company has monitored those who have taken days o! to join the protests, she is willing to lose her job for the movement. “I am still young and I can pay the cost … We need to protect Hong Kong’s freedoms.”

Yan, who gave only her surname, says women have become more daring as the movement evolved. “We are still exploring our limits on how and what we can do,” she notes. “Most women are not as physically strong as men. I see [how men] can play an important role, like moving materials and protecting others.”Automatic word wrap
But recently, she and a female friend tried to extinguish tear gas canisters for the first time. “Actually, I realised that women can do more,” she says.

Cheung, 17

Cheung, a 17-year-old student, is standing on a footbridge in Tsuen Wan, helping her fellow protesters use bricks to prepare a new defence line. She compares the protests to a “battlefield” where everyone, regardless of their gender, plays a role.

She says she had not taken part in a protest before the movement started, but since June her e!orts have only grown stronger. “We feel that this movement is very important for our future … This is our home.”

On the front line

Women have long played a prominent role in social movements. They have been at the forefront of the fight for su!rage and women’s rights, and have also been critical in many other recent front-line situations – such as in Sudan this year, where they led protests that toppled long-time president Omar al-Bashir [6]

In contemporary China, female activists have been outspoken voices for change in society. Their numbers include the Tiananmen Mothers [7] who still demand to know exactly what happened on June 4, 1989, the date of a bloody crackdown on pro-democracy protests in Beijing.

Susanne Choi Yuk-ping, a professor

The place of female Hongkongers in society has also evolved over time. While gender parity in terms of participation in education was reached about a decade ago, the city’s gender wage gap has remained wide for at least the past 20 years. According to a recent report by the Women’s Foundation, women in Hong Kong are paid 22 per cent less than men on average.

“If you look at leadership in higher education, the judiciary and listed companies, the male dominance is still very pronounced,” says Susanne Choi Yuk-ping, a professor with the Chinese University of Hong Kong’s sociology department.

Despite such a gap, the gender expert notes the high rate of female voting in Hong Kong as well as strong female engagement in community organisations.

“I am not surprised that in this anti-extradition movement we have seen a lot of women taking to the streets, joining the marches, rallies and even [being] at the front line,” Choi says, recalling that large numbers of women had also taken part in the Umbrella Movement. “I think all these experiences will certainly empower women, and make them feel they have a stake in society and that they can make change by directly participating.”

Choi notes that the leaderless movement has been marked by initiatives from female groups, such as a group of housewives and a group of mothers who organised petitions and rallies [8] “We have seen women coming out in a specific feminine way and using these roles to speak out.”

At the same time, the city’s female leader Carrie Lam has positioned herself maternally to court public sympathy. But scholars say her strategy has backfired, as Lam’s remarks respectively comparing herself and anti-extradition bill protesters to a mother and her spoiled children angered many residents.

“She has this perception from ancient China, where o"cials are the parents of those whom they govern,” Choi says. “But Hong Kong people feel that she is a civil servant paid by taxpayers.”Automatic word wrap
While Lam has not been able to gather public support as a woman, Choi says she has noticed a positive shift in the way local women have been described online.

“Before, Hong Kong women were often ridiculed as gong nui [or ‘Kong girl’, usually a reference to being materialistic],” she says. “But since last month, I’ve seen some posts on [the forum] LIHKG addressing their changing perception on Hong Kong women.”

Darker side

Petula Ho Sik-Ying, professor

However, as Hong Kong University professor Petula Ho Sik-Ying notes, women have been more vulnerable than men to different forms of abuse and attacks since the movement began.Automatic word wrap
“Women will always be an easy target,” the gender expert says. “You have to be prepared because things will be posted online about you, about your physical appearance, personal opinions or relationships.”

Ho was criticised online after dozens were detained during a protest outside Tin Shui Wai Police Station on August 5, which was organised after a female protester was photographed with her underwear exposed as police dragged her away.

Activists blame her [9] for telling protesters not to run away and for urging them to stop throwing stones. Despite having denied these accusations, Ho is still grappling with online harassment.

“It’s been a masculine movement and very patriarchal,” she says. “We all enjoy the romantic aspect of the movement, but there are more dangers than we are willing to talk about.”Automatic word wrap
Allegations of sexual violence by the police have also grown stronger of late, while anger and resentment towards the force has increased.
Humiliating strip-search

A female protester who had been arrested publicly accused the police [10] last week of subjecting her to a humiliating strip-search. “I want to ask the police: does being arrested mean our rights are deprived and we could be treated without basic respect for women?” the protester said.

She claimed that after being told to take o! all her clothes – including her underwear – she was ordered to squat, as one female o"cer patted her thighs with a pen and instructed her to open her legs wider. A police spokeswoman has denied the allegations [11] maintaining there is footage that contradicts the protester’s story.

On Wednesday 28 night, thousands gathered in Central to demand answers from the Hong Kong police over such allegations. An emotional crowd shouted slogans such as “Shame on Hong Kong police” and heard several alleged victims’ accounts.

To those arguing that these protesters are weaponising their gender, Choi from the Chinese University of Hong Kong notes that some recent incidents have been witnessed by journalists and documented in videos and photos.

“Indeed if the police thinks that these are wrongful accusations, they should support an independent investigation,” she says.

The police did not respond to questions sent by This Week in Asia, but the force previously denied any wrongdoing and said those who had complaints could submit them through an existing mechanism.

While the Independent Police Complaints Council does not currently have a breakdown on complaints of a sexual nature, a spokeswoman for the police watchdog says it is conducting an overall study that includes looking into police guidelines and the events of the past few months.

“If there are repeated complaints on a particular issue, then we need to look at why that happened. Is it because of individual operations, management or guidelines? There might be some issues to be improved,” she says.

Association Concerning Sexual Violence Against Women

‘I FEEL MORE EMPOWERED’

An ongoing survey launched on August 21 by the Association Concerning Sexual Violence Against Women saw 46 out of 221 respondents, as of noon on August 27, report having experienced sexual violence since the movement began. These reports include being touched in sensitive parts of the body, attempted sexual assault, and being humiliated by the use of sex-related language.

Of the respondents, who are from different genders, 23 made allegations against police or other law enforcement officers, and eight said they had suffered abuse while in detention facilities.

The survey also found there were 18 accusations against pro- establishment supporters, and four involving other demonstrators.

A number of design posters have been shared online in the past few days with the hashtag #ProtestToo, a reference to the global #MeToo movement, which has amplified the voices of victims of sexual harassment and abuse.

Leo and Chan, males

Leo, a 17-year-old male student who has joined the protests as a first aider, says he is particularly concerned about the mistreatment of female protesters by the police.

“At the beginning there were not that many female protesters on the front lines, but more women have come up to fight for the cause,” he says. “Unfortunately, some of them have been caught by the police and have faced unfair and rude treatment.”

Another male protester surnamed Chan, 24, says he is surprised by the

female protesters' fearless attitude. "They are very e"cient and brave … some even walk in front of us … I respect that," he says, noting that many have been hurt.

Serious injury to the eye

On August 11, a woman who is believed to be a volunteer medic suffered a serious injury to her right eye, with protesters claiming she was hit by a beanbag round fired by the police.Automatic word wrap
The force has refused to take responsibility [12] pending an investigation, and has asked for a search warrant to access her medical records. The woman has since been discharged from hospital [13] and has turned into a symbol of the movement.

Jordyn, 23

Jordyn, the NGO worker, says she has become more self-driven since the protests started.

"In some ways, Hong Kong youngsters tend to be a bit passive, mostly because of our education system … I feel more empowered now. Not sure if that relates to my gender. But I have grown as an individual," she says.

Jordyn also says the movement has shown another side of female Hongkongers: "Some are now realising that Hong Kong girls are not afraid of getting their hands dirty."

South China Morning Post

Footnotes

[1] https://www.scmp.com/topics/hong-kong-protests.

[2] https://www.scmp.com/topics/gender-equality.

[3] https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3024789/thousands-gather-metoo-rally-demand-hong-kong-police-answer.

[4] https://www.scmp.com/topics/occupy-central.

[5] https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/society/article/3021708/rumours-armed-gangs-heighten-north-point-tensions-after-anti.

[6] https://www.scmp.com/news/world/africa/article/3005737/sudans-president-omar-al-bashir-forced-out-power-after-apparent.

[7] https://www.scmp.com/news/china/policies-politics/article/1962016/weve-suffered-27-years-state-terror-chinese-mothers.

[8] https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3014613/mothers-stage-sit-hong-kong-park-calling-government.

[9] https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3021713/pan-democrat-lawmakers-call-protesters-calm-down-avoid.

[10] https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3024164/woman-arrested-anti-government-protest-accuses-hong-kong.

[11] https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3024614/three-men-arrested-storming-legislative-council-hong-kong.

[12] https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3024947/hong-kong-police-apply-search-warrant-access-medical,

[13] https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3024147/woman-who-suffered-severe-eye-injury-during-hong-kong.

Hindutva on the march

4 September 2019, by Achin Vanaik

On August 5, 2019, India's right-wing government, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, annulled Article 370 of the Constitution, which had hitherto guaranteed the autonomous status of the province known as Jammu and Kashmir (which also included the Ladakh region), in one stroke through a presidential order. The order fulfilled the longstanding and publicly declared aim of the forces of Hindu Nationalism and its Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) movement that Jammu and Kashmir, as the only majority-Muslim state in the Indian union, must not be allowed to exist.

Along with the legal annulments, New Delhi not only bifurcated the region into two parts — Jammu and Kashmir on one hand, and Ladakh on the other — but for the first time in the history of Indian federalism, downgraded the status of the two from statehood to being mere "Union Territories" and therefore much more subordinated to central rule. Of the seven such UTs that already exist in the Indian Union, two have been allowed to have a representative legislative; Jammu and Kashmir will join them, while Ladakh will join the others without such a legislative body.

This action was long prepared. In Modi's last term before the 2019 general elections, "President's Rule" had been imposed to deny any possibility of a state government being formed by the main local parties with a strong base particularly in the

Kashmir Valley, precisely to prepare the ground for the August 5 order. In the days before that announcement, Modi's government sent an additional 38,000 troops (much more, according to some private observers) to join the existing force of over 750,000 armed personnel in the Kashmir Valley, worsening the already worst ratio in the world of armed personnel to civilians, standing at around 1:10.

In addition to the prevailing detention and sedition laws that allow arrests of civilians on mere suspicion, these deployments were accompanied by a communications lockdown (no landline or mobile phone service or internet availability for the general public), house arrests of local party leaders, strict curfews, and the banning of any public assembly of more than five people. At the time of writing, these injunctions largely remain in place, while hospital reports of gun-pellet injuries and ruthless beatings of stray civilians by the army during this period are basically ignored in the media outside Kashmir.

Steady Erosion of the Constitution

The people of Jammu and Kashmir on both sides of the border have been continuously betrayed by the governments of Pakistan and India.

In the Indian-occupied part of the province, previous governments, with the support of puppet-state regimes and rigged elections in the Valley, systematically eroded the autonomous powers and rights of the region. In the face of deepening resentment among the population, Modi's repressive moves were the only way to contain Kashmiris' growing anger and militancy.

One can recognize the nefarious role played by the Pakistan government, and the Islamist forces supported by them, in this scenario. But the truth is that the Indian government created and maintained the "troubled waters" in the Valley, in which, from the late eighties onwards, Pakistan fished. All previous Indian governments were determined to maintain territorial unity and military-political control of the valley at all costs, regardless of the suffering of the people of Kashmir or what Kashmiris wanted. In short, the land was always more important than the people.

The latest action is the final step in ending whatever remains of Jammu and Kashmir's claim to autonomy and respect for its distinctive history, culture, and political hopes within the Indian Union. The BJP/RSS motivation is not just a reassertion of the principle of prioritizing territorial unity; it is also motivated by a foundational hatred of Muslims and Islam and determination to reduce Indian Muslims to second-class citizens as part of its drive to establish a Hindu nation and state in all but name. This action has consequences specifically for the three parts of the region, for the rest of India, and for India's relations with Pakistan.

It was carried out through a brazen violation of the constitution. The fundamental basis for the region's incorporation into the Union was through the sovereign authority of a Jammu and Kashmir Constituent Assembly set up in 1951 and permanently dissolved in 1957. While a state legislature — which can never have sovereign authority but only a representative authority — was repeatedly used to make modifications and shift more and more powers embodied in the Indian Constitution to the province, the annulment of Art. 370 can only be done by that Constituent Assembly.

To get around this, the Modi government used another Article 367 to introduce a clause to make a state legislature the equivalent of a constituent assembly. Then, if a state assembly is not in operation because, for example, President's Rule has been imposed, this allows the president to usurp the powers of this assembly and issue ordinances that become law. Given this unconstitutional equation, the next step was then to nullify Art. 370 and following this, scrap Art. 35A, which prevented private land sales or state government post to those not domiciled in Jammu and Kashmir.

The issue has already been taken to the Supreme Court. It will almost certainly not reverse these unconstitutional acts. It may overturn the arbitrary downgrading to UT status of one or both the parts (although this too is unlikely). As it is, the Supreme Court ruled on August 13 that this military lockdown could continue for two weeks. If the Supreme Court does not strike down this unconstitutionality, it will have set a dangerous precedent whereby the president, at the behest of the prime minister and cabinet, can dramatically accelerate much greater centralization of power in New Delhi vis-à-vis all other states within the Union.

This is of course, the long-term and declared aim of the BJP and RSS. Already in his August 15 Independence Day speech, Modi has called for simultaneous central and provincial polls i.e., "one nation, one poll," as well as affirming that one nation with one creed is the foundation for building a strong India.

In Former Jammu and Kashmir

Modi has said that statehood could be restored to Jammu and Kashmir in time, and polls for the new legislature will be held. The plan, however, is this: A Delimitation Commission has already been set up to reorganize constituencies and administrative districts/units and will complete its job before elections are held. The aim is to increase the number of constituencies in Hindu-majority Jammu (with a population close to 6 million, of which around 35 percent are Muslims), which has a bigger territory but a smaller overall population than the Valley (which has close to 8 million) — so that the BJP, which has massive support in Jammu but very little in the Valley, can nonetheless obtain an overall majority of seats on its own or with smaller parties outside the bigger Kashmiri ones.

There could also be another legal-political maneuver. Historically, the RSS has always wanted trifurcation and therefore separate statehood for the Jammu region as well. Once this government is confident that it can secure a majority in the new legislature for the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, this could

provide the legal path to a further bifurcation whereby Jammu gets statehood while Kashmir remains a UT with maximalist forms of political-military control, to be enduringly exercised over it by the center.

The Modi government took the unique step of both bifurcating and then demoting both parts of a former unified state to UT status, but also ensuring that one part can have a representative legislative body but not the other. At the same time, Modi gives a reassurance — surely more directed at the Hindus of Jammu than at the Muslims who comprise 96 percent of the people in the Valley — that he is concerned about their interests and that some of their special privileges will be restored through reestablishment of statehood.

In the commentaries made so far, negative and positive, about what New Delhi has done, no one has suggested that such a more deep-seated plan is in operation. But it may be wise not to rule out such a possibility, since what has already been done confirms the depths of malevolent manipulation of the law that this government is prepared to take.

Changing administrative units will ghettoize Muslims through concentrating them in greater numbers, so making it easier to monitor and exercise control over them in the future. While removal of 35A is necessary to bring about demographic changes in Jammu and Kashmir, the local BJP party unit in Jammu is worried about outsiders taking over land. So at the right time, after some land is given over to favored capitalists from other states, then, as in a few other Indian states, such land acquisition can take place be only for those having domiciled certificates thus partially restoring local privileges.

In the Valley, the "middle ground" of those who have wanted to remain in India, albeit with much reduced autonomy and with a willingness to collaborate with the powers that be in New Delhi, have been wiped off the political map. Where can they go now? Can they join the separatists, or do they try to collaborate with a government that no longer needs them unless they are willing to become complete puppets and abandon all talk of autonomy?

In the Valley, there will be growing anger and deeper and wider public alienation from the rest of India, especially among the youth. There will very likely be greater recruitment and support for, as well as collaboration with, cross-border insurgent forces — themselves abetted by the Pakistan government. This, and even nonviolent mass actions, will be taken as an excuse by the Indian government and armed forces for the exercise of greater brutality and repression, including the use of the newly amended legislations on "terrorism" to arbitrarily and preemptively arrest, harass, and even torture those deemed "suspects."

Apart from the Muslim-majority area in Jammu near the Pakistan border, whose representatives were hitherto wary of their transactions with the powerful political forces in both the Valley and Jammu, their identification with different currents in the Valley and the regional forces in the Azad Kashmir part held by Pakistan, which has never experienced the turmoil of Indian-held Kashmir, will increase. As for Ladakh, its population of around 240,000 is itself divided between the Shia Muslims of the Kargil region and the Buddhists of the Leh region, with no love lost between them. The Shias are fearful because they are Muslims but have no real affinity with the predominantly Sunni Muslims in Kashmir or Jammu. The Leh Buddhists are happy with their separate new status as a UT and looking for more sops from the center.

Pakistan and the Rest of India

The BJP has also now decisively altered its relationship with Pakistan. It is an enemy with whom there can be no accommodation except on Indian terms i.e., accepting this new reality. This is the external counterpart to its Hindutva hostility towards Muslims internally. And the anti-Pakistan forces can rally around a much larger section of the Indian population including huge numbers of liberals, mainstream leftists, supporters and leaders of the Congress, and other non-BJP parties who otherwise oppose the BJP. The period when some kind of bilateral "soft border" arrangement, or even some form of "dual guardianship," of a relatively autonomous Kashmir on both sides of the border, could be put in place is over. The message to the rest of the world is clear: Kashmir is not to appear on any international agenda. It is purely an internal matter brooking no external interference, humanitarian considerations be damned.

Some progressives in Pakistan who want to institutionalize liberal democracy in Pakistan and see a decisive erosion of the political power of the Pakistani military in Modi's moves in Kashmir. The stalemate, they could say, has ended. Both countries now have swallowed their respective parts of the once-united Jammu and Kashmir province and will have to move towards accepting the new international fait accompli, since surely neither side is stupid enough to risk a major war given the nuclear overhang.

But matters are not so simple. Both the Pakistan military establishment and Islamist forces in the country are not going to take this route. Indeed, Modi's India, through its earlier strike on Balakot, well into Pakistani territory —– the first time since the nuclear age began that one nuclear power has carried out such a deep penetration, conventional air strike on another nuclear power — has indicated that Pakistan's so-called nuclear shield will not deter conventional assaults on it by the much stronger Indian forces. Cross-border insurgency action from the Pakistan side provoked this earlier; an attack by a Kashmiri local at Pulwama on Indian soldiers led to the Balakot attack.

To be sure, Pakistan is aware of India's conventional superiority and has publicly drawn up its own red lines that declare its willingness to use tactical nuclear weapons on Indian troops who enter too far into its territory. India's nuclear doctrine, however, simply says it reserves the right to retaliate wherever Indian troops are threatened. The latest

interpretation of its nuclear "No First Use" doctrine by a former foreign secretary official is that this does not preclude preemptive use if circumstances warrant it.

The real danger is not so much that one side will decide to launch its nuclear weapons, but that the likelihood of cross-border insurgency will rise after the US-Pakistan agreement over Afghanistan frees more Islamist squads to move towards the Indo-Pakistan border areas. Cross-border skirmishes along this border can rise significantly. These can turn into a conventional war, raising the chances of a miscalculated or inadvertent nuclear exchange breaking out. Pakistani efforts to internationalize the issue, short of a threat of nuclear exchange emerging, will not really succeed. India's weight in the United States' geopolitical structure of alliances is greater than its ties with Pakistan, though for Washington these are separate relationships serving non-substitutable concerns. China will give some verbal support and supply arms to Pakistan, but nothing more.

In the rest of India, Modi's move has gained him even greater popularity among the general public with most regional parties, including some of those opposed to the BJP like Delhi's ruling AAP (Common Man's Party) hailing it. The mainstream electoral left of the CPM, CPI, and an aboveground Maoist party, the CPI-ML (Liberation) have called for the restoration of the previous status quo, even willing perhaps to call for extending greater autonomy. The Congress party is divided. Some leaders are calling to restore the previous status quo, while others have publicly approved the final outcome but criticized the legal means used to achieve it as well as the temporary clampdown in the Valley, but nothing else. Many legitimate fears have been expressed about the assault on Indian federalism, the momentum that is being generated for the anti-democratic means that are being and will be used in future pursuit of the Hindutva agenda.

But when it comes to the question of preserving "national security" there is no dissent: Kashmir must remain a part of India.

The Central Issue

Herein lies the basic dilemma. Everything hinges on the evolving situation in Kashmir over the coming decades and generations. For over seventy years the Kashmiri people have repeatedly expressed their desire to retain their distinct status. All want demilitarization but have disagreed along three separate lines as to the way forward. Those political parties, namely, the National Conference (NC) with its rival the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), want to remain in India and practice patronage-based clientelism, and therefore have been content with playing the game of power-brokering and deal-making with New Delhi, electoral competition, and unprincipled alliances with each other and with the local Congress party unit in Jammu and Kashmir. The PDP even forged a coalition government with Modi's BJP before the latter withdrew its support and imposed President's Rule.

Then there are the parties and groups that espouse some form of separatism, which are hardly involved in underground struggle but are kept under much tighter central control and frequently harassed, and their leaders detained. The underground movement has been mainly responsible for organizing nonviolent mass mobilizations and engaging in retaliatory violence against the brutality of the occupation. This is primarily waged by local Kashmiris, young and old.

Although there is certainly an influx of various insurgent groups from across the border, it is a myth that it is these militants (or "terrorists," as they are called in officialese), are the reason for such a heavy presence of the Indian armed forces. By New Delhi's own account, these "terrorists," homegrown or Pakistani, are today said to number a few hundred — many fewer than the couple of thousands said to have been there at the peak of militancy in the 1990s. In neither case can it be plausibly argued that you need 750,000 and more armed personnel to keep such numbers in check.

This ending of autonomy is not going to be reversed by any future Indian government. Yet given the way Kashmiris have for so long behaved vis-a-vis the longstanding Indian occupation, there is no reason to doubt that their resistance will continue and that many more will not want to be a part of the Indian Union. If an ever-increasing majority in the Valley, perhaps joined by more and more Muslims in Jammu, move in this direction, what can be expected? Certainly, this will lead to an enduring and even more brutal military repression by the BJP/RSS. Should the resistance continue and deepen, more people in Pakistan, in the wider Muslim world, and perhaps elsewhere, will begin to stir and lend more material and political support to it. But what of progressives in India who are already horrified by what the Modi government has done and what it is likely to do in the future?

If the middle ground in Kashmir has been destroyed, what of those in the rest of India who are opposed to Indian brutality in Kashmir but are not willing to respect the right of the Kashmiris to determine their own political future up to and including secession? The classic Leninist and truly democratic formula has always been that an oppressed community like the Kashmiris must have the right to decide their own political future which in this case could be a) fighting for greater autonomy within India; b) independence; or c) merger with Pakistan. No prominent liberal intellectual or even any leader of the mainstream Communist parties after August 5 has publicly taken such a stand. Powerful and legitimate criticisms of what has been done abound as do sound extrapolations of the democratic dangers that are now arising from it. But the territorial unity of India remains effectively "sacred" for them.

The point, however, is that one can disagree with the manner in which Kashmiris might want to exercise that right, e.g., by wanting independence or even joining with Pakistan; and even seek to persuade them not to choose that particular path and remain to fight for a democratic India. But the rock-bottom democratic principle is respecting their right to

choose.

This means categorically opposing all efforts by the Indian government to forcibly prevent them from exercising that choice in the future. The best thing would be for separate, binding referendums to be held in Ladakh, in Jammu, and in the Valley reflecting the three choices of being with India, being with Pakistan, or independence. We know that the majority in the first two regions would choose to remain and the third to be separate. We also know that no such referendums will ever be offered.

What then is the point of taking such a stand? It is simply that today and, in the future, the only truly honest and courageous way to show solidarity with the suffering of the Kashmiri people is to declare this. To only oppose all forms of force that might or will be used against Kashmiris is not enough, since the main end for which that force is being used — to prevent territorial separation — is something that one silently accepts as a state of affairs that must never be allowed to happen, no matter what the principal sufferers themselves may wish to choose.

In the coming months and years, there will be many occasions on which all kinds of non-Kashmiri Indian progressives will have to come together to oppose governmental violence against Kashmiris. Our different preferences for what we consider to be the best future for Kashmiris must not prevent this practical unity in struggle. At the same time, we must never be silent accomplices with the powers that would seek to deny the oppressed people of Kashmir the right not only to choose but, more importantly, to freely pursue their goal of collective self-determination.

30 August 2019

Jacobin

Labour movement begins to face down the coup

3 September 2019, by Andy Stowe

Corbyn was at another event in Glasgow but the Labour leadership was represented by Dawn Butler, Diane Abbott and John McDonnell. The London event was dominated by pro-remain, pro-Corbyn supporters. This felt like the day that Labour both put itself at the head of the anti-Brexit movement on the streets and energised its supporters for what will be a ferocious general election campaign.

Demonstrations took place in several towns and cities, including places like Windsor, Bournemouth and Clitheroe which don't usually feature on listings for radical political activity. A national protest movement was born.

TV coverage of the event switched back and forth between the demonstrations in Britain and the inspiring, increasingly militant protests happening in Hong Kong. It was a good juxtaposition. In both cases people were on the streets in defence of their rights opposing governments they see as corrupt and anti-democratic. And just as the Hong Kong protests have become more intense so too the British assemblies have changed gear. In London calls for civil disobedience, direct action and daily protests were met with resounding cheers.

Michael Chessum, one of the demonstration organisers told the crowd "we're here to force him (Johnson) to back down. That means civil disobedience and being willing to disrupt things."

A hint of things to come was a semi-spontaneous transformation of the static protest into an impromptu march through central London. Extinction Rebellion have done this sort of thing but it is a new tactic for the Labour and anti-Brexit activists. People understand that the situation needs new methods.

Siân Berry spoke for the Green Party. Given that the slogans on the backdrop behind the speakers were "fight for democracy, defend migrants and stop the coup" it wasn't too much of a surprise that figures like Anna Soubry and Chukka Umunna weren't there. This was the sort of politics they just don't understand. When they hear organisers like Alena Ivanova of Another Europe is Possible saying what we need to organise in defence of freedom of movement and take to the streets in defence of migrants or a London demonstration starts singing Bella Ciao, they know they don't belong there.

So, while we thank them for their work in fragmenting the Tory party, we know we don't need them. Saturday 31 August was when the labour movement began to respond on the streets to Johnson's coup. It's also shown him that he is much more vulnerable that he thinks in the election. The essential thing now is to keep up the tempo of actions in England, Scotland and Wales to exploit a constitutional crisis which has revealed the Brexiteers' underlying weakness.

Socialist Resistance

Hands off the squats!

2 September 2019, by OKDE-Spartakos

At the end of August, the new New Democracy government chose to evacuate 4 squats, political and refugee ones, in the centre of Athens. It is a repressive action that goes hand in hand with its harsh repressive agenda against the movements, the oppressed, the multinational working class. The ND government and state mechanisms have been making efforts to make this plan public for a long time. We have seen tangible examples of ND's anti-labor and repressive action since it became government. A striking example is the abolition of asylum. [1]

The evacuation of the four squats, Spyridon Trikoupis 15 and 17, Gare, and Rosa De Foc, is the beginning for the evacuation of others. It is a blow by the state against the movement. The ND government has practically zero tolerance, speaks out against the movement in terms of fight against crime, and stimulates conservative reflexes among the petty bourgeoisie. It is, of course, also based on the continuation of the repressive policy by the former "left" SYRIZA government, by evacuating squatters and perpetuating its "citizens' safety" discourse and its anti-immigration policy towards refugees with the EU-Turkey agreement. After all, executives of SYRIZA (e.g. Zachariadis) were quick to recall their own action. It is confirmed that there is continuity in the state and its repressive mechanisms.

Occupation is a medium and a tool of the left and anarchist movement, of the refugees, the working class, the radicalized youth, to self-organize our struggles. At the same time, they are useful and necessary to meet social needs, such as the right for housing. They are tergeted as examples of collective self-management and as projects that challenge individual ownership, but also as sites of political and cultural integration and reflection.

With the evacuation of refugee squats, the state has indicated that it wants to undermine the solidarity movement with them and the structures that were created by the mass refugee movement in the summer of 2015. It is attempting to ease the picture of the refugee as an "intruder" and "criminal", to impose as socially acceptable the concentration camps and the repressive operations against immigrants, if they have not already drowned in the Aegean. A misanthropic speech for refugees has always been expressed by the representatives of the state, as was the case with the far-right cop Balaskas.

Government, police, and the media give Exarchia a picture of a region inaccessible and the site of constant illegal action. This image is needed to depreciate an area historically linked to the movements and to evacuate the spaces of political collectivism that exist in it. The present government, like the previous governments for decades, would very much like the neighbourhood to change its character and become a commercialized alternative Soho. [2] To be done once and for all with its "disgrace". But they will fail once again because the movement will block their way.

We need to defend the squat movement in its multiple forms as it has a "place" in buildings, both private and public, and in the city's public space, workplaces, schools. With unity in action, without sectarianism. It is necessary to unify the occupation movement with the other areas of the labour movement, solidarity with refugees and the movements of the oppressed.

The blow against the squats should not be underestimated by anyone, as through that all operations of class struggle are undermined. We demand immediate release of those arrested. We stand in solidarity with the refugees, our class brothers. We support the solidarity marches and rallies.

Athens
31 August 2019

Footnotes

[1] A legal state of protective environment against the police in universities.

[2] As in the Soho area of London.

What the Sanders' Campaign Opens

1 September 2019, by Dianne Feeley

Bernie distinguishes his vision from others running in the Democratic primary in several ways. First, Sanders doesn't accept corporate funding. Bernie has built a funding model based on small donations and continues to build that base. No one thought that could be done until he did it!

Second, he organizes independently of the Democratic party's political machine and welcomes the support of other independent organizations such as Labor for Bernie and DSA's committees.

Third, he outlines a platform focused on the needs of working people, who have suffered from a growing inequality over the last quarter

century. Unlike other politicians who endlessly identify "the middle class" as their audience, Bernie talks about the needs and desires of working-class people.

His campaign champions a $15 an hour minimum wage and the right to belong to a union. In fact, he joins picket lines and encourages his supporters to do so.

His platform for racial justice outlines a comprehensive program to end discrimination in housing, education, health care, employment, an end to police violence and voter disenfranchisement. He calls for comprehensive immigration reform, dismantling deportation programs and detention centers, expansion of DACA and a path to citizenship. When asked what is the greatest problem facing the world, he says right up front: climate change.

Fourth, unlike any other candidate running, Bernie has a history as a movement activist since his college days when he was a member of the Young People's Socialist League. This enables us to have more confidence that he speaks with greater conviction that those who live their lives as politicians.

Fifth, he does not claim he will represent the interests of working people, rather he maintains that without independent political organization, it is impossible to implement such the program he outlines. In a recent talk he pointed to the example of the Puerto Rican people in forcing the resignation of Governor Ricardo Rosselló as the kind of action necessary to defeat Wall Street.

The Capitalist Party Straitjacket

Frankly, I come from the socialist tradition that identifies both the Democratic and Republican parties as controlled by different sections of the corporate elite. We have worked to build independent political parties, particularly the Labor Party founded in the 1990s, but also socialist campaigns and the Green Party.

I don't think either of the two "major" capitalist parties, even the Democratic party (which is seen as more open to initiating change), can be transformed into a tool controlled by those who vote for it. The party's funding and structures are controlled by corporate power.

But given the lock the two-party system maintains under a winner-take-all system, an independent third-party formation has been unable to gain a mass audience in the United States.

It's a century-old problem, underpinned by undemocratic election laws. These have been reinforced by the 2010 Supreme Court ruling in Citizens United vs. FEC, allowing unlimited amounts from disclosed donors to be spent on elections as well as extensive use of gerrymandering made more precise with new technology. Clearly a break from the two-party system isn't imminent.

Sanders, who has run as an independent for years but stayed aloof from building a party, developed a strategy of running on the Democratic primary party ballot line while refusing corporate funding and remaining fairly independent of party structures. Since Vermont doesn't record party registration, Sanders is technically an Independent who receives the Democratic nomination. This novel tactic has attracted support from people committed to social change — but although useful in the short term, its potential is questionable.

While some folks were disappointed that in 2016 Bernie kept his pledge to support the Democratic Party candidate who won the primary, in fact he did what he promised to do. I don't think he would have been allowed to run in the Democratic primary if he hadn't. That's the compromise he made.

Bernie's Campaign This Time

Some thought that for his second run Bernie would move to the "center," but interestingly enough he is staking out a fuller social democratic program. His highlighting the need for an economic bill of rights has opened up an important discussion.

He's pointing out that political democracy without economic democracy doesn't offer much more than the possible right to vote. While that right is important, particularly for those who have been disenfranchised, by itself it doesn't offer much security in one's life or for one's family.

What Bernie's campaign does, particularly for the socialist left, is to provide us with a larger platform on which to outline our own socialist vision of society. He points to the reality of a battle between working people and the corporations. He supports and defends the unions and programs (starting with Medicare for all) that decommodify what people need for their lives.

That vision gives power to some of his smaller proposals. For example, Bernie and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Congresswoman for NY-14 (the Bronx & Queens), introduced a bill to have the post office issue money orders as it used to do.

There are several million people who rely on check cashing outfits that charge an arm and a leg because people lack a bank account. It's a simple reform, yet with consequences not only for poor people, but also strengthening public sector workers, the majority of whom are women and African Americans.

What does this simple have to do with socialism? It puts the needs of people before the megaprofits of the check-cashing business. That means something in today's corporate-ravaged neoliberal America.

It is true that Bernie doesn't raise nationalizing industry under workers' and community control, and his opposition to U.S. wars abroad doesn't scrutinize U.S. imperialism's role in the world — issues that the independent socialist left needs to foreground. However the reality of his program — support to workers' rights, expansion of Medicare for all, an end to a fossil fuel economy and the call for women to control our own bodies — can only be implemented if millions mobilize in the streets.

The Democratic party does not see Sanders as "reliable," and will once again find a way to block his winning their spot on the ballot. That was true in 2016 and I believe it's true this

time. In fact, this time around there is a surplus of candidates so delegates will be able to "pick" from a range — whether it's Elizabeth Warren, who echoes a great deal of his program, or someone much closer to the center, whether Kamala Harris or Joe Biden.

Given that Sanders' road will be blocked once again, what then is the point in supporting his primary run? Won't that experience just demoralize his grassroots support, especially as he will then endorse a figure the establishment prefers? Won't it reinforce reliance on the Democratic party?

Of course all that's a possibility, just as the re-election of Trump is a possibility. But it's significant that at its August convention, DSA voted not to support any candidate for president if Bernie is not a nominee. That doesn't seem as if supporting Bernie's run traps individuals and organizations inside the Democratic party — whatever choices Individuals make in pulling the lever on election day, whether that's for the "lesser evil," progressive independent or third-party option.

It's blindness to ignore how Sanders' platform and dynamism have changed political discussion throughout the country. It gives socialists the opportunity to engage friends, family and coworkers in a discussion, far beyond support to a particular reform and without sounding like futile utopians. This broader vision of social, political and economic democracy is a battering ram against the austerity program that all wings of the corporate elite demand.

Although it doesn't confront, let alone solve, the huge problem that we don't have a party run by working people and in our interests, nonetheless Bernie's campaign reveals a positive alternative to corporate domination. That insight will flourish, of course, only if millions find their voices in the struggles for justice.

Let's not kid ourselves: The struggle to win a majority to realize that the destructive nature of capitalism can be replaced through mass intervention is still at a beginning stage. It can be nourished through the daily community struggles for clean water, affordable housing and quality schools. It lives in Black Lives Matter and the fight for a democratically-run union.

If we can pry open more political space during this electoral season, we may invigorate movements out of which these demands first arose. Isn't that's the point of the exercise?

It is unlikely, given the tools we currently lack, to immediately do more than widen the discussion for economic, political and environmental justice. But the deeper our roots the greater chance of success. The point Bernie makes, which socialists need to amplify, is that change comes about when millions mobilize for ourselves and each other.

Source: September-October 2019, ATC 202