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The Eighteenth Brumaire of Macho Camacho

29 November 2019, by **Forrest Hylton, Jeffery R Webber**

“Instead of society conquering a new content for itself, it only seems that the state has returned to its most ancient form, the unashamedly simple rule of the military sabre and the clerical cowl.”

Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*

What kind of coup has taken place in Bolivia, and what are the stakes in labelling it a coup?

The first thing to stress is that a coup is an event that is best understood as part of a larger historical process; the trick is to grasp event and process in relation to one another. In a regional perspective, we might situate the Bolivian coup more or less mid-way between the “hard” military coup in Honduras in 2009, and the “soft” parliamentary coups against Fernando Lugo in Paraguay in 2012 and Dilma Rousseff in Brazil in 2016, with a crucial difference—“in Bolivia, the far right co-opted and hijacked mass centrist protest by urban middle classes that preceded the coup, pushing it in a violent direction. The point is that there is currently no one-size-fits-all model for coups in Latin America, but rather a broad spectrum of approaches leading to regime changes aimed at restoring the Washington Consensus.

The stakes in labelling what happened in Bolivia a coup are nothing less than political legitimacy. Former presidents Dilma Rousseff and Luis Ignacio da Silva in Brazil; former president Cristina Fernández de Kirchner and president-elect Alberto Fernández in Argentina; and the governments of Andrés Manuel López Obrador in Mexico and Tabaré Vázquez in Uruguay labelled it a coup, while the governments of Brazil, Argentina, and Colombia, to name only some of the countries in the US orbit, refused to do so. Brazil, perhaps the least legitimate government in the hemisphere today, was the first country to recognize the post-coup government.

What happened that led to the coup?

On Sunday, October 20, 2019. Evo Morales, leader of the Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) sought a fourth mandate, having been president since early 2006. Morales arrived at the Palacio Quemado, or the Burnt Palace as the presidential residency is known, with 54 percent of the popular vote, riding a left-indigenous cycle of quasi-insurrectionary proportions between 2000 and 2005. Since then, he won a number of elections and plebiscites, all with more than 60 percent of the popular vote, and with dramatic

distance between him and his leading opponents.

But this year was different, and predictably so. For the first time, the ballot would be relatively polarized, drawing what had been for years a regionally fragmented and hapless right-wing oppositional spectrum behind Carlos Mesa, former Vice President under Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, or Goni, and President between 2003 and 2005 following Goni’s ouster in the wake of mass popular demonstrations. Mesa leads the Comunidad Cuidadana (Citizen Community) coalition and embodies what Tariq Ali has called the extreme center. Congenitally ineffectual, after October 20, he was swept aside with breath-taking speed by a preposterously far right figure, Luis Fernando Camacho, the bible-toting president of the Santa Cruz Civic Committee, who self-identifies as Macho Camacho.

Crucially, Morales’s popularity had suffered since he lost a popular referendum on February 21, 2016 – 51 percent of voters said “no” in the wake of scandals and allegations of corruption – over whether the constitution should be amended to allow him to run for a fourth term in the October elections in 2019. Through a series of legally dubious manoeuvres that many analysts

correctly anticipated, he ignored these results and was approved to run by the relevant state authority – this went uncontested at the time by Luis Almagro, general secretary of the Organization of American States (OAS). The referendum became the rallying cry of urban middle classes and regional civic committees hoping to unseat Morales, but unable to do so electorally.

According to Bolivia's electoral system, to avoid a second round, the leading candidate must secure more than 50 percent of the vote, or more than 40 percent of the vote and a lead of 10 percent over the second-place candidate. On the evening of October 20, the "quick count" tally – or the Transmisión de Resultados Electorales Preliminares (Transmission of Preliminary Electoral Results, TREP), which is not legally binding – was updated regularly on the website of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE).

With 83.8 percent of the quick-count votes tallied, the TSE's website indicated that Morales was leading with 45.3 percent, with Mesa in second place with 38.2 percent. It appeared as though there would be a second round. At this point, the TSE inexplicably shut down live transmission of the quick-count tabulation of ballots after the 83 percent of votes had been counted, which prompted Mesa to claim fraud.

In the following days there would be four distinct and contradictory explanations for the shutdown from TSE and government representatives – (1) that they didn't want to superimpose the quick-count on the official count, which had already been initiated; (2) that there was an alert regarding a cybernetic attack so it was shut down for security purposes; (3) that they always shut it down at around 80% of the quick-count; and (4) that they did not have 17% of the votes because rural areas did not have sufficient internet access to send corresponding photos of the ballots.

To make matters worse, the vice president of the TSE, Antonio Costas, resigned, indicating that he had not been informed of the order to stop the TREP, which "was not a good decision." His resignation was

nonetheless enigmatic: he said he had done it out of principle, but that there had not been any alteration of the results. This does not constitute evidence, even circumstantial, of fraud.

Twenty-two hours later, on the evening of October 21, the transmission of quick-count results was restarted, with the website now indicating 95.63 percent of votes counted. The distance between Morales and Mesa had grown over the intervening period. The difference separating the two candidates was now said to be 10.12 percent according to the quick-count. Morales had already announced that once the rural votes were counted, he was sure there would be no need for a run-off. Again, Mesa's claims of electoral fraud had no evidence other than the admittedly fishy shutdown of the quick-count results.

Violent opposition protests led by Mesa kicked off that Monday evening throughout the country and included the torching of several departmental offices of the electoral tribunal, even as MAS supporters simultaneously took to the streets in celebration. The official vote count was concluded several days later, with the results being Morales at 47.08 percent and Carlos Mesa at 36.51% – a difference of 10.54 percent, making it a first-round victory for Morales. Despite a decline in support, the official results also indicate that MAS secured a majority in the legislative elections, with 68 seats of 130 in the chamber of deputies, and 21 of 36 in the senate.

What explains the political disaster of the shutdown?

A report by analysts at the Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR) suggests that the TSE was only ever obliged to quick-count 80 percent of the votes, and that this had been regular practice in past elections. They suggest that the reopening of the quick-count tally almost 24 hours later was done at the request of the OAS, and that the growing difference in the quick count between Morales and Mesa over the intervening blackout period is consistent with rural votes coming in later for a variety of predictable reasons.

Morales always enjoyed more support in the peripheries – almost two times as many votes in past elections in small cities and the countryside than in the major urban centres of La Paz, Cochabamba, and Santa Cruz. The CEPR report additionally argues that the OAS has not provided any evidence suggesting any inconsistencies in the tabulation of the official count, the only legally binding vote count, despite calling into question the validity of the electoral results. The OAS audit of electoral results, released on November 9, labelled the changes in the percentage of votes for Morales "improbable," but cited no evidence of actual fraud.

How did Morales' opponents in the extreme center and on the far right respond to this situation?

The dye had been cast even before the OAS audit with the opposition rejecting the audit when it was first proposed by the OAS and agreed to by the government. The opposition, still nominally led by Mesa, doubled down on claims of electoral fraud, yet rejected a recount, calling for an intensified campaign of (violent) protests and demonstrations to unseat Morales. Given this maximalism, it was foreseeable that Mesa would be overwhelmed by the dark forces he helped unleash.

Especially among the urban middle class, which swelled considerably under his government, Morales lost considerable legitimacy after February 2016 when he simply ignored the negative results of the referendum. Nor was his government's situation improved by the bizarre behaviour of the TSE and government officials concerning the shutdown of quick-count transmission on October 20.

Predictably, the radicalization of the lowland right in the eastern lowlands, linked to agri-business and gas-petroleum extraction, as well as racist paramilitary youth groups, followed immediately. Luis Fernando Camacho, hitherto little-known outside the eastern lowland department of Santa Cruz, captured and became the leading figure of a nationwide, and predominantly urban middle-class revolt.

Camacho comes from a wealthy Santa Cruz family with interests in agribusiness and finance. He directed the neo-fascist youth group Union Juvenil Cruceñista (UJC), which led street-violence against indigenous informal street vendors in the city of Santa Cruz during a failed destabilization campaign against Morales in 2008. The UJC has made frequent use of the swastika symbol in the past and engaged in actions together with the fascist Falange Socialista Boliviana.

A born-again evangelical Christian, the 40-year old "Macho Camacho" shares more than a little in common with Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil: both cemented an alliance with evangelicals, paramilitaries, and cattle ranchers. After years of ineffectual, traditional right wing opposition from the likes of Samuel Quiroga, Samuel Doria Medina, and Mesa, beginning in 2019 Camacho stepped in to fill a vacuum that arose from a power dispute within the Civic Committee of Santa Cruz - long the institution responsible for aggregating the interests of reactionary lowland elites and various sections of agrarian, financial, commercial, industrial, and narco capital in that part of the country, which was systematically favoured by military dictatorships in the 1960s and 70s as well as the subsequent neoliberal partidocracia in the 1980s and 90s.

Camacho managed to amalgamate the disparate threads of opposition, including forging pacts with popular sectors that had become alienated from the Morales government during the last four or five years. These included the Ponchos Rojos, a dissident Aymara indigenous group from the western highlands, coca growing peasants from the Yungas region, sections of the state-owned mining unions, and transport unions. Crucially, he also forged an alliance with the president of the Potosí Civic Committee, Marco Pumari, an indigenous son of a miner and leader of the Potosí regional dispute with the national government over the distribution of future wealth to be generated by the extraction of lithium deposits in that part of the country.

What about forces on the left and

in the popular movement? How did they respond?

Other popular sectors were also independently aligned against the government, either out of spontaneous discontent over perceived electoral fraud, or for longer-standing grievances, many of them legitimate yet ignored. Examples include the government's intervention and disruption of the authentic leaderships of the highland indigenous organization, Consejo Nacional de Ayllus y Markas del Qullasuyu (CONAMAQ), and the lowland organization, Confederación de Pueblos Indígenas de Bolivia (CIDOB), in open dispute with the government since Morales's decision in 2011 - as well as more recently - to railroad opposition to highway construction in an indigenous territory and national park called the TIPNIS.

The feminist organization Mujeres Creando has also mobilized against the government over its failure to act in the wake of accelerating gender violence and one of the highest proportional rates of femicide in the continent. Other indigenous territorially-based organizations in the lowlands have been on the frontlines of disputes with the government over its failure to consult indigenous communities properly prior to initiating development projects, in partnership with multinational capital, for extractive industries such as mining and natural gas extraction. None of these grievances is minor. None was heard.

Yet "and this is crucial" we can't miss the forest for the trees. Independent Left and indigenous opposition to Morales and MAS was incidental to the post-electoral course of events. Similar to Brazil in 2013 and thereafter, even mobilizations that included popular sectors were quickly channelled and led by the far-right. This was movement capture with a vengeance.

At the same time, popular organizations closely aligned with the government "the six trade union federations of the coca growers, the highland and highland valley indigenous peasants of the CSUTCB, miners, the Landless Workers'

Movement, and what's left of organized labour" have been slow to react. This, too, was predictable, and is to be explained in part by their near-total incorporation into the apparatuses of the state, their bureaucratization and pacification in that process, and the lost capacities for critical independence, autonomy, and mobilization. Again, the parallels with Brazil and the PT spring to mind.

The right seems to have taken advantage in these circumstances to press their demands with increasing violence. What have they done?

The right's key demands quickly shifted from new elections to Morales's resignation to the incarceration of the president, the vice president, and the entire cabinet. Violent lumpen mobs burned Morales's house down, as well as those of his sister, Esther, the ex-president of the Chamber of Deputies, Víctor Borda, and the ex-minister of mines, César Navarro. In a moment that marked the shift from center to far right, on November 6, students from the main public university and private universities confronted police and miners supportive of Morales shouting, "We are all Camacho!"

On November 7-8, police forces mutinied in support of the opposition, first in Cochabamba, and then in Sucre, Santa Cruz, Potosí, Oruro, and La Paz. According to the director of the Institute of Forensic Investigation (IDIF), Andrés Flores, six people have been violently killed in the 23 days following the October 20 elections - two in Santa Cruz, two in Cochabamba, and two in La Paz. Five were civilians, one was a police officer.

On Sunday evening, November 10, Camacho was paraded on top of a police car through the streets of La Paz, escorted by mutinous police and accompanied by cheering supporters of the opposition. Morales and vice-president Álvaro García Linera fled to the Chapare region of the department of Cochabamba, the coca-growing region that produced Morales and MAS, to avoid the fate of Gualberto Villaroel, who was hung from a lamp-post in 1946.

Camacho entered the Palacio Quemado, placed a bible on top of a folded Bolivian flag on the floor, and knelt down on bended knee, announcing that "Dios vuelva al Palacio": "God returns to the presidential palace." Outside, the non-partisan indigenous Wiphala flag was torn off buildings and set aflame by Camacho supporters, as they announced the defeat of communism. Police in Santa Cruz removed the Wiphala from their uniforms.

Openly racist sentiment, tamed to a remarkable degree during the Morales period for the first time in Bolivian history, has now risen forcefully above ground, as have reactionary ideologies against women (never below ground, in spite of significant political and legislative advances for women during the Morales era), and LGBTQ+. Alongside Camacho's facho-macho-blanco street politics (anti-feminist, white supremacist, and fascist), another expression was the electoral rise to almost 10 percent - and third position - of evangelical doctor and pastor, Chi Hyung Chang, who spoke of the presence of Satan in the Morales government, and their sin of idolizing the indigenous conception of Pachamama, or mother earth. Once again, the Brazilian example looms large.

Following several resignations of cabinet ministers, the chief of command of the Bolivian Armed Forces "suggested" Morales resign. On Sunday, November 10, Morales and Garc  a Linera resigned, leaving for exile in Mexico two days later, while denouncing the coup in process, and promising that resistance would follow. Adriana Salvatierra, the masista president of the upper house of congress, and V  ctor Borda, masista president of the lower house, also resigned - constitutionally, in order, each would have been in the next position to replace Morales as interim president.

On Tuesday, November 12, without legislative quorum  since MAS, which holds a majority in both houses, was absent  Jeanine A  ez was declared the new president of Bolivia. The right-wing senator from the eastern lowland department of Beni, a member of the Unidad Democr  tica

(Democratic Unity, UD) party, had been the vice president of the senate. When asked if she would accept the presidency, she stated, "We owe it to people to give them certainty. Thus, if there is accompaniment by civic organizations I will accept, but if some other path is chosen, I will also accept."

In other words, she accepted without conditions. She was then made president of the senate and then immediately declared president of the republic. She promised to "convene elections as soon as possible," but her first act was to make a balcony appearance from the second floor of the Palacio Quemado, with bible in hand, and Camacho and Marcos Pumari, the leader of the Potos   Civic Committee, on either side. Other than Pumari, there were no indigenous faces in the photo.

The first formal meeting she called as president was with the commanders of the Bolivian Police and Armed Forces. At that gathering, William Kalim  n, commander in chief of the armed forces, and Yuri Calder  n, head of the national police, pledged their allegiance to the new president. This was followed by a congratulatory tweet from Carlos Mesa. A  ez also wrote to Jair Bolsonaro, thanking him for his government's support, and, on the day that fascist shock troops stormed the Venezuelan embassy in Bras  lia, invited self-proclaimed interim president Juan Guaid   to name a Venezuelan ambassador to Bolivia.

To summarize: the two short-term catalysts for the coup were the perception of fraud in the October 20 elections  a perception Mesa helped create prior to the elections and then systematically reinforced thereafter  and the backdrop of the February 2016 referendum. The mobilizations were predominantly composed of an alienated urban middle class, although they included popular sectors and the lumpenproletariat, i.e. working-class forces organized by capital (chiefly lowland finance and agri-business) for fascist violence.

Although sections of the independent left and indigenous movements had legitimate grievances with the

government, these did not shape post-election political dynamics. Centrist discontent was channelled and led by the far-right, under the figure of Camacho, ultimately with the support of the police and the military, which proved decisive.

Bureaucratized and hollowed out during almost 14 years of MAS rule, popular organizations aligned with the government were unable to respond quickly and independently, and with sufficient force to challenge the reactionary tide that pulled the extreme center under its sway. They still exist as organizations with mass memberships, and we will soon see what capacity for sustained opposition remains. No one has challenged the fact that Morales won a hefty plurality of votes in the first round.`

Stepping back from the immediate conjuncture of elections and the coup, what do the medium-term dynamics look like?

We cannot make sense of the latest events unless we account for the reverberation of the global crisis of capitalism into Bolivia and the contradictions of the political-economic model of extractive neodevelopmentalism.

First, Morales's ongoing popularity after nearly 14 years in office  let us remember that he took more than 45% of the vote  stems from the dynamism of the new political-economic model at its height. According to a pre-election Ciesmori poll, 36 percent of Bolivians thought that the economic situation of the country was "good," and another 27 percent "regular." Forty percent thought their personal and familial situation would be "a little better" within the year; 15 percent thought "much better," and 13 percent, "equal."

At the lower end of the social order, this is hardly surprising given that extreme income poverty (measured by the grossly inadequate World Bank indicator of less than \$2 per day) fell from 38 percent to 18 percent during Morales's tenure, and is now roughly 10 percent in the cities. Simultaneously, Bolivia became what the World Bank deems a "middle

income country,” in which “only” 30 percent of the population earns less than \$4 per day. In his first speech in exile in Mexico, Morales emphasized these achievements.

At least since the conservative turn of Morales’s second term (2010-2014) – similar in some respects to Dilma’s Rousseff’s shift – it has been apparent that the political project in question is a state-directed project of capitalist modernization from above; a new, improved version of the National Revolutionary Movement in the twentieth century. Notions of a “socialist success” are pure fantasy, since the (passive) revolution has been nationalist. The government’s economic strategy has been reliant on low-inflation targets, fiscal conservatism, and the enormous accumulation of foreign reserves during the commodities boom.

Since 2010, if not earlier, economic policy and political coalitions have hinged on agreements with finance, multinational hydrocarbon capital, and foreign and domestic agro-industrial capital in the eastern lowlands. In terms of finance, the Morales period saw enormous gains for national banks, whose assets increased 3.6 times between 2008 and 2017, from \$700 million to \$2.55 billion, and whose profits in the same period grew 2.7 times, from \$120 million to \$330 million annually. The Morales government’s core social base over time became an indigenous petty bourgeois layer of merchants, petty extractivists (miners), small-scale industrial producers, and medium-scale producers involved in commercial agriculture for export – a layer which, in the context of the commodities boom, grew expansively during Morales’s first term, thus modifying the class composition of his core popular base.

The logic of large-scale, foreign capital in the extractive sectors runs alongside the growing power of an indigenous and popular petty bourgeois layer. In addition to this nucleus, there is a wider layer of passive electoral supporters from the dominated classes. The more modest the income, the more likely to be indigenous, and the more likely to

support Morales in elections.

Down from a recent high of 6.8 percent GDP in 2013, the economy has nonetheless ticked over at an average of 4.2 percent growth in the last three years – one of the most impressive performances in the region. The subsidizing effects of extractive rent distributed to different circuits of capital in other more labour-intensive sectors of the economy (manufacturing, agriculture, construction, tourism, and so on), relatively low unemployment, and targeted cash transfers to the poorest has meant very significant improvements in poverty levels, as indicated above.

All of this is important to explaining the enduring popularity of Morales, as is the fact he is the first indigenous president in a majoritarian indigenous country since the founding of the republic in 1825. When discussing his government in interviews and speeches, these are the achievements Morales touts.

Yet the Bolivian economy, of course, is highly sensitive to broader trends in the world market and has been drying up its foreign exchange reserves and leveraging debt in order to sustain public spending and disguise the underlying reality, especially in the last year or so of pre-electoral preparation. As in Brazil, the neodevelopmental model has suffered from an exaggerated dependence on primary commodities, an overreliance on imports that have become cheaper with an overvalued currency, and an associated decline in non-traditional and manufacturing exports. The commercial deficit has been growing since 2014, as has the fiscal deficit and indebtedness, while foreign reserves have been declining at \$2 billion annually over that period.

We cannot over-emphasize the fact that formerly independent social movements and trade unions were co-opted, divided, and absorbed into the state apparatus – or worse, as in the case of lowland indigenous movements – maligned as agents of the right and of empire. For an ever-more extractive economy, declining market conditions do not translate into a slowdown of extractive activity,

but rather a race to improve profitable conditions for extractive multinational capital, as indicated in the Morales government’s trampling of the right to meaningful consultation for indigenous communities prior to extractive development projects in their territories.

The socio-ecological devastation of the current drive for capitalist modernization will intensify. The tropical fires this summer were not restricted to Bolsonaro’s Brazil but included 500,000 hectares of Bolivian territory. As long as the Morales government’s ties to agribusiness in the east remained unbroken, the flames would have continued to spread.

Just as we celebrate Lula’s recent release from prison as an unambiguous democratic gain, without projecting a radicalism into his years in government that it never possessed, we need not claim a socialist pedigree for Morales in order to condemn his anti-democratic removal from office. Indeed, we can’t explain the momentum of right-wing forces and the significant popular support for the 2016 soft-coup that ousted the Workers’ Party in Brazil and led to Lula’s incarceration, nor the somewhat harder coup in Bolivia today unless we grasp the underlying class contradictions of each country’s experiments with neodevelopmentalist capitalism.

How have the different classes, populations, and political forces on the left and right responded?

The predominantly urban middle class 21-F Movement, which erupted in opposition to Morales’s response to the February 2016 referendum, is Mesa’s core base. Although the 21-F Movement declined once the electoral campaigns had begun, and seven oppositional parties had decided to participate despite questioning the legality of Morales’s candidacy, middle-class sentiments cohered rapidly into action in the violent post-election, anti-fraud riots, that were captured, channelled, and radicalized by what we are calling the Macho Camacho Facho effect.

The core organizational infrastructure

was provided by the major cities' civic committees" in addition to Santa Cruz, Potosí, Tarija, Cochabamba, La Paz, and Chuquisaca" which were reanimated in recent years from relative dormancy and aligned squarely with far-right forces that organize racist youth violence and mayhem. Prior to the elections, these organized against an eventual Morales victory. Also important was the fact that the Committee for the Defence of Democracy" led by Waldo Albarracín, the Rector of the UMSA, Bolivia's leading public university" whose origins lie in the popular resistance to Bolivia's military dictatorships of the past, was reborn under a liberal anti-Morales guise.

Similar to what happened in Brazil under the PT, due to the promotion of popular and indigenous sectors in Bolivia, urban middle class people perceived that their status had been undermined during the course of the Morales years. There was a new petty bourgeois indigenous layer, and the country's indigenous traditions were newly valorized in the public school system – even as the quality of public education remained dire.

Indigenous people were incorporated into the state bureaucracy in proportional numbers for the first time, cutting off one common traditional employment route for lighter-skinned middle class professionals. The geography of social life and consumption patterns changed, as spaces once exclusive to white-mestizo middle and upper class layers were relatively democratized – shopping malls, airports, and so on. The subsidized gondola transport system in La Paz, for example, made the route from popular-indigenous El Alto to the posh southern end of the city a cheaper, easy and quick commute.

Meanwhile, the various fractions of capital had never found in Morales and the MAS a natural political home. In the first few years of MAS rule, organizations like CAINCO, the main commercial and industrial business confederation of Santa Cruz, organized an all-out destabilization campaign to overthrow the government. Once that was defeated in 2008-2010, however, they entered

into a pact with the government, together with agribusiness interests, as well as foreign hydrocarbon and mining capital.

Finance capital had a similar relationship to the Morales government. As in Brazil under Lula, as long as profitability was high, and viable right-wing political alternatives were unavailable, they learned to live with the Morales government. However, since 2014, economic conditions have worsened, despite surface growth. Demands for austerity and restructuring were escalating from the think tanks that represent these interests, and unlike Dilma Rousseff, Morales did not shift economic policy toward austerity for MAS's base.

Morales's reaction to the February 2016 referendum, moreover, suggested that capital might be indefinitely locked out of direct political representation. Under these circumstances, capital began looking for an exit behind the scenes, and have fallen in behind this coup, supporting the new, unelected president.

As we have suggested, many of the core social-organizational infrastructures that underpinned the extraordinary left-indigenous cycle of contention in the 2000-2005 period have been weakened through their subordinate incorporation into the state over the Morales period. However, we must remember that this relative decomposition of autonomous popular capacities does not preclude rapid recomposition.

There are incipient signs of this already in El Alto and the Chapare region of Cochabamba, but it is too early to say how far efforts to reverse the coup will go. Albeit in very different circumstances, the dynamics of popular struggle in Argentina under Macri might provide a clue as to what to expect. Whereas the Peronist administrations of Néstor Kirchner and later Cristina Fernández de Kirchner divided the left vis-à-vis the state, the common enemy of Macri's neoliberal restructuring led to very high levels of militancy, at least for Macri's first years in office.

Similarly, the Bolivian left has been divided with respect to the Morales administration, especially since his second term in office began in 2010. The installation of an unelected right-wing regime backed by the armed forces, especially if it fails to hold open elections in which the MAS can participate, is likely both to introduce neoliberal austerity measures, and to face serious and growing popular opposition.

What role did the OAS, the US and Canada play in the ouster of Morales?

The OAS has long been considered a branch of the US State Department, which is part of the reason alternative regional bodies which excluded the United States and Canada – the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), and the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of our America (ALBA) – were established during the height of the Pink Tide era (1998-2012). They were an effort to establish a relative autonomy for the region from the dictates of the United States, and to a lesser degree Canada, in the geopolitics of the hemisphere. The OAS has always been seen, correctly, as one institutional expression of imperial power.

In the case of the October 20 elections, the OAS performed its appointed role of undermining Bolivian sovereignty. "In Bolivia there was a coup on October 20 when Evo Morales committed electoral fraud," Luis Almagro, the general secretary, told those gathered at a special session of the Permanent Council of the OAS in Washington, DC, on November 12. "The military has to act in accordance with its mandate. Nobody has exceeded that power to this point."

The OAS politicized the procedure of the electoral process by making misleading statements without evidence concerning the quick-count tally, and by restricting its commentary to the legally non-binding quick-count tally, ignoring the fact that "it is the official count that is legally binding," as the CEPR report indicates, and that "the official count

was never interrupted and was regularly updated online without any significant interruption."

In other words, on the basis of speculation rather than evidence, the OAS helped polarize the political setting even further, thereby lending credence to the violent street politics of the far-right, with predictable consequences. Now that the police and military have intervened on behalf of the far right and installed an unelected, unknown oppositional senator as president, Almagro has congratulated the Bolivian armed forces for carrying out its mandate. This is diplomacy as farce.

Barring another heroic gesture from the inside of the intelligence services on the scale of Chelsea Manning's leak, it is unlikely that we will know the depth and detail of US and Canadian involvement for some time to come. We know, however, that the Trump administration was involved in Juan Guaidó's futile coup attempt in Venezuela in April this year, and that he has greeted the coup in Bolivia with unrestrained delight.

"After nearly 14 years and his recent attempt to override the Bolivian constitution and the will of the people," Trump's official statement reads, "Morales's departure preserves democracy and paves the way for the Bolivian people to have their voices heard. The United States applauds the Bolivian people for demanding freedom and the Bolivian military for abiding by its oath to protect not just a single person, but Bolivia's constitution." Trump also said the Bolivian dynamics should be read as a warning by the governments of Nicaragua and Venezuela as the US administration pursues a "completely democratic, prosperous, and free Western hemisphere."

As Thomas Walkom points out in the *Toronto Star*, we find echoes of Trump in Justin Trudeau's position. On October 29, the Canadian

government's official statement noted that it would recognize Morales's government only if there was a run-off election, meaning that it rejected the official count, despite the fact that the OAS never demonstrated fraud. In the words of Ottawa, "it is not possible to accept the outcome."

These statements contrast with the tweet by Bernie Sanders condemning what "appears to be a coup in Bolivia," the only one of this year's US presidential contenders for the Democratic party to do so, and Jeremy Corbyn of the British Labour Party, who issued a similar message in stronger terms: "I condemn the coup against the Bolivian people and stand with them for democracy, social justice and independence."

How should the left in Bolivia and internationally respond to the coup? And, specifically, what posture should the left take toward Morales and his deposed government?

Those parts of the international left based in imperial countries need to insist on the right of Bolivians to self-determination free of outside intervention. In this case, the demand is not abstract, and within Bolivia, the gesture would be deeply appreciated by all those except the golpistas. This does not require that we suspend disbelief, refrain from criticism of Morales, or romanticize his rule, as some of the more vulgar interpretations would have it. As Karl Marx quipped to Engels in *The Young Marx*, "Ignorance never helped anyone." We have been highly critical of Morales from the left, while trying to explain both his enduring support and his untimely demise.

In Bolivia, critics from the left should recognize that Morales won a convincing plurality in the first round, that the MAS is self-evidently the most popular political entity in the country, and that a coup has indeed taken place. What has occurred is a coup, and the Ñez presidency is

illegitimate and illegal.

Morales and MAS will have to be a part of any negotiated exit to the present political crisis, and their willingness and capacity to negotiate with the opposition has never been in doubt—which is why the opposition insisted on Morales's renunciation, and is now actively persecuting key MAS figures. The left in Bolivia and abroad should be highly sceptical of the OAS findings—which cited probability rather than evidence of fraud—even though, in the wake of the February 2016 referendum and the bizarre explanations for the cessation of live transmission of the quick count vote, many have understandably lost faith in the MAS administration's democratic transparency.

Avoiding a right-wing consolidation of the post-coup scenario will involve massive, militant extra-parliamentary struggle, which is exactly what the coca growers, miners, trade unionists, and indigenous peasant communities have called for in the coming days and weeks. Institutional procedures and legal manoeuvres will not be the deciding factor in the outcome of the contest for political power.

Unfortunately, in the new dictatorial climate, the private Bolivian media will not cover these mobilizations except to stigmatize, racialize, and criminalize them, and both government media and local miners' and peasants' radio stations have been taken over and shut down. The media blackout is one of the key tactics of the coup regime and has prompted us to write in spite of considerable hesitation.

What we have tried to do here, to quote Marx, is "to show how...the class struggle...created circumstances and conditions which allowed a mediocre and grotesque individual to play the hero's role."

Source 15 November 2019, [Verso](#).

The undying revolutions in the Middle East and North Africa

28 November 2019, by **Darren Roso, Gilbert Achcar**

Let's start by returning to what now seems to be a distant memory: the revolutionary shockwave that swept the Arab world in 2011. You argued in your book, *The People Want: A Radical Exploration of the Arab Uprising*, that these events were only the beginning of a protracted revolutionary process owing to the specific nature of capitalism in the Middle East. Could you explain these dynamics of political economy in the Arab world and their relationship to forms of authoritarian rule?

To begin with a general consideration, it is obvious now that we are witnessing a severe global crisis of the neoliberal stage of capitalism. Neoliberalism developed as a full-fledged capitalist stage since the enforcement of its economic paradigm in the 1980s. This stage has gone into crisis since the Great Recession a decade ago. The crisis is unfolding under our eyes, resulting in ever increasing social upheavals. If you look today at what is occurring in Chile, Ecuador, Lebanon, Iraq, Iran, Hong Kong and several other countries, it looks like the boiling point is reached by more and more countries.

The events in the Arab region fit into that general global crisis, to be sure. But there is something specific about that regional upheaval. There, the neoliberal reforms were carried out in a context dominated by a specific type of capitalism – a type determined by the specific nature of the regional state system that is characterised by a combination in various proportions of rentierism and patrimonialism, or neopatrimonialism. What is mostly specific to the region is the high concentration of fully patrimonial states, a concentration unequalled in any other part of the world.

Patrimonialism means that ruling families own the state, whether they own it by law under absolutist conditions or just in fact. These families regard the state as their private property, and the armed forces – especially the elite armed apparatuses – as their private guard. These features explain why the neoliberal reforms got their worst economic results in the Arab region of all parts of the world. Neoliberal-inspired changes achieved in the region resulted in the slowest rates of economic growth of any part of the developing world and, consequently, the highest rates of unemployment in the world – specifically youth unemployment.

The reason for this is not difficult to understand: the neoliberal dogma is based on the primacy of the private sector, the idea that the private sector should be the driving force of development, while the state's social and economic functions must be curtailed. The dogma says in a nutshell: introduce austerity measures, trim the state down, cut social expenditure, privatise state enterprises and leave the door wide open to private enterprise and free trade, and miracles will happen.

Now, in a context lacking the prerequisites of ideal-typical capitalism, starting with the rule of law and predictability (without which long-term developmental private investment cannot happen), what you end up getting is most of private investment going into quick profit and speculation, especially in real estate along with construction, but not in manufacturing or agriculture, not in the key productive sectors.

This created a structural blockage of development. Thus, the general crisis of the global neoliberal order goes in

the Arab region beyond a crisis of neoliberalism into a structural crisis of the type of capitalism prevailing there. There is therefore no way out of the crisis in the region by a mere change of economic policies within the continued framework of the existing kind of states. A radical mutation of the whole social and political structure is indispensable, short of which there will be no end in sight to the acute social-economic crisis and destabilisation that affects the whole region.

That's why such an impressive revolutionary shockwave rocked the whole region in 2011, rather than just mass protests. The prospect was truly insurrectionary, with people chanting "The people want to overthrow the regime!" – the slogan that has become ubiquitous in the region since 2011. The first revolutionary shockwave of that year forcefully shook the regional system of states, revealing that it had entered a terminal crisis. The old system is irreversibly dying but the new cannot be born yet – I'm referring here, of course, to Gramsci's famous sentence – and that's when "morbid symptoms" start appearing. I used that phrase in the title of the 2016 sequel to my 2013 *The People Want*.

Is it true to say that neoliberal measures in the Arab world have accelerated despite the revolutionary surge? Egypt's food prices are rising along with electricity and fuel prices, and the conservative estimates of the World Bank say about 60 percent of Egyptians were "either poor or vulnerable", all this while the regime has renewed its crackdown on street protesters. Can you talk about the relationship between counter-revolution and accelerated neoliberalism?

Egypt provides a very good example of this, indeed. When the Great Recession hit in 2008, many believed that it heralded the end of neoliberalism and that the pendulum would swing back towards the Keynesian paradigm. That was a huge illusion, however, for the simple reason that economic policies are not determined by intellectual and empirical considerations; they are determined instead and above all by the balance of class forces.

The neoliberal turn has been steered since the 1980s by fractions of the capitalist class, those with a vested interest in financialisation. In order to bring a new shift away from that, there needs to be a change in the social balance of forces, impacting the balance between fractions of the capitalist class itself, a change equivalent at least to that which took place in the 1970s and 1980s.

This did not happen yet, and the progressive forces opposed to neoliberalism have not yet proved strong enough to impose change. The neoliberals are still running the show: they claim that the reason of the global crisis is not neoliberalism but the lack of a thorough implementation of its recipes. Although they resorted massively in 2008-9 to measures contradicting their own dogma, such as the huge bailout of the financial sector by means of state funds, they quickly reverted to more and more of the same neoliberal policies pushed further and further.

That's exactly what we've got in the Arab region, despite the gigantic revolutionary shockwave that shook the whole region in 2011. Almost every single Arabic-speaking country saw a massive rise of social protest in 2011. Six of the region's countries - that is more than a quarter of them - witnessed massive uprisings. And yet, the "lesson" according to the IMF, the World Bank, those guardians of the neoliberal order, is that all this happened because their neoliberal recipes hadn't been implemented thoroughly enough! The crisis, they claimed, was due to insufficient dismantling of remnants of yesterday's state-capitalist economies. They asserted that the solution is to end all forms of social subsidies, even more

radically than what had already occurred.

However, the reason that governments of the region did not do more of that indeed was because they were afraid to do so. This isn't Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall, when people swallowed the very bitter pill of massive neoliberal changes in the hope that it would bring them capitalist prosperity. In the Arab world, people are not willing to pay the price for that because they have no illusions that their countries will turn out like Western Europe as the Eastern Europeans were brought to believe. Therefore, in order to impose further neoliberal measures on the people, brutal force is required. Egypt is hence a very clear illustration of the fact that the implementation of neoliberalism does not go hand in hand with democracy as Fukuyama's "end of history" fantasy claimed thirty years ago.

Egypt clearly shows that in order to implement thoroughly the neoliberal program in the Global South, dictatorships are needed. The first such implementation was in Pinochet's Chile, of course. In Egypt, it is now the post-2013 dictatorship led by Field Marshal Sisi - the most brutally repressive regime that the Egyptians have endured in many decades. It has gone the furthest in implementing the full neoliberal program advocated by the IMF, at a huge cost to the population, with a steep rise in the cost of living, food prices, transport prices, everything. People have been completely devastated. The reason why their anger did not explode in the streets on a massive scale is that they are deterred by state terror. But the full implementation of the IMF's neoliberal recipes has not and will not produce an economic miracle. Tensions are thus building up and sooner or later the country will erupt again. There was already some limited explosion of popular anger last September; sooner or later, there will be a much bigger one.

Though contexts differ, and specificity is always important, why did barbarism maintain its head start over the workers' and democratic movements throughout the Arab world? What, and why,

were the turning points of defeat in the region since 2011? What is the state of the Egyptian left and the workers' movement in the face of Sisi's ultra-neoliberalism and his authoritarian brutality?

Unfortunately, both the left and the workers' movement in Egypt are in bad shape. They have suffered a painful defeat - not only due to the brutal comeback of the repressive state, but also because of their own contradictions and illusions. The major part of the Egyptian left has pursued a politically erratic trajectory, switching from one misconceived alliance to another: from the Muslim Brotherhood to the military. In 2013, most of the left and the independent workers' movement supported Sisi's coup very short-sightedly, subscribing to the illusion that the army would put the democratic process back on track. They thought that getting rid of Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood, after their year in power, would reopen the way to furthering the revolutionary process even though it was brought about by the military.

It sounds rather silly, but they did genuinely hold this illusion, which the military fostered in the initial post-coup phase. The military even co-opted the head of the independent workers' movement into their first post-coup government. This terrible blunder discredited the left as well as the independent workers' movement. As a result, the left-wing opposition is much weakened and marginalised in today's Egypt.

I'm not speaking here of the Marxist radical left, which has always been marginal, although it played a disproportionate role at times during the revolutionary upheaval of 2011-13. I'm speaking of the broader left, the one that used to appeal to large masses. This broader left has lost much of its credibility after 2013. This is actually one crucial reason why people have not mobilised massively against the new neoliberal onslaught. When there is no credible alternative, people tend to assimilate the regime's discourse that says: "It's us or chaos, us or a Syria-like tragedy. You must accept our iron heel. It will be tough, but at the end of the day you will find prosperity". The Egyptians do not

really buy the last promise - prosperity - but they are still paralysed by the fear of falling into a situation much worse still than what they are enduring.

Linked to all that is another specificity of the regional revolutionary process, of which Syria is the most tragic illustration. We already discussed a first specificity - the structural crisis that is peculiar to the Arab world in the context of the general crisis of neoliberalism. The other specificity is that this region has experienced the development over several decades of a reactionary oppositional current, which was promoted for many years by the United States alongside its oldest ally in the region, the Saudi kingdom. I mean Islamic fundamentalism, of course - the whole spectrum of this current, whose most prominent component is the Muslim Brotherhood and whose most radical fringe includes al-Qaeda and the so-called Islamic State (aka ISIS).

Islamic fundamentalism was sponsored by Washington as a main antidote to communism and left-wing nationalism in the Muslim world during the Cold War. During the 1970s, Islamic fundamentalists were green-lighted by almost all Arab governments as a counterweight to left-wing youth radicalisation. With the subsequent ebb of the left-wing wave, they became the most prominent opposition forces tolerated in some countries, such as Egypt or Jordan, and crushed in others such as Syria or Tunisia. They were, however, present everywhere.

When the 2011 uprisings started, Muslim Brotherhood's branches jumped on the revolutionary bandwagon and tried to hijack it to serve their own political purposes. They were much stronger than whatever left-wing forces remained in the region, very much weakened by the collapse of the USSR, while the fundamentalists enjoyed financial and media backing from Gulf oil monarchies.

As a result, what evolved in the region was not the classical binary opposition of revolution and counter-revolution. It was a triangular situation in which you had, on the one hand, a progressive

pole - those groups, parties and networks who initiated the uprisings and represented their dominant aspirations. This pole was organisationally weak, except for Tunisia where a powerful workers' movement compensated for the weakness of the political left and allowed the uprising in this country to score the first victory in bringing down a president, thus setting off the regional shockwave. On the other hand, there were two counter-revolutionary, deeply reactionary poles: the old regimes, classically representing the main counter-revolutionary force, but also Islamic fundamentalist forces competing with the old regimes and striving to seize power. In this triangular contest, the progressive pole, the revolutionary current, was soon marginalised - not or not only due to organisational and material weakness, but also and primarily because of political weakness, of the lack of strategic vision.

The situation became dominated therefore by the clash between the two counter-revolutionary poles, which escalated into a "clash of barbarisms", as I call it, of which Syria is the most tragic illustration, with a most barbaric Syrian regime confronting barbaric Islamic fundamentalist forces. The huge progressive potential that was represented by the young people who initiated the uprising in Syria in March 2011 got completely crushed.

Many of these young people left the country, because they couldn't survive either in regime-held territories or in territories held by Islamic fundamentalist forces. Much of the Syrian progressive potential was thus scattered in Europe, Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan. Some of it survives inside the country but, as long as the war situation lingers on, it will be difficult for it to re-emerge.

The Kurdish situation in Syria is a different story. The Kurdish PYD/YPG in North-East Syria is undoubtedly the most progressive of all the armed forces active on the ground in Syria, if not the only progressive force. They managed to develop and extend the territory under their control with US backing, because Washington under

Obama saw them as efficient foot soldiers in the fight against ISIS. They had their own stake in fighting ISIS, of course, since it is a deadly enemy for them. Their first direct cooperation with the US was indeed in the battle of Kobane in 2014, when US air support including airdrops of weapons was decisive in allowing the Kurdish fighters to roll back ISIS's offensive. There was thus a convergence of interests between the US, providing air support as well as other means and resources, and the YPG, providing troops on the ground.

That is what Donald Trump has let down, stabbing the Kurds in the back and opening the way to Turkey's colonial-nationalist and racist onslaught against them. Their situation has become extremely precarious as they are now caught between Turkey's hammer and the Syrian regime's anvil, between Turkish chauvinism and Arab chauvinism - two projects of ethnic cleansing, converging on the project to replace Kurds with Arabs in Syria's border areas with Turkey. Moscow is helping both in this endeavour.

But the PYD/YPG failed to join up consistently with the rest of the struggle against Assad's murderous regime...

I wouldn't put the main blame on them: none of the Syrian armed opposition forces was open to a true recognition of the Kurds' democratic and national rights. To be sure, the PYD/YPG are not some reiteration of the Paris Commune as some tend to portray them quite naively. And yet, with all their limitations and without fostering illusions about them, they represent the most progressive significant organised force on the ground in Syria. If we take the status of women as our main criterion - and it should always be a crucial criterion for progressives - there is no match for the PYD/YPG. Add to this that their co-thinkers in Turkey lead the Peoples' Democratic Party (HPD), the only progressive and feminist major political force in that country.

What were the most significant theoretical and political lessons to draw out of the previous cycle of revolutionary struggle for

Marxists? We often hear the argument that Marxism is "Orientalist" and is thus unsuited to non-Western societies. Michel Foucault's attitude towards the Iranian revolution (1979) was an example of the attempt to find salvation in a non-Western religious Otherness, declaring an end to universal visions of human emancipation, class politics and Marxian theoretical instruments to understand the world.

So why do you believe that Marxist theory is better equipped to make sense of the revolutions and counter-revolutions throughout the Middle East and North Africa? What are the prospects for a new generation of Arabic-speaking Marxists activists to develop since 2011, and to what extent has this started taking place?

The Orientalist vision of the region is that it is doomed to be eternally stuck in religion as part of its cultural essence, and that religion explains everything and has always been the key motivation of the region's populations. That is a completely flawed vision, of course, which is also very impressionistic in that it ignores the past and believes that the present is going to last forever.

Looking at the Middle East and North Africa in recent years, one may get indeed the impression that Islamic fundamentalist forces are prominent everywhere. However, that wasn't the case a few decades ago, especially in the 1950s and 1960s, when these forces were marginalised by much stronger left-wing forces. I was asked to write a preface to the re-edition of Maxime Rodinson's *Marxism and the Muslim World* a few years ago. This collection of articles, most of which were written in the 1960s, discusses a part of the world where left-wing currents were dominant. I had therefore to inform or remind the readers of this historical fact, lest they be bewildered in reading the book.

Few realise today that in the 1950s and 1960s, it was widely assumed that the Arab region was under communist ideological hegemony. A Moroccan author published in 1967, in French, a book entitled *Contemporary Arab Ideology*, where he discussed what he

called "objective Marxism" as an ideology that was diffuse in the region. By this phrase, he meant that people used Marxist categories and ideas, most of them without even being aware of their origin.

Or take a country like Iraq - a good example. Today, clerics and mullahs dominate the political scene, especially among the Shiites. But if you fast backward to the late 1950s, you'll find that the major struggle in the country opposed Communists to Baathists, the latter subscribing to a nationalist ideology that described itself as socialist. The Communists were particularly influential among the Shiites and were able to mobilise hundreds of thousands of people in demonstrations. So, think of that Iraq and of today's Iraq: a wide gulf is separating them. But it proves that there is nothing in the genes of the region's populations that dooms them to abide by the political guidance of religious forces.

The most popular political leader in modern Arab history was indisputably Gamal Abdel-Nasser - Egypt's president between 1956 and his untimely death in 1970. He went as far to the left as possible within the boundaries of bourgeois nationalism, implementing a sweeping nationalisation of the economy along with successive agrarian reforms, promoting state-led industrial development, and bringing a substantial improvement in labour conditions, all this on an anti-imperialist and anti-Zionist backdrop.

Although it occurred under harsh dictatorial conditions, this was a very progressive phase in Egypt's history, and it was emulated in several Arab countries. When you contemplate that history, you realise that the role of Islamic fundamentalism in recent decades is not rooted in some cultural essence, as the Orientalist view would have it. It is rather the product of specific historical developments. As we discussed already, it is partly the product of Washington's protracted and intensive use of Islamic fundamentalism in cahoots with the most reactionary state on earth, the Saudi kingdom, in fighting Nasser and the USSR's influence in the Arab region and the Muslim world.

When the Arab Spring (as the uprisings were called in 2011) blossomed, a new generation entered the struggle on a mass scale. The bulk of this new generation aspires to a radical progressive transformation. They aspire to better social conditions, freedom, democracy, social justice, equality, including gender emancipation. They reject neoliberal policies and dream of a society in sharp contrast with the programmatic views of those Islamic fundamentalist forces that hijacked or tried to hijack the uprisings and lead them towards their own goals.

There is a huge progressive potential in the region, and we have seen it coming back to the fore in the second revolutionary shockwave that is presently unfolding. It started in December 2018 with the Sudanese uprising, followed since last February by the Algerian uprising, and since October by massive social and political protests in Iraq and in Lebanon. Sudan, Algeria, Iraq and Lebanon are boiling, and all other countries of the region are on the brink of explosion.

What about the role of Stalinism in the Arab world?

The Soviet Union and the communist parties under its leadership have represented the dominant form of "Marxism" in the region for decades. There have been several important communist parties in the region, all narrowly linked to Moscow. This meant that the self-described Marxist literature was heavily dominated by Stalinism in the region in the 1950s and 1960s. With the global emergence of the New Left in the late 1960s and the 1970s, new translations allowed access to critical Marxist and anti-Stalinist Marxist authors in Arabic.

The rise of a New Left in the Arab region was boosted by the June 1967 defeat of the Arab armies in the so-called Six-Day War, which dealt a major blow to Nasser and his regime. A large section of the youth got radicalised beyond both Nasserism and Stalinism, into what often was radical nationalism in a "Marxist" garb rather than plain Marxism. The Arab New Left grew significantly in the late 1960s and early 1970s, but it failed in building an alternative to the old left,

let alone an alternative to the powers that be.

That is the period when the regimes used Islamic fundamentalism to nip the New Left in the bud. Most, if not all, Arab governments unleashed and helped Islamic fundamentalist groups in the 1970s, especially in the universities, as an antidote to the new left-wing radicalisation. They thus contributed significantly to the failure of the radical left.

Of course, the latter bears the main responsibility for its own defeat. It lacked political maturity and strategic acumen. The new radicalisation did not go far beyond previously dominant superficial and dogmatic "Marxism", heavily influenced by Stalinism. Marxism was generally reduced to a few clichés. There were exceptions, of course, but overall original Marxist intellectual production in Arabic remained very limited – leaving aside contributions by Marxist thinkers from the region who lived abroad and wrote in European languages, such as the late Samir Amin. The most prominent exception was Hassan Hamdan, known under the pen name of Mahdi Amel. He was the most sophisticated intellectual of the Lebanese Communist Party and was assassinated by Hezbollah in 1987. An anthology of his writings will come out soon in English translation.

Let's return to the present: the Algerian uprising and Sudan's revolution reignited hope, as have the courageous protests in Egyptian streets and Lebanon's assemblies in Riad al-Solh square calling to topple the current regime. At the risk of asking an impossible question, to what extent have ordinary people in the region learnt political lessons from the earlier wave of struggle? What kind of mass dynamic is involved here? How have the oppressed and exploited learnt through the experience of mass struggle? Have they learnt?

They have definitely learnt. Protracted revolutionary processes are cumulative in terms of experience and know-how. They are learning curves. The peoples learn, the mass movements learn, the revolutionaries

learn, and the reactionaries learn as well, of course, everybody learns. A long-term revolutionary process is a succession of waves of upsurges and counter-revolutionary backlashes – but they are not mere repetitions of similar patterns. The process is not circular, it has to move forward or else it degenerates.

People grasp the lessons of previous experiences and do their best not to repeat the same errors or fall into the same traps. This is very clear in the case of Sudan, but also for Algeria and now for Iraq and Lebanon too. Sudan and Algeria, along with Egypt, are the three countries of the region where the armed forces constitute the central institution of political rule. Of course, armed apparatuses are the backbones of states in general, but it is direct military rule that is peculiar to these three countries in the Arab region.

Their regimes are not patrimonial. No family owns the state to the point of making whatever they wish of it. The state is rather dominated collegially by the armed forces' command. These are "neo-patrimonial" regimes: this means that they are characterised by nepotism, cronyism and corruption, but no single family is in full control of the state, which remains institutionally separate from the persons of the rulers. That explains why in the three countries the military ended up getting rid of the president and his entourage in order to safeguard the military regime.

That's what happened in Egypt in 2011 with the dismissal of Mubarak, and this year in Algeria with the termination of Bouteflika's presidency, followed by the overthrow of Bashir in Sudan, all three carried out by the military. However, when it happened in Egypt, there were huge popular illusions in the military, which were renewed in 2013 when the military deposed Muslim Brotherhood president Morsi.

These illusions were not reiterated in Sudan or Algeria in 2019. On the contrary, the popular movement in the two countries has been acutely aware that the military constitute the central pillar of the regime that they wish to get rid of. The movement in both

countries understands very well that when they chant "The people want to overthrow the regime", they mean military rule as a whole – not the presidential tip of the iceberg alone. They grasp this very clearly in both Algeria and Sudan, unlike what happened in Egypt previously.

But in Sudan there is more than that difference. There is a leadership that embodies the awareness of the lessons drawn from all previous regional experiences. This is mainly due to the foundation of the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA), which started in 2016 with teachers, journalists, doctors and other professionals organising an underground network. As the uprising that started in December 2018 unfolded, the association developed into a much larger network involving workers' unions of all key sectors of the working class. It has been playing the central role in the events on the side of the popular movement. The SPA was also instrumental in the constitution of a broad political coalition involving several parties and groups. They are presently engaged in a political tug of war with the military. They agreed temporarily on a compromise that instituted what can be described as a situation of dual power. The country is ruled by a council in which the leadership of the people's movement is represented alongside the military command. This is an uneasy transitional period that can't last very long. Sooner or later, one of the two powers will have to prevail over the other.

But the key point here is that the Sudanese experience represents a massive step forward compared with everything we have seen since 2011, and this is thanks to the existence of a politically astute leadership. The SPA didn't foster any illusions about the military. They are as radically opposed to military rule as they are to Islamic fundamentalism, especially that both were represented in the regime under Omar al-Bashir. They uphold a very progressive program, including a remarkable feminist dimension. This is a very important experience which is very closely observed all over the region.

The popular movement in Algeria is

amazing for having been staging huge mass demonstrations every week for several months now. But it has no recognised and legitimate leadership. Nobody can claim to speak in its name. This is an obvious weakness, in stark contrast with Sudan. The forms of leadership naturally change over time, but we haven't entered some postmodern age of "leaderless revolutions" as some want us to believe. The lack of leadership is a crucial impediment: a recognised leadership is crucial in order to channel the strength of the mass movement towards a political goal. This they have in Sudan, but not in Algeria, and not yet in Iraq or Lebanon.

In both Iraq and Lebanon, however, people inspired by the Sudanese example are trying to set up something like the SPA. There are beginnings in that direction, involving university teachers along with various professionals. In Lebanon, they created an Association of Professional Women and Men, clearly inspired by the Sudanese model. That clearly shows how learning from experience functions at the regional level.

Could you further elaborate about the most significant aspects of the mass movements in Iraq and Lebanon?

Both movements share a remarkable particularity in that both countries, Iraq and Lebanon, are characterised by a sectarian political system.

In Lebanon, it has been institutionalised by French colonialism after World War I in a form close to the country's present political system. In Iraq, it was established by the US occupation, much more recently. Such sectarian political regimes thrive off sectarian divisions, naturally. In their context, religious sectarian divisions become the defining feature of political life and government. Sectarianism is a very pernicious and effective tool in diverting class struggle into religious strife. It's an old recipe, a version of "divide and rule": thwart any horizontal solidarity of class versus class by turning it into a vertical clash between sects. Bourgeois-sectarian nepotistic leaderships secure the allegiance of

members of the popular classes belonging to their sectarian community by stoking sectarian divisions and rivalries.

In both Iraq and Lebanon, the accumulation of social grievances resulting from a very wild form of capitalism that crushes ordinary people and deteriorates their standard of living has created a huge resentment. The social explosion was triggered by a political measure in Iraq - the dismissal of a popular military figure - and an economic one in Lebanon - a projected tax on VoIP communications. These measures provoked a formidable outburst of popular anger. In Lebanon, to everybody's surprise, the outburst covered the whole country and involved people belonging to all sects. In Iraq, it has been mostly confined to the Arab Shiite majority, but this is equally significant since the ruling clique itself is Shiite. The movement in both countries has thus strongly repudiated sectarianism in favour of a renewed sense of popular-national belonging.

In Lebanon, sectarianism was so entrenched historically that it appeared as a very difficult barrier to break. It was therefore very amazing to see people belonging to all religious communities participate in an uprising whose key slogan has become the Arabic equivalent of the Spanish-language "Que se vayan todos!" (All of them must go!), which was the key slogan of the December 2001 popular revolt in Argentina. The Lebanese version says "All of them means all of them" - a way of insisting on the repudiation of all ruling class members, with no exceptions. "Us vs. them" shifted from sect vs. sect to a revolt of the people from below against all members of the ruling caste at the top, whichever religious-political sect they belong to, whether Shiite, Sunni, Christian or Druze.

Hezbollah was not spared - and that is even more striking since a sort of taboo regarding the party, and particularly its leader, had been enforced until then. It was astounding to see that people went into the streets in the regions under Hezbollah's control despite the party's clear stance against the popular

movement. Since then, there have been successive attempts to intimidate the popular movement by thugs belonging to Hezbollah and its close ally Amal, the two Shiite sectarian groups.

In Iraq, parties and militias linked to the Iranian regime engaged in repressing the popular revolt at a much higher scale, with much killing. That is because Tehran's tutelage over Iraq's government is a major target of the popular revolt. The recent explosion of anger within Iran itself was likewise met with brutal repression. Iran's theocratic regime thus confirms that it is one of the main reactionary forces in the region on a par with its regional rival, the Saudi kingdom. This was already clear from its brutal repression of the democratic popular movement within Iran in 2009 as well as from its massive contribution to the Syrian regime's counter-revolutionary drive starting in 2013 and from its heavy-handed repression of the social protests that flared up again in Iran at the end of 2017 and early 2018.

The role of women in the second wave of the revolutionary process in the Arab region is another very important feature, and a further indication of the higher degree of maturity achieved by the popular movements. In Sudan, Algeria and Lebanon, women have participated massively and very visibly in the demonstrations and mass rallies as well as in heading them. In the three countries, feminists have been a crucial component of the groups involved in the uprisings. Even in Iraq, where women were hardly visible in the initial stage of the protests, they are getting increasingly involved, especially since the students joined the mobilisation.

The big question now is: will the popular movements in Algeria, Iraq and Lebanon succeed in finding ways to organise, like their Sudanese brothers and sisters did, in order to amplify their struggles' impact and achieve major steps towards the fulfilment of their goals, or will the ruling classes manage to quell each of these three uprisings and defuse it? Without being optimistic due the very vicious nature of the regimes that govern this part of the world, I have a

lot of hope. My hope, however, is based on the knowledge that a huge progressive potential exists, while I

am perfectly aware that in order to be realised, a lot of struggle, organisation and political acumen are needed.

Source *Marxist Left Review*, No 18, Winter 2019.

Eastern Europe: revisiting the ambiguous revolutions of 1989

27 November 2019, by **Catherine Samary**

Twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Timothy Garton Ash wrote that ‘in 1989, Europeans proposed a new model of non-violent, velvet revolution.’ [1] Some years earlier, instead, he had used an interesting neologism – ‘refolution’ [2] – to describe the kind of systemic changes that had occurred, combining features of revolutions and of reforms from above. I want here to support and develop the neologism against the ‘pure’ epithet, as being more accurate to analyse the very ambiguities of the historical transformations that put an end to the ‘bipolar world’. I will argue, that the mobilised democratic movements, which occurred before 1989, were both against the ruling nomenklatura and not in favour of the main socio-economic transformations introduced since 1989. It is necessary to look behind labels and ideological discourses to take into full account the role of ‘bipolar’ international ‘deals’ still at work in 1989, but also the role taken by leading figures of the former single party in opaque forms of privatisations: that means the lack of any real democratic procedure of decision making about the main reforms which have had plenty of counter-revolutionary substance. Popular aspirations were expressed massively in revolutionary upsurges against the single party and Soviet domination like the Polish Solidarność movement in 1980-1. And this movement was closer to the Prague autumn of workers councils in 1968 against the Soviet occupation, than to the 1989 neoliberal shock therapies. Those embryonic revolutions towards a third way were repressed and dismantled by the bipolar world’s

dominant forces through different episodes, because the mobilised democratic forces were an alternative to the existing political order which tried to impose its own end, a reality hidden by Cold War concepts and the transformation that followed 1989.

The 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 has been a particular opportunity for many countries to commemorate that historical event, leading to systemic changes up to the end of the Soviet Union in 1991. In spite of different scenarios in Eastern Europe, 1989 has been described as ‘year of revolutions’. Timothy Garton Ash stresses how different those ‘revolutions’ were from the usual violent ‘model’ of such radical changes elsewhere: ‘in 1989, Europeans proposed a new model of non-violent, velvet revolution’. [3] But the specificities are probably elsewhere.

Ideological bias of Cold War concepts

Without engaging here in semantic debates or accepting rigid ‘models’ or norms, one can certainly reject the reductionist identification of revolutions with organic violence. And we can reasonably take for granted that this notion covers two interlinked features and meanings: a broad popular (social) mobilisation against fundamental aspects of an existing system on the one hand, and on the other hand the result of those movements, that is getting rid of the ruling structures and dominant social

forces of the system and introducing new ones with symbolic and ideological dimensions. Even if gaps (disillusionment) always exist between the popular hopes and demands and the accomplished changes, the ‘revolutions’ express an organic link between both aspects: that is mass movements being needed for radical changes. It is rather obvious that the use of the term ‘revolutions’ in liberaloriented milieus and media to characterise the 1989 historical turn associates popular (democratic) rejection of the repressive dictatorships with what is described as ‘the end of communism’. In so doing, a democratic legitimacy is given to the changes and four implicit equations are established: the former rule of Communist parties (CPs) are equated with ‘communism’; popular rejection of those past bureaucratic and repressive regimes is identified with demands for the political and socio-economic changes introduced after 1989, as part of the neoliberal capitalist globalisation; the latter is identified with democracy; and all opponents of the past (communist) regimes are identified with anti-communists. Those dominant equations are all but convincing.

As a matter of facts, labels were and are still confusing, especially ‘socialism’ and ‘communism’ which cover, first, ideals of a non oppressive society without classes and aiming at the satisfaction of human needs through their individual and collective direct full responsibilities. This does not give a ‘model’ but only principles and aims that are shared by those who still believe in

that ‘concrete utopia’. It includes in their thoughts the means to go towards these ends, and a critical approach to all experiences, including those which claimed to be socialists. The second meaning of those worlds covers systems or parties as concrete historical formations, having adopted those labels at a certain moment of their history, and developed concrete institutional ‘models’. Inside or outside those systems or parties, individuals or movements can criticise the concrete model or experience because of its distance from the ideals. The main historical reasons for the gap between ideals and reality, and the resulting ideological ambiguities and confusion behind labels lies on the one hand with the international evolution of ‘socialist parties’ towards integration in the capitalist world order and more recently towards its neoliberal variants, and on the other hand the Stalinisation and more generally the bureaucratisation of the ‘socialist revolutions’ of the 20th century, and since the 1980s the role played by many ex-communists (or even, in China, still ‘communists’) in the process of privatisation and insertion in the capitalist world order. The classical ‘right’ and ‘left’ divisions are themselves often opaque.

I will not deal here with the conceptual debates which have divided – and still divide – even Marxists themselves about how to characterise the Soviet Union and its sister countries. [4] The main crises and social upsurges within the former ‘communist’ societies and the concrete process of their transformation since 1989 convinced me that ‘pure’ concepts to characterise them (either ‘socialist’ or ‘capitalist’, or ‘new class’) cannot permit to grasp their main contradictions – namely, the historical context of the 1980s leading at the end of that decade to a specific turn of large parts of the bureaucratic apparatus of the Communist parties’ (CPs) bureaucratic apparatus towards insertion in the world capitalist system, and the popular ambivalent feelings and specific conflicting relations to those states/parties – which played a key role in the opacities of the capitalist restoration. Those parties were ruling on behalf of

the workers (which meant a non-capitalist and paternalist form of social protection) – but at their expense (repressing all autonomous movements of the workers). Considering those parties as classical political bodies is obviously wrong. But reducing them to the (real) feature of state apparatus denies any historical and political influence on their way of functioning, and the role the socialist ideology which they used to legitimate themselves. This is also reductionist, one-sided and misleading.

The same dual aspects lies behind the analysis of the kind of bureaucratic ‘social ownership’ which characterised – under different variants, including decentralised self management – the former regimes claiming to be socialist. They suppressed private property as a dominant feature not in limited circumstances but as a ‘constitutive’ and ideological factor that limited the domination of market in such a way that the money could not play the role of ‘capital’ (money invested to ‘make money’, that is profit). The party/state nomenklatura managed the economy, but did not own shares and could not transform its privileges of power, consumption and management into real ownership rights that could be transmitted to heirs: the official (legal) ‘real owners’ were the workers (every one and no one in particular) or even the ‘entire people’. But all that also meant there were neither the right to carry out economic lay-off nor to enter into bankruptcy procedures. The right to strike was forbidden (the workers would not strike against themselves, said the regime). And the trade unions were the transmission belt of the decisions of the party, not organs of defence for workers. But the way the labour force was stabilised in big factories was through the distribution of increasing ‘social income’ under the form of flats, products, health care or childcare services associated with jobs – and a ‘good attitude’. The dominant, paternalist and repressive role of the party prevented any independent and consistent power of decision making for the workers, but the single party was ruling on behalf of socialist ideals and claiming to implement them. The ‘socialist’

legitimation of the regimes was established through a high level of social protection, ideological praise of the labour force’s creation of the wealth, and relatively high ‘egalitarianism’.

The party’s strength would have been reduced if it was only an apparatus. The integration from rank and file members of the party, and in its broad ‘mass organisations’, of the ‘best’ socialist workers and intellectuals was both a mean to channel, control and if ‘necessary’ repress their initiative and to give a legitimacy or a ‘social basis’ to the regime. The popularity of the official ideology was reflected by ambiguous relationships: dominant trends of resistance and alternative movements have been, consciously or de facto, aimed at reducing the gap between the official socialist ideals and the reality. Many rank and file members of these CPs simply tried to implement those ideals which were popular. That is also why so many party members were involved in the huge upsurges that occurred in 1956 in Poland or Hungary, in 1968 in Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, or even in the Polish Solidarno??, in 1980-1. But all of them suffered repression by the ruling apparatus as it feared the loss of its privileged position of power and control. [5]

All this cannot be analysed without going behind the dominant labels. As already stated the former ‘communist’ party/state was of course not a real political party (e.g. there was no right for alternative tendencies, no real and free votes in congresses). But it combined different features: an apparatus with bureaucrats having privileges of power; but also a set of mass organisations attached to the party, among which the cultural ones played a kind of political role with a fair amount of critical approaches. In spite of Stalinisation (even analysed not only as deformation but as a kind of counterrevolution within the revolution [6]) the regime continued to use a socialist ideology to legitimise itself both nationally and internationally (within the anti-capitalist and anti-colonialist social, trade-union, political scene). In the period of real ‘catching up’ (up to

the 1970s) with a high extensive growth of production and improvement of standards of living, these regimes could be perceived as an alternative to capitalism, and an improvement in the global balance of forces for those who resisted imperialist colonial policies. But the Stalinisation of the Soviet Union had also transformed it into yet another 'great power' wanting to control its 'sister countries' as much as its own workers.

Membership in these parties in power could be sought for a broad range of (changing) motivations, ranging from cynical use of the party card to get privileges to sincere communist and anti-imperialist convictions. The practical choice to try and reduce the gap between the official ideology and the reality included both explicit involvement in intellectual and popular anti-bureaucratic criticisms and upsurges, and simple daily promotion of horizontal fraternal relationships and activities. In between, there were all those without sophisticated ideologies who were born into the system and were looking for positive aims and concrete gains for themselves and the people around them by using the rules and with a little help of the party card – so long as such gains did exist. Ideological bias and Cold War concepts provide limited complex objective sociological and political analysis about these specific conflicting societies. [7] The relationships between these regimes and their populations have generally been presented in black and white – from both sides of the bi-polar world.

The Stalinised Soviet Union behaved as a 'great power' dealing with (in Yalta) or conflicting with (during the Cold War) other 'great powers' over the back of 'fraternal regimes' and people. The Yugoslav Communist regime (called 'Titoist' from the name of his leader, Josip Broz known as 'Tito') was 'excommunicated' in 1948 by the Kremlin. This meant absolute isolation, political and physical repression of all links with the Yugoslav regime within the international Communist movements (especially in Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia). After Stalin's death, Khrushchev came to Belgrade in 1955, and made apologies and promises to

respect different socialist 'models'. But in spite of that (and of the hope of a 'de-Stalinisation' of the Soviet Union at the 20th Congress of the CPSU where 'K' denounced Stalin's crimes and the Gulag), Moscow continued – in 1956 in Hungary and in 1968 in Czechoslovakia – to slander and repress alternative socialist movements and figures by fear of uncontrolled democratic dynamics. Past official communist movements supporting the Soviet Union as the motherland of socialism censored and repressed as 'anti-communists' all of its opponents. And, in general, that included all movements or individuals who criticised the gaps between socialist ideals and the reality who were looking for a 'socialism with human face'. Social gains introduced by these regimes were supposed to 'prove' their socialist reality; but they were in fact far from real social rights because autonomous activities and initiatives which they could have de facto stimulated, were under the control and repressed by an apparatus which wanted to keep its monopoly of power.

Anti-communist ideologies at the time were too pleased to identify these regimes with any kind of communist ideals as such, and to reduce communism to the repressive aspect of the Soviet reality. Like new official 'democratic' (pro-market) regimes – especially when dominated by former members of the communist nomenklatura – they tended to deny or (now) suppress recognition of any progressive gains from those past regimes, which are reduced to Gulag. The whole short 'Soviet century' is now presented as an artificial parenthesis in a European history and civilisation which is only 'western' and supposed (wrongly) to have been unified in the past: the slogan 'return to Europe' is heard as very arrogant and ignorant for the majority of these populations.

There was a paradoxical convergence of Cold War approaches (defending the communist regimes or cursing them) in claiming that the former societies were 'communists' and therefore all opponents, or simply critical citizens could only be anti-communists dissidents. The reality was certainly otherwise: different kind

of political currents and aspirations existed, including in period of crisis of the former systems. But it remains to analyse what aspirations and dynamics were dominant, which we will try to do in the last part of this text. Hence '1989', or more broadly the different national scenarios and phases of crisis and changes in the Eastern European countries is an issue at stake in alternative interpretations and memories. [8]

Popular demand for individual and collective freedoms in past (or present – in Cuba or China) 'communist regimes' do not 'belong' to a particular current. They were expressed in broad fronts in 1989 and before then, as in Czechoslovakia in the dissident movement called Charter 77 or the Civic Forum it established in 1989 where Communists and anti-communists individuals coexisted and fought together for their freedoms. Similar demands were put forward in democratic upsurges against single party dictatorship and the Kremlin's domination, in 1956 in Poland and Hungary, 1968 in Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, 1980-81 in Poland. So the very question of continuities and discontinuities between those democratic upsurges and 1989 are at the core of conflicting views. That is the very question I will discuss at the end of this text.

International factors and Cold War deals before 1989

The opening of archives and commemorations of 1989 in 2009 leave no doubt about the key importance of international hesitations and 'deals' in a specific context around the issue of Germany. But although 1989 was a 'turning point', it was neither a sudden 'event' nor a pre-conceived and controlled scenario. We have briefly to go back to the 1970s, to remind ourselves of a crucial period of crises and changes in the international capitalist world order, while the neo-Stalinised world became itself more and more fragile.

From the stagnation of the 1970s and the arms race to the fall of the Berlin Wall

The 1970s had been dominated in Eastern Europe by the freezing of internal reforms. Whatever had been their limits, these reforms were aimed at increasing a certain degree of decentralisation (in general at the benefit of managers, but in Yugoslavia with increasing workers rights of self management) and some market pressure to reduce bureaucratic waste. Their main contradictions were socio-economic and political: on the one hand they increased inequalities and instability according to market pressure - which was rejected by workers as contradictory to egalitarian values and by conservative sectors of the bureaucracy who feared to lose their domination. On the other hand, precisely in order to overcome social resistances, the reformist wings of the apparatus opened the doors to more freedoms - but then, social and intellectual movements from below would develop without respecting the limits of the reforms of the single party regime: this was illustrated by the development of spontaneous workers councils in 1956 in Poland and Hungary, demands for 'self-management from top to bottom' and self-managed planning opposing the market reforms and the 'red bourgeoisie' in Yugoslavia in June 1968, and all features of a 'socialism with human face' like in the Prague Spring and Autumn of workers councils (to which we will come back at the end of this text).

So the reforms were blocked after repressive episodes, and the intervention of the Warsaw Pact tanks in Prague. But a new decade of relative growth (by comparison with western countries) occurred based on increasing credits and imports in some key Eastern European countries. This opened the floodgates to western products in order to modernise their economies and so respond to consumer aspirations of the population. The rather high rate of growth in the South and in the East by comparison with the 'stagflation' in the core capitalist countries was attractive for western banks: they increased their international loans, looking to use in a profitable way the

deposits they had received in dollars from Arab countries after the oil price hikes.

The 1970s had also been a decade of relative 'stagnation' in the Soviet Union when the Kosygin's reforms had been pushed back and the old guard around Leonid Brezhnev clamped down. It was therefore a period of high social protection both for workers and for the bureaucrats in power but of slowing down of productivity and growth.

At the end of that decade, the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan opened up the last phase of the Cold War and of the arms race with a radically different effect in the two parts of the bipolar world. The huge military expenses and foreign borrowing legitimised by the 'Star Wars' programme against the 'communist danger' helped the new US President Ronald Reagan to relaunch the US economy (with a considerable budget deficit) and begin to re-establish the deteriorating hegemony of the US. The 'neoliberal' turn in Britain in 1979 under Margaret Thatcher and in the US in 1980 with Ronald Reagan turned out to be a counter-offensive against all systems, programmes and labour rights which, after the Second World War under the pressure of the bipolar competition, had reduced inequalities, promoted the welfare state and protected the labour force from market competition. The technological revolution was mobilised in order to reorganise the productive space and dismantle trade union bastions or other forms of collective capacities of negotiation. Meanwhile, the free flow of capital and suppression of social and national protections required the imposition of generalised market competition under the new rules of US-led international financial institutions. The debt crisis (in the post-colonial countries of the 'South' and in some Eastern European countries) became the central vector of 'conditional credits' and policies of 'structural adjustment' aimed at opening these societies to generalised privatisation and competition - what has been called the 'Washington consensus'.

The arms race weighed heavily on the USSR - unlike the US: military

expenditure caused a drain in other areas of the budget, in particular spending on infrastructure and Soviet industrial equipment, which were fast becoming obsolete. And during the very same period, relations at the heart of the Comecon (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance) became strained by years of foreign borrowing in hard currencies that were without precedent in many of the key Eastern European countries: Poland, Yugoslavia, Romania, Hungary and East Germany.

The increase in interest rates in the United States (with a radical monetarist policy) at the beginning of the 1980s provoked a chain reaction on the variable interest rates of those international credits contracted from private banks. This increased suddenly the level of the debts in Eastern European 287 countries (as well as in the South) while reimbursement through exports was difficult in the context of the slowdown in world growth and the weak competitiveness of their products.

The response of the Communist parties in power in Eastern Europe to this debt crisis differed. In Poland, the Gierek government decided on a price increase for consumer goods that produced the explosion of strikes leading to the establishment of the first independent trade union (with some ten millions workers) in Eastern Europe, Solidarność (Solidarity). After its first and last democratic congress, martial law was imposed by the (communist) General Jaruzelski followed by nearly a decade of repression and absolute fall in production up to 1989.

In Romania, President Ceausescu imposed the repayment of the entire debt over the course of the 1980s, through a violent dictatorship enforced against his own people. His peers were in favour of trying to keep their own power, while making the dictator pay for his unpopularity, by way of his assassination during a pseudo 'revolution' at the turn of the 1990s.

In Yugoslavia, the 1980s were marked by the paralysis of central institutions, which were incapable of making people accept the federal policies of

repayment of a debt that was opposed by both workers and the republics. Soaring inflation reached triple figures and multiple resistances were expressed through thousands of scattered strikes combined with an increase in nationalist tensions. The widening of the gap between the republics, which had become the real centres of decision making since the decentralising reforms of the 1960s, and the disintegration of solidarity foreshadowed the break-up of the federation. The last Yugoslav government of Ante Marković, tried to impulse a radical liberal shock therapy and transformation of social ownership in 1989, but he was confronted by different republican nationalist strategies and the decision of the richest republics to leave the sinking boat while nation-wide bureaucracies were trying to consolidate a 'nation state' able to control the appropriation of wealth and as large a stretch of territory as possible...

In Hungary, the Communist leadership was the only one that tried to repay the debt by selling the best businesses to foreign capital as early as the 1980s. In the context of the Gorbachev's signs of 'disengagement', they bargained the opening of their borders to Austria in September 1989 (in return for financial compensations), making the fall of the Berlin Wall unavoidable.

But the key indebted country was the GDR, the German Democratic Republic, whose increasing imports from the West had been encouraged by Moscow during the 1970s, as a way to oppose US-led prohibition of technological export to the Soviet Union. Honecker's GDR was in fact 'released' from November 1987 by Gorbachev, who hoped that agreeing to get rid of such an unpopular regime and the Wall - and perhaps accepting a unification of Germany - could be the best solution for his own policy. It was hoped that German subsidies would help the repatriation of the Soviet army, reduce the cost of the arms race and allow concentration on internal reforms, while the Soviet withdrawal would stop the western embargo on credit and facilitate the import of new technologies. Gorbachev's tone was that of

'peaceful coexistence' and no longer that of the Khrushchev's regime in 1956, aiming to catch up with capitalism by 1980.

From this point on, the USSR wished to disengage from its essential international politics of political-economic aid notably in Cuba and Nicaragua, in order to go ahead with the new international 'deals'. But the USSR also wanted its sister countries in the framework of the Comecon to pay back their debts in products - and was more and more interested in turning its exports of oil and gas towards those countries which paid in hard currencies. Yeltsin pushed forward the logic behind the dissolution of the USSR, which enabled the Russian Federation to ask the new independent states to pay in hard currency for their energy imports.

Behind the scene, financial deals with the Hungarian regime (to open the first holes in the 'Wall') and Moscow (to accept the unification) were associated with Gorbachev's popular visits in Germany - and his orders to the East German security services not to repress popular demonstrations. But his idea was to propose the dismantling of both NATO and Warsaw Pact coalitions. He shared with Mitterrand a project of 'a common European house' based on a peaceful coexistence and reforms in both parts of Europe - along some kind of Council of Europe and Helsinki agreements like those which were in the 'Paris Charter'. [9]

The dynamic of German unification was determined by Chancellor Kohl's decision, supported by the US, to establish a monetary union. The exchange rate (one to one) was a disaster for the East German economy but attractive in the short term for its population. Such an absorption/destruction of the GDR was far from the initial discussions Gorbachev had held with Kohl about a new constitution for both parts of Germany. Mitterrand's French government made all possible efforts to integrate the unified Germany within the European construction (with the Maastricht Treaty and its rigid monetarist approach a condition for convincing the Bundesbank to

leave the DM). But for the US administration, NATO was the stake - Germany had to be in, and NATO had to be maintained and expanded in spite of the Warsaw Pact's dissolution in 1991.

During the 1990s, the US used the Bosnian and then Kosovo issues (in the context of the failure of European and United Nations 'peace plans') to push the former Cold War Alliance eastwards and establish new protectorates. [10] The internal dynamics of Soviet policies changed the balance of external relations and put Gorbachev in the corner; he has no choice but to accept western political decisions. The dissolution of the Soviet Union, Yeltsin's coup against the Duma which was opposing radical market reforms, and international reciprocal agreements about measures against terrorism opened the door for a new period.

Democratic revolutions or opaque 'revolutions'?

Let us deal here with factors that prevented social 'revolutions' from occurring and, moreover, contradict the 'democratic' nature of the changes.

Bipolar external factors

International behind-the-scene negotiations between Gorbachev and western governments are not sufficient grounds to deny the character of 'revolutions'. The past had demonstrated the possibility of revolutions breaking the bipolar world's agreements: the Yugoslav Revolution leading to the Titoist regime resisted both Stalin and the western major powers, the Non-Aligned movement. It was able to impose itself despite (and against) Yalta's agreements according to which Yugoslavia was supposed to be a monarchy again with western and USSR's influence 'shared' fifty-fifty. The capacity to resist to such international 'deals' was rooted in several factors: the deep popularity

and legitimacy of the partisan-led antifascist struggle, the distribution of land to hundreds of thousands of armed peasants, and a new self-administration on the liberated territories crystallising the new federal project against inter-ethnic hatred, all of this associated with a radical rejection of the Serbian Kingdom which dominated the first Yugoslavia in a dictatorial way. [11] Our hypothesis is that the decisive role played in 1989 by international 'deals' in the dynamics of changes illustrates, on the contrary, the weakness of popular mobilisations, unable to really determine the content of the transformations, which occurred 'from above' (and from outside). They were sufficient to get rid of the most corrupt and inefficient regimes and open a process of pluralist elections. But this was introduced in the Soviet Constitution without any 'revolution', under Gorbachev's rule and appeared as a possible 'norm' as soon as Moscow had accepted the fall of the GDR's regime.

The former Czech dissident of Charter 77 and later President, Vaclav Havel, expressed that clearly in an interview to a French newspaper, given in the context of the 20th anniversary of the 'Velvet revolution': 'in, we were first looking carefully at the East German exodus, which was a huge flow passing partially through Prague (...). I understood that the course of history had changed'. [12] And as the journalist asks 'Did the 'Velvet revolution' began naturally in Berlin?', Vaclav Havel stresses, of course, the deep aspirations and struggles for freedoms in all societies and adds that, in spite of there being no guarantee for peaceful events, one could guess that 'the Soviet Union could no more intervene unless it would have opened an international crisis and a break in the new policy of Perestroika'. But he stresses: 'the dissidents were not ready (...); we have had only a marginal influence on events themselves. But when the power began to look for a dialogue, he made us its interlocutors. There was no organised political movement with which it could speak. That was when we established the Civic Forum'.

In other words, 'the Velvet

Revolution would not have been possible were it not for the monumental events unfolding in the other Communist Bloc countries', first of all, the Soviet Union. [13]

But it remains to be explained how very unpopular radical socioeconomic transformations could be introduced if not through revolutionary mobilisations at least (apparently) without resistance. Other sources of ambiguities appear in those issues.

Unclear labels

The first source of ambiguity for the dynamics of the changes is the fact that all the new fronts or new parties coming out of the former single party were very heterogeneous, and rapidly split, without agreements on what to do. In the same interview Vaclav Havel reminds us what was the programme of the Civic Forum: 'Our ideals were still the same. The first reforms were reduced to the dissidence principles: free elections, pluralism, market economy, citizen rights, and protection of individual freedoms. And then our priority was to dismantle and get rid of all those who were responsible of communist exactions'. In reality, behind those vague formulations, high disagreements existed about all those issues (including 'lustration' - kind of witch hunting anti-communist campaign) among former members of the same Charter 77. Everywhere, new parties emerged with increasing difficulty in establishing stable majorities in parliaments. And the experience of neoliberal first 'market reforms' led quite rapidly people voting the former communists back in, hoping they would maintain or reintroduce social protections. This happened first of all in Poland, only three years after the neoliberal shock therapy.

And there was then another factor making the picture unclear. Dominant figures of the newly elected parties or of former communist parties now renamed social democrats, had carried a membership card of the Communist party only some months earlier. And from Russia to Poland, most of the new leaders came from the former apparatus - even from its secret police. [14] That was one of the

reasons why the population did not clearly understand what was at stake.

Getting rid of the single-party regime and introducing pluralism enjoyed popular support and therefore were not difficult to accomplish. But the party/state was at the same time both infrastructure and superstructure and dismantling allowed a radical transformation of the system from the top, through changes in fundamental laws without pluralist debates on new constitutions. The lack of democratic life in the past but also the opacity of the economic transition facilitated that process. It was enough that the newly elected leaders attacked the foundation of the socio-economic order through a set of new laws established without transparency. The populations, in particular those involved in Solidarno?? (the Polish independent trade union) at its congress in 1980, never expressed or demonstrated in favour of a project of generalised privatisations. Their aim was to live better and freer. The hope was often to benefit from the best in each system - looking much more towards a very social-democratic Swedish or German model of the 1960s, rather than towards the Anglo-Saxon capitalism of the 1980s.

The transformation of a large cross-section of former Communists into new liberals and property owners occurred in general in Eastern Europe because they wanted pragmatically to protect their privileges of power and consumption and could no longer do so through the former mechanisms. Because of the debt crisis, increasing waste and low productivity, they could not 'pay for' stability through the guaranteed social protection. So they looked to privatisation for themselves and used their knowledge of the system and former social relations to invent convenient reforms. In general, the former party was the main source of qualified elites, and there was no private capital to buy the factories. That is why they became the dominant actors and beneficiaries of the privatisations and new political system.

Two slightly different cases must be stressed where former communists could not play that role. The first case is the unified Germany, because a real

German bourgeoisie with real capital able to buy the factories did exist. That is why a radical anti-Communist purge and in particular a denigration of the past regime was imposed (we will come back on that point later). The second case is the Czech Republic, because there, the neoliberal social democratic party which was established, had its roots in the pre-war past (and could be reconstituted) and not in the former transformed Communist party. So unlike for instance Poland where the population brought back to power the ex-communist transformed into 'new' social democrats, the Czech population could vote for another social-democratic party, after the first years of domination of the right - which refused any alliance with the CP (the only one to keep its name in Eastern Europe). Staying in the opposition (like the PDS - Party of Democratic Socialism - in Germany), that CP was not directly involved in the neoliberal policies implemented by all the social democratic parties (be they from 'communist' origin or not). And this 'marginality' became initially an advantage with electoral support rising among the losers of the privatisations (especially pensioners and unemployed), both in the Czech Republic and in Germany. There, the PDS fused with some other left currents to build Die Linke - the Left [15] - with some electoral successes.

But a deeper issue has to be raised to understand the opacity of the whole transformation: that of the form taken by privatisations, without historical precedent.

The 'refolutions' in ownership: politics and/or economy?

We use here Timothy Garton Ash's neologism [16] to describe the core of the 'great transformation' which, from the end of the 1980s affected the USSR and Eastern Europe in extremely unexpected ways: the reforms 'from above' would revolutionise the system and change it radically, but the self dissolution of the single party was not a 'revolution'. Generalised market and privatisations were the 'benchmarks' of the break with the past regimes, indicators of the

'transition's success' for external 'experts', creditors or negotiators. But what did they mean for the population?

A certain kind of market for goods did exist. The popular image of the market was obtained by travelling to the West or from pictures showing beautiful and attractive shop windows. That was surely the reason of the attraction of the Deutsche Mark and the immense joy of East German people crossing the former frontier and discovering the real abundance in western German shops. Later on they will have to discover new market rules.

So what about 'privatisation'? The notion was even more abstract and blurred. Small private sectors did exist and could be useful. Surveys in Poland [17] asking the people if they were for or against privatisation gave a dominant 'for' as a general possibility, and 'against' as a concrete question for the factory where the person was employed (even if in certain cases or periods, the hope that a foreign owner could bring higher income could lead to a positive assessment on privatisation). In general, far from a clear capitalist form of ownership (linked with the market 'laws', constraint and risks of bankruptcy and unemployment), the word 'privatisation' itself was used in a very opaque way to express the change in ownership. And in electoral slogans, the 'experts' pushed forward a kind of equation: 'market + privatisation = efficiency + freedom'. That was certainly optimistic and, at the least, not precise. What were the criteria of efficiency? What individual and collective freedoms and rights were related to property rights?

The on-going reforms were called 'transition to market economy' by international 'experts' during the first years after 1989. It was a confusing and imprecise formulation: what is a 'market economy'? Is it an economy with a market? What kind of market? Is that Yugoslavia? Sweden? Mexico? Great Britain? France or Germany? And when, in what periods? The 1960s? Now? But in spite of being imprecise, the notion of 'transition to' seemed to indicate a clear and unique possible choice for the future,

with a nonexplicit normative neoliberal 'model'. Who had determined such a future choice?

By presenting themselves as scientific, neoliberal precepts had a voluntary, dogmatic and normative character - falsely claiming that successes elsewhere in the world were attributable to them. In practice they were imposing their criteria and excluding their choices from democratic debate. [18] In Eastern Europe not only did they benefit from the strength of the institutions of globalisation (with the IMF and the World Bank having a direct role in the re-organisation of budgets and accountancy and later the European Union's commission playing a leading role); but they also benefited from the zealous support of former members of the Communist parties. [19]

Practically, the process of privatisation had to fit into the ideological context inherited from the former system of formal rights and find some 'democratic' legitimacy. Therefore the dominant feature was at the beginning of the 'transition' was to recognise that the ownership had first to be taken from incompetent and corrupted bureaucrats and given back to the workers and people who had produced the wealth for decades (and additional owners were put forward as 'legitimate': those who had been expropriated in the past). To be popular, the discourse had to focus against the privileges fitting with the dominant egalitarian ideology. Yeltsin first 'profile' and the '500 days' Chataline's programme of privatisation in Russia at the beginning of the 1990s, were based on that ideology. And this very same orientation was also expressed in the East German initial proposals before the monetary unification of 1990.

That does not mean that the scenarios and contexts were all the same. There were choices and the Slovenian cases shows a slightly different 'model' because of different factors: a relatively favourable context (that republic had the highest level of life and of export of the whole Yugoslavia, and the most efficient self-management system); a radical reorganisation of the former official trade-union into a real independent

force helping to express a massive mobilisation and therefore public debate on privatisations resistance to neoliberal recipes at the beginning of the 1990s and later on. As a result, in spite of recurrent pressures from the European commission to 'open' the economy to liberal criteria, the state kept the control of public financing of strategic big factories instead of systematic privatisation and lack of credit; the forms of privatisation kept an important part under the control of municipalities and factory employees; the taxes on income and factories and the wages were not submitted to neoliberal criteria (to be 'attractive' for private foreign capital as a general rule); growth was based on internal mechanisms and regulations without accepting the logics of 'competitive advantage' to reduce workers' income and taxes; the main assets of the past system in culture and health care were not destroyed. [20]

But if the case of Slovenia was in the initial phase slightly different, it was not because elsewhere the populations were more in favour of liberal recipes but just the opposite: it was because it was more difficult elsewhere for the populations to defend their social gains. They could only express more and more disagreements in elections. The party which had been most involved in privatisations (like the first liberal coalition around the Balcerowicz's shock therapy in Poland in 1989) even lost the capacity to come back later on in Parliament, or to establish stable parliamentary majorities. They could claim to be dismantling the arbitrary rules and waste of the former stateparty system; but their aim was mainly a dismantling of social protections - something that was generally kept quiet during the election campaigns, so that it could be put into practice afterwards. This is in part why the electoral results varied - according to the promises made by both new and old parties, which were more or less reformed; but also according to what was the most urgent or important for the population in facing the uncertainty of the market: punishing the former corrupt leaders, the desire for radical change, or rather the fear that the perceived changes would be a threat.

For the majority of the population,

markets and privatisations were at the beginning orientations given by economists, often less discredited than the political parties. And there was the idea that - against the former political choices made by the apparatus - economic choices were matters of 'scientific knowledge' and 'law' and were therefore outside of democracy. This facilitated the socio-political and ideological swing of a large number of former leaders from the single party system towards privatisations, at different paces and under different labels. Privatisations were presented as 'norms'. The form, the speed and the scope they took were without historical precedent.

'Direct privatisation' without capital input [21]

It is necessary to establish the major distinction between 'small privatisation' (which generally meant the creation of small new businesses) and 'large privatisation' (which concerned big enterprises; that is those that were essential to employment and production in these industrialised countries). [22]

Small privatisation was generally the driving force behind growth in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, notably in Poland. It was often promoted as the privileged route to systemic transformation. It clearly did contribute to the creation of flexibility of response to certain needs in the sector of services (refurbishment, repairs, telephony, computing, commerce, restaurants etc.). It introduced a competitive mechanism, with genuine owners and a more or less rapid transfer of finances to the new private firms (start ups). Initial tax breaks for the new businesses generally made this process more favourable. But the small businesses were often fragile and their growth quickly reached its limits. So the issue at stake in the ownership transformation, and its main aspect was dealing with the large privatisation concerning big factories. Who could buy them, with what capital? Overall, privatisation by real sale did not, for the most part, find any other buyers apart from those with foreign capital. The non-capitalist nature of the former society (of the

Soviet type) was associated with the absence of financial market and of private banks, the fact that money in the planned sector could not be used to buy and sell the means of production, but only for accounting. All that meant the general lack of national accumulated financial capital.

For those countries who wanted to gain their independence and their sovereignty by detaching themselves from the hegemony of the USSR, the decision to sell the best factories to foreign capital was hardly a popular one. And the aspiring national bourgeoisie did not want to be reduced to a 'comprador bourgeoisie', using their knowledge of the internal cogs for the service of foreign capital. In practice, only Hungary and Estonia opted for privatisation by foreign sales at the start of their transition.

The privatisations have been called mass 'direct privatisations' by the Polish sociologist Maria Jarosz, who used this term to describe the privatisations that operated without money, through a legal change in ownership. This would make it possible to change the socio-economic behaviour and the status of workers under the pressure of market competition, which was the goal of capitalist market privatisations.

However, this aim could not be explicit, in as much as it was necessary in the first years of systemic transformation to legitimise the process as 'democratic' in the eyes of the populations concerned and their workers which were, as we have stressed, according to the ideology and constitutions of the former systems, the official 'social owners' of the means of production. This was a kind of recognition of their 'official' role in the production and legal ownership of all these national assets - provided a part of them was put aside for 'restitution' to those who were private owners of the lands or firms when they were nationalised after the war. So, the workers have been in general given a 'choice' between different kinds of 'privatisations': selling to 'outsiders' (external actors from the factory) state property or (quasi) 'free' distribution to the workers or

people of the major parts of shares of the transformed enterprises (the state becoming owner of the rest). Those two variants constitute, in essence, what was called 'direct privatisations' (without capital) at the start of the transition in the majority of countries concerned: either the state became the owner, or 'mass privatisations' occurred where insiders (employers and managers of the former enterprise) became dominant shareholders – with a rapid concentration of shares in the hand of the managers.

The paradoxical notion of 'direct privatisations' concealed a change in the socio-economic role of the state behind apparent continuities. For the population it was difficult to distinguish between the state of the past, managing means of production and distribution, and the new state mutated into the instrument of mass privatisation. This perception was even more confuse when the very same persons were still in power. But in reality, from this point on, the state was no longer ruling 'on behalf of the workers' (even at their expense) and without the attributes of a 'true' owner (able to use genuine management powers, bankruptcy, sale and transfer). This past reality was to be eradicated according to neoliberal criteria. Through direct privatisations, the purpose was to establish the power of 'real owners' – even if (in a paradoxical way for 'liberals') those were the state, allowing both a change in the status of the workers and the restructuring of firms under market constraints, before their subsequent sale. It was this that was known in Poland as the 'commercialisation' of public firms, and it was accompanied by the suppression of all traces of workers' councils.

The deepest source of ambiguity in these resolutions was there. The radical nature of these changes in ownership (in social status and in the relationship of production and distribution), which were introduced by the state, doubtless went unseen by the people they concerned. When the state became the major player in these businesses, it was often seen as continuity with the former state, which certainly had ruled as a

dictator, but also as a social protector.

This popular illusion of continuity in social protection was also expressed rapidly in free elections by the vote in favour of those among former Communists who kept as new labels some kind of socialist or social democrat epithets. This was the case in Poland, fewer than three years after the neoliberal shock therapies. Nevertheless, once these social democrat ex-Communists had returned to power by way of the ballot box, in Poland and elsewhere, they generally made the decision to be zealous supporters of NATO and ultra-liberal transformations, a decision that was not free from corruption. They are paying for it today through the fact that it is the nationalist and xenophobic right that has put forward the issue of social protection against the 'left', winning elections on this very basis.

Conflicting dynamics were often at work behind the ambiguity of these 'mass privatisations'. From the workers' point of view, the pragmatic choice of this form of privatisation was to protect their jobs, and allow them to keep at least part of the social advantages that were allocated to them in big enterprises (flats, restaurants, childcares, hospitals, some products distributed by internal shops), compared with the restructuring imposed by private individuals/outside. However, from the point of view of those who managed the reforms, it was a question of legitimising the privatisations in the eyes of the population, while at the same time this gave them the opportunity to 'prove' to the institutions of the ongoing globalisation that 'privatisation' had occurred, that a radical break with the previous system was taking place. This was the precondition for loans and for negotiations to become candidate members to the European Union (EU). In this context, a new process of genuine social polarisation and concentration of ownership and financial montages took place behind the fragmented popular shareholding that brought to workers neither income nor power apart that of slowing down re-structuring. The 'privatised' state used its rights of

property either with the clientelist approach or with the aim of selling the firms to 'real' private investors, foreign or national.

Behind the mass privatisations which occurred at the beginning of the systemic transformation, there was the emptying of the productive substance of big enterprises, but avoiding immediate bankruptcy and massive unemployment of the workers. [23] The lack of credit available for these firms contrasted with the comparative financial support received by the sector that was truly 'privatised'. Although liberal 'experts' criticised the lack of restructuring linked with mass privatisation, they also eventually highlighted, from their point of view, the beneficial nature of this first period, because it permitted radical transformation of ownership. Inasmuch as 'insiders' were partially protected, it lessened the risk of social explosions, while destroying the former system.

'Transition to democracy'? The German symbol: what about 'Ostalgia'?

Because the East German mobilisations have become the symbol of the 'democratic revolution', the concrete scenario is worth examining. Few people know what is behind the 'Ostalgia', a neologism invented to describe the nostalgia rapidly felt by East Germans. Nostalgia of what? Certainly not the former political order based on the repressive Stasi. Was it, then a feeling due to some 'difficulty' in adapting to the new 'modernity' of capitalism that they had at first wanted so much? On 8 November 2009, the Guardian published an article 'East Germans lost much' written by Bruni De La Motte:

'Once the border was open the government decided to set up a trusteeship to ensure that 'publicly owned enterprises' (the majority of

businesses) would be transferred to the citizens who'd created the wealth. However, a few months before unification, the then newly elected conservative government handed over the trusteeship to west German appointees, many representing big business interests. The idea of 'publicly owned' assets being transferred to citizens was quietly dropped. Instead all assets were privatised at breakneck speed. More than 85 per cent were bought by West Germans and many were closed soon after. In the countryside, 1.7 million hectares of agricultural and forest land were sold off and 80 per cent of agricultural workers lost their job.' [24]

In the GDR, single mothers enjoyed free childcare. As a result, the share of professionally active women was 90 per cent. After 1989, this share dropped to 40 per cent, this fall being the highest contributor to unemployment. Childcare centres were closed, while rights and means for free contraception and abortion were suppressed (to keep their jobs or find them many young women above 30 years old resorted to sterilisation). Could this be called a 'democratic revolution'? No debate, no elected assembly and no bilateral procedure occurred to establish a new unified Germany. The GDR was simply absorbed: the East German population was not asked what they wanted to keep or not. And they felt profoundly humiliated, like second-class citizens.

A counter-revolution?

The social shock imposed on East Germans and on East European populations in general would probably be better characterised as a counterrevolution. But one is confronted here with several analytical difficulties, with symmetrical ambiguities: were there real 'revolutions' after the Second World War in those countries?

The occupation and division of Germany by foreign troops were foreseen by the Yalta agreements between antifascists allies before the defeat of the Nazis. The Potsdam agreement (August 1945) organised Germany's division into zones between the Allies supposedly under collective

responsibility but in fact affected increasingly by Cold War tensions. Stalin would have preferred to keep access to the rich Ruhr than to divide Germany into two separate states: the richest western part was eligible for aid under the Marshall plan (introduced in 1947) while Stalin submitted the poorest eastern part under his control to radical pillage, considered as reparations for the huge destructions and the millions of Soviet citizens killed in the war. The decision to establish the GDR (October 1949) was an answer to the establishment of the Federal Republic in the Western Allies' occupied zones on 23 May of the same year.

Over the continent, a whole range of scenario occurred, from a genuine revolution in Yugoslavia – according to both criteria of mass mobilisations and radical changes – to the Moscow-led refolution establishing the GDR or Romania, through real popular mass mobilisation and welcoming of the Red army in Czechoslovakia. All the scenarios were the result of World War II, civil wars, intense class conflicts and political polarisations. With different scenarios, the populations of Eastern Europe have been confronted with and divided by the combined wars: civil and world wars, where different kinds of anti-fascist resistances (with or against Communists) led also to different attitudes towards the Red Army's invasion (from radical hostility to enthusiasm). But, even when the Soviet Union's intervention played the decisive role in the structural changes the national single Communist parties in power broaden their social basis by introducing radical 'reforms' against private ownership and market domination: extremely rapid vertical social promotion occurred for peasants and workers in comparison to their situation in pre-war peripheral capitalist societies – combined with repressive regimes claiming socialist goals. 1989 was the undoing of the post-1945 period.

The *refolutions* imposed by the CP apparatus were dominated by the Kremlin. But the socialist goals proclaimed could win popular support and a trend to reduce the gap between them and the existing regime did exist. In the GDR, Rosa Luxemburg or

Karl Liebknecht enjoyed prestige, like the theatre of Berthold Brecht. But left-wing anti-Stalinist intellectuals or artists were repressed or were drastically separated from the workers by Stasi repression. In 1989 an embryonic 'Red and Green republic' [25] was discussed among those circles who had much sympathy with the 'Western' radical left led by Rudi Dutschke in the 1960s and with the Prague Spring. They did want the end of the Stasi and of Honecker's regime but certainly not its dissolution within the existing West Germany.

A 'systemic crisis' (linked with the dismantling of the system) occurred in all countries at the beginning of the 1990s, which the World Bank reports compared to the 1929 crisis in a different context: it was a drop of 30 to 50 per cent in production in all branches. After 1993, growth started again first in Poland – helped by the cancellation of the debt decided by the US without publicity – then in other Central and Eastern European countries. This has been called a 'catching up' but without noting two facts: first, the indicator used to measure the growth and catching up (GDP or equivalent) does not reflect the well-being of populations: it does not say how the production is done and distributed, which means that it is compatible with increasing poverty; and second, it was necessary to 'catch-up' first of all with the 1989 level of production. That occurred within more or less a decade, with a sharp structural transformation behind the figures. With the new millennium this growth was still accompanied by deepening unemployment and inequality – because the re-structuring of big enterprises and of agriculture only had begun and financial resources were concentrated in certain productive sectors.

Overall, both the starting points, and the different paths of systemic transformation have been varied. Nevertheless, behind these differences, the same outcome can be stated for all the former countries of the USSR and of Eastern Europe, expressed after the first decade of 'transition' by the World Bank: 'poverty has become more widespread and has increased at a

greater speed than anywhere else in the world' while 'inequality has increased in all of the transition economies and amongst certain of them this has been dramatic'. [26] This happened even when 'the countries of this region have started their transition with levels of inequality that were amongst some of the weakest in the world'. For sure, the reports have been more positive during the period 2000-2007: impressive rates of growth (for instance more than 7 per cent or even 10 per cent in some Baltic States) leading to many comments about a 'success story' of the 'transition'. Unfortunately, the specific feature of that whole transformation has been the extremely unbalanced growth, and high dependence upon foreign capital and banks with dramatic side effects such as those seen in 2008 with the second sharp crisis and social shock, under the effect both of the world crisis and of international features of the systemic transformations.

As we have stressed, financial markets and private banks did not exist in the former system. As the dogmatic priority has been placed on being attractive to private (that is foreign) capital, the introduction of a private banking system has meant an absolute domination of the banking system by West European banks: in 2008 from 65 per cent of banks being foreign-owned in Latvia to nearly 100 per cent in Slovakia and more than 90 per cent in all other New Member States (NMS) except Slovenia (35 per cent, in 2008). [27] Their logic has been short-term profit and the highest possible return on loans. Concretely this meant a lack of credit for industry, and speculative borrowing to meet the demands for household credit for consumption (mainly flats and cars) through financial operations based on foreign currency borrowing (especially in Swiss Francs when the rate of exchange was attractive). So the very high growth, mentioned above, in the recent period (specially in the Baltic countries), and the so-called 'catching up', were based on a huge disequilibrium of external balance and debt in societies with high level of poverty and inequalities. [28] The Financial Times comments the last 'hard-hitting report' for 2009

published by the EBRD: 'Central and Eastern Europe must get rid of an 'addiction to foreign currency debt'. The report recognises that the global recession plunged the region into crisis - the IMF was called to the rescue by Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Ukraine, Bosnia-Herzegovina - but the social situation was not its real concern: the only concern of the Bank was whether there was any reversal trend of the 'transition'. And the answer was: no, for the moment. That was considered a success: the 'growth model for the region remains intact', in spite of fragilities, the state must be stronger, and accept IMF austerity policies. As long as social unrest is not too explosive there will be no systemic change.

The repressed 'third way'

The Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek produced in November 2009 an article in a tribute under the title 'Behind the Wall, people did not dream of capitalism'. [29] There is certainly no direct possibility to check such a judgement, but it is possible to find some indications in what was expressed in the most important democratic movements within/against the past regimes and compare that to the main features of 1989. The Polish Solidarność in 1980-1 and the Prague uprising of 1968 are surely the most impressive indications of 'third ways'. One cannot 'demonstrate' that they could be generalised, but one should at least respect - that is make known - what they expressed, and put questions on the way those alternatives were 'closed' or condemned to oblivion.

'In Poland the transition [from communism to democracy] lasted ten years, in Hungary ten months, in Czechoslovakia ten days' states a significant presentation of the 1989 Velvet Revolution. [30] But fundamental questions arise from such descriptions: how far was the end of those regimes in 1989-91 imposed by massive democratic mobilisations defining the content and purposes of those 'revolutions' (as we have so far discussed)? Is there continuity between Solidarność in 1980 and in 1990? And what about the Prague uprising in 1968 or the Hungarian and

Polish anti-bureaucratic upsurges of 1956? In the above quotation, the Polish Solidarność is supposed to be part of the 'transition to democracy' ('10 years' in Poland and '10 days' for the Velvet Revolution) - meaning that the 1989 socio-economic changes have been made within that western oriented democracy. My thesis is, on the contrary, that Solidarność in 1980 in its dominant expectations, as expressed in documents adopted by the movement, was closer to the 1968 and 1956 mass movements than to the post-1989 shock therapy. I will try to explicitly explain the reasons through the examination of the democratic demands put forward by these huge social mobilisations.

A systematic study of the different presentations of those past events is still to be made and would be a highly useful piece of historical research. Both the Kremlin and the West described the 1956 upsurges in Hungary and that of 1968 in Czechoslovakia as 'anti-communist'; for the Kremlin, that description served to 'justify' the Warsaw Pact military intervention and in western propaganda. The Stalinised Soviet Union 'the country of the big lie' (like wrote the Croatian Communist Ante Ciliga wrote in the 1930s) was in the continuity with the first 'justification' of the 1948 'excommunication' of the Yugoslav Communists because of their supposedly 'pro-capitalist' orientations. [31] The same logics prevailed in 1968: even if it was more difficult, the Soviet Union could not but 'justify' the sending of tanks in Czechoslovakia by speaking of a 'danger for socialism'. It is therefore quite 'normal' to find in western broadcasts or papers about 1956 or 1968 similar presentations to that during the beginning of 'the end of communism' and of the 'return' to democracy occurring in 1989. Elements of continuity do exist if the only criterion considered is the call for freedoms, without describing of their content. It is also true that the Polish events can appear closer to 1989 than the Prague Spring, because of the strength and expression of religious feelings, explicit anti-communist positions of the Church and of a certain number of strike

leaders and advisers as opposed to the 1968's reforms introduced from within the Communist party itself, and the explicit call for 'a socialism with human face'.

So we will focus on the kind of democracy and rights which were put forward, and stress those demands that capitalism would not accept: workers councils, or workers self-management as a fundamental right to control the organisation and aim of economic system, the statute of workers and product of labour.

From Solidarno?? in 1980-1981 to the Balcerowicz's plan in 1989: continuity or antipodes?

When considering the scenario of the Polish strike movement in August 1980, which led to the establishment of the first (officially accepted) independent trade union within the former 'communist' bloc, one sees that its congress in September 1981 was much closer to a democratic revolution than any other events in Eastern Europe. After a decision taken by the regime to increase prices, a general movement of strikes occurred with a high level of self-organisation and coordination. Nearly all the state-owned factories of the country - that is the whole industrial sector - were involved. The movement rapidly took on political features. Horizontal links were established, and an inter-factory strike committee with a mandate to negotiate (the electrician Lech Walesa being chosen as delegate). In an earlier wave of strikes back in 1976, in solidarity with the striking workers, intellectuals had organised a committee, the KOR, rapidly transformed into a body of 'advisers'. Now, the Inter-Factory Committee (MSK) established a list of 'twenty-one demands'. [32]

A first group of demands could be expressed, and could in a certain context be accepted in a capitalist society. They indicated a very high

level of social expectations of the population which would be, and has been, quite in conflict with the dominant liberal trends in the post-1989 kind of capitalism: wages protected from inflation and full payment of the days on strike, reduction in the retirement age (to 50 for women); pensions to reflect working life; universal healthcare; an increase in the number of school and nursery places for the children of working mothers; three year's paid maternity leave; increased help for those forced to travel far to work.

A second group of demands was for benefits recognised in western democracies but not in all capitalist societies. In general these have been refused in the post-1989 European countries in the factories owned by foreign capital: the possibility to build free trade unions and to have the right to strike. These requests demands were, of course, also in conflict with the rules of the former 'socialist' regime's rules; but were not generally in conflict with socialist ideas. Both in Yugoslavia in the 1960s and in Czechoslovakia in 1968, trade unions tended to win autonomy - which was later repressed by the party in power like all autonomous movements when they became a danger for the political monopoly of power. In Poland, the Communist regime had to accept in September 1980 the demand for a free trade union: the preparation and meeting of its congress in two phases in September 1981 was legal. A third group of demands were linked with the specificities of the regime: the demand that factory management be selected on the basis of competence and not of Party membership; an end to privileges for the police and party apparatchiks; and an end to 'voluntary' Saturday working. A fourth group of demands could be put forward in a capitalist society, but were rarely accepted: the demand for access to the mass media for all; the publication of the strikers' demands in the mass media; freedom of access to information about the economy.

But the main demands would be in essence very much in conflict with a capitalist logic: they asked for the involvement of the whole population in the debate on the economic situation

and the reforms to answer to the crisis. This last demand was underlined once again in the program programme adopted at the congress organised one year later. Obviously different currents and conflicting views were expressed, which reflects a normal democratic and massive movement that took on the dynamics of a quasi-political 'constituent assembly'. What kind of society did it want to establish?

The simple presentation of the twenty-one demands stresses the sharp contrasts between on one hand the social expectations for social protection and of social gains and democratic control on economic decisions of those millions of workers in strike in 1980, and on the other hand the content of the 1989's shock therapy and privatisations. The fact that the twenty-one demands did not ask for privatisations but the opposite is rarely mentioned. Yet this was not a marginal issue: first the workers won legal recognition and therefore could really organise the congress democratically and not underground. As international observers could see, a dual social and political power within the whole society was already functioning. [33] A political and social programme for the whole society was elaborated during several days in the two sessions of September 1981 by several hundred delegates under the control of 80 per cent of the organised Polish labour force: direct socially managed TV broadcasting made it possible to watch the debates of the congress within the factories in the whole of Poland, while the rank and file workers were democratically controlling their delegates.

But what was adopted by that significant democratic congress? How is it related to 1989? Let us look at Wikipedia's article on Solidarity in English, for instance. [34] It presents the whole Polish events as led by 'anti-Soviet' currents and the Church, and as the beginning of 'anti-communist revolutions' in 1989, and concludes: 'Solidarity's influence led to the intensification and spread of anti-communist ideals and movements throughout the countries of the Eastern Bloc, weakening their communist governments'. The defeat of the 'communist' candidates in

1989 elections in Poland ‘sparked off a succession of peaceful anti-communist revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe known as the Revolutions of 1989 (Jesień Ludów).’ Is this not that the dominant presentation still made of Solidarność? And this without a single quotation from those supposed ‘anti-communist ideals’. Nothing about the twenty-one demands. Nothing about the programme of the congress.

In France all these documents have been produced and a broad movement of solidarity and direct links was developed among left-wing trade-unionists in the 1980s. That is probably why the Wikipedia article in French on the same topic, is quite different, because it quotes the documents adopted by Solidarity’s congress in September 1981 and says the project was to establish ‘a self managed Republic’, adding that ‘the congress demands a democratic and self-managed reform at whole levels of decision making, a new social and economic order which will articulate plan and self management with market’. The article comments that this was ‘a deepening of the positions elaborate since autumn 1980 by the inter-factory strike committee’, proclaiming that ‘we are for a worker, progressive socialism, an egalitarian and harmonious development of Poland, collectively determined by the whole of the labour force’s world (...) a social order which would be authentically worker and socialist’. [35]

The threat of a Soviet intervention was central at that time. On 13 December 1981, General Wojciech Jaruzelski, backed by the ‘Military Council for National Salvation’, declared that Poland was under martial law. Mobilising the army and security services, he took control of the TV and radio, and unleashed the hated internal police and motorised riot police to break up unauthorised meetings. Military tribunals sentenced thousands of trade unionists for up to three years in prison.

But the repression gave a different influence to those among the intellectual advisers who wanted to use the strength of the social movement to get rid of the system,

suppress all dynamics of self management and reduce Solidarność to a classical trade union in a market economy. After such repression by a ‘Communist’ party, the ideological strength of the Church and of real anti-communist projects increased with the demobilisation (in spite of some strikes and anger). After the amnesty law, the second half of the 1980s opened the road towards a compromise with the ruling party which was losing members and any capacity to rule – it was looking to protect some political power and the links with the Gorbachev’s Soviet Union. The high level of self-organisation and democratic revolution had been broken. Under Gorbachev’s pressure, a ‘round table’ was organised with legalisation of a much weaker Solidarność; and the ruling party was defeated in the first free elections.

Huge ‘financial’ pressures and negotiations were at stakes behind the scene. The national debt in various foreign banks and governments reached in 1989 the sum of US \$42.3 billion (64,8 per cent of GDP). The ‘Balcerowicz plan’ – also called shock therapy was adopted at the end of 1989. In late December, the plan was approved by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The IMF granted Poland a stabilisation fund of US \$1 billion and an additional stand-by credit of US \$720 million. Following this, the World Bank granted Poland additional credits for modernisation of exports of Polish goods and food products. Western governments followed then and paid off about 50 per cent of the sum of debt capital and all cumulated interest rates to 2001. One can compare programs and procedures. 1989 appears much more like a social ‘liberal’ counter-revolution than the continuation of the initial Solidarność congress.

In 1981, more than 80 per cent of the workforce was unionised and Solidarność had about ten million members. In 2008, those who were in trade unions made up no more than 11 per cent of the workers, according to official figures provided by trade union organisations. During the process of privatisation trade union leaders were often introduced – on an

individual level – into the boards, where they were linked with the employers. [36] This corruption and integration into the processes of privatisation undermined the trade unions. The loss of resources and the bankruptcy of big enterprises produced huge unemployment (when Poland became member of the UE in 2004 the unemployment rate was nearly 18 per cent), the difficulties of daily life and the absence of trade unions in businesses run by foreign capital did the rest. Therefore the social discontinuities between 1980-1 and 1989 are closely linked with the totally different dynamic of ‘reforms’. [37]

From the Prague Autumn of workers councils (1968) to the Velvet Revolution (1989): continuity or antipodes?

The scenario is slightly different for Czechoslovakia, but the essence of the issues at stake and conflicting interpretations are the same. The economic and political reforms proposed in 1965-8 in Czechoslovakia by the reformist leader Dubček and the economist Ota Šik, [38] supported by a whole wing of the Communist party was very similar to the one implemented in Hungary at that time: the purpose of the reform was to introduce a stimulant to increase the efficiency of production (quality and productivity). But the proposed means were mainly based on a partial extension of market economy and on increasing the responsibility of managers (and increasing their income according to market results) as an alternative to the too vertical and authoritarian form of Soviet planning. Such reforms did not introduce workers rights for self-management.

That is why, up to the Prague Spring, the Czechoslovak workers had not felt great enthusiasm for the Ota Šik and Dubček’s economic reforms: their

effect would be to increase inequalities (through more market competition) and social insecurity (through the power and material incentive given to directors to push them to reduce production costs including labour cost). The ideology of socialism recognises the workers as the creative source of wealth, not as a commodity whose price is a 'cost' to be reduced. They were supposed to be the 'owners' of the factories - which would mean a responsible actor involved in the democratic and pluralistic elaboration of criteria of economic efficiency and mechanisms aimed at reducing waste and material costs. That was exactly the demands that the Polish workers expressed in 1980.

In the process of debate of the reforms in Prague just before 1968, some Communists and trade unionists have proposed a new law increasing workers rights of establishing organs of self-management of the factories, elect directors, and decide on the organisation of the productive process and distribution of the production. But that was pushed aside - or slightly reduced - by the Ota Šik reforms. And the liberalisation from above had in turn stimulated unexpected movements and demands from below in the whole society: in all sister countries ruling parties were afraid of contagion. The Prague Spring was also an immense international gathering in favour of 'socialism with a human face'. The Soviet intervention aimed to stop all that.

But it produced the opposite effect. And this is never said in TV broadcasts and dominant analysis on those events. The reality, is that during the autumn of 1968, in nearly 200 factories, more than 800,000 workers reacted to the Warsaw Pact's invasion and Soviet propaganda (which claimed that the Red Army was sent to Czechoslovakia to defend socialism) by establishing workers councils, [39] encouraged by a broad part of the Communists and trade-unionists in favour of a self managed socialism.

The movement spread and organised its first national conference in January 1969 - six months after the arrival of the tanks! In March there were 500 councils. It had become a massive

political movement by its own coordination and through the support received by youth and intellectuals, many of whom were members of the Czechoslovak Communist Party (CCP) itself. Workers councils were often supported or even launched by factory cells of the CCP and of the trade union body (ROH), which at that time emancipated itself from the bureaucratic apparatus of the state. Their leaders were often elected to head the councils. A new bill was elaborated and presented to the government, still led by the reformist leader Alexander Dubček. Such proposals were backed by hundreds of occupied factories and by the part of the CCP resisting the occupation and organising clandestine meetings.

But that bill on factories would have given too much power to workers councils, and certainly frightened the Dubček wing, looking for compromises with the Kremlin. The bill was taken in account - which indicates how much it was still difficult simply to censor it - but the government introduced changes and reduced the rights given to the workers, to become closer to the Ota Šik and Hungarian sort of reforms. After some months the dynamic of the workers councils had been broken by pressures and direct repression.

Nearly twenty years after the Velvet Revolution of 1989, the debate about the Prague Spring began to reappear in the Czech Republic. It was relaunched in particular by the republication at the end of 2007 of two contradictory standpoints expressed immediately after the Soviet intervention, in December 1968, by Milan Kundera and by Vaclav Havel. [40] Both these prestigious and well-known writers had challenged the former regime's censorship before 1968. The first one acted out of his Communist convictions while the second did it as a liberal anti-Communist. Vaclav Havel kept his anti-Communist and democratic standpoint through his involvement in the resistance to the Soviet occupation within the 'Charter 77' (initiated in 1977 to resist the Soviet 'normalisation', a front where Communists and anti-Communist democrats could join the fight for human rights), and became the first

President of the new Czechoslovakia and then of the Czech Republic. In the meantime, Milan Kundera lost the Marxist convictions he had in 1968. But it this is not important here, because the standpoints he expressed at that time are quoted and still supported in the present period and debated by other Communists - Jaroslav Abata is one of them. In 1968, he was leading the left current within the Communist party which gave radical support to self-managed socialist democracy and workers councils.

In presenting the present renewal of the controversy, Jacques Rupnik [41] writes that for Vaclav Havel, the Spring 1968 achievements (abolition of censorship, individual freedoms) 'only re-established what existed thirty years before and what is still the basis of democratic countries in general'. This point of view can also lead to consider the Velvet Revolution as a successful variant of the Prague Spring democratic movement (repressed by the Communist regime, whereas the Velvet Revolution was able to get rid of it). But Vaclav Havel's position today is closer to a second trend: to deny any significant consistency to the 1968 events because of their socialist aims. The repression is then stressed as the only possible issue: there is no possible third way.

Milan's Kundera's view, on the contrary, stresses that - as Jacques Rupnik summarises 'despite having been a defeat, the Prague Spring retains its universal significance as a first attempt at finding a route between the eastern and western models, a way of reconciling socialism and democracy'. The (still) Communist intellectual Jaroslav Abata quoted recently and shared the former Kundera's judgment in a more radical way: 'The Czechoslovak Autumn is probably much more important than the Czechoslovak Spring. [...] Socialism, the logic of which is to identify itself with freedom and democracy, cannot but create a kind of freedom and democracy that the world has never known.' [42]

Such a movement and self-organisation was a danger for all ruling CPs wanting to keep the

monopoly of political power, even if they opposed the Soviet domination. [43] The workers' council movement could embrace all demands against censorship, and for individual and collective freedoms. But it also

stressed the contradictions or limits of all those who support the slogan 'socialism with human face' but 'forget' the fundamental socialist aims: the suppression of relations of

domination within the economy permitting a radical subordination of economic choices, as all key human choices, to a democratic system to be invented. This stand contradicted both systems of the Cold-War camps.

"We need a left that is not a crutch for the PSOE"

26 November 2019, by **Raul Camargo**

The organizations involved in the possible coalition government (PSOE, Podemos, IU and En Común Podem) are consulting their activists in internal referendums hoping to obtain a green light for it. Other left-wing organizations watch from the sidelines. Anticapitalistas have long since been more outside of Podemos than in it, except in Andalusia. Always critical of governing with the PSOE, always in the minority in the purple formation, today they are observing the steps of Podemos with suspicion and distance. Their spokesperson, Raúl Camargo (born Madrid, 1978), says that in March there will be a political conference of Anticapitalistas where they will determine the strategic direction of the organization in the new scenario. He is convinced, he says, that a left-wing opposition to the PSOE-UP government is needed, if it goes ahead.

We know about the ERE court ruling [44] It brings to mind the slogan "PSOE, PP, it's the same shit".

Yes, that legendary chant of the 15M movement has not lost its validity. The PSOE of the ERE is not from the past, it still has Susana Díaz at the head of the Andalusian federation. Díaz was then in a high position and replaced José Antonio Griñán, today sentenced to six years in jail. We understand that the PSOE in Andalusia remains a corrupt structure.

The positions that have been maintained by the comrades of

Podemos Andalucía during these years have been consistent. Imagine if they had succumbed to the pressures for a pact with this PSOE, today it would have been a disaster, today those are condemned for corruption going back decades, for taking the funds that should have been allocated to people who are unemployed to distribute them among friends.

It is a very serious judgement, which demonstrates the widespread corruption in one of the pillars of the regime, the PSOE, and in our opinion confirms that the best stance is political independence with respect to this type of party, with the exception of reaching specific agreements.

I understand here a critique of the possible coalition government between PSOE and Unidas Podemos. The position of Anticapitalistas is clear: to facilitate an investiture of a socialist government following a programmatic agreement and to remain in opposition to force, from there, compliance with the agreed programme. How do you rate the pre-agreement last week?

We always taken this stance, for five years. We promoted Podemos because we believed that this country was lacking a left that channelled the constituent and rebellious impulse of 15M. Without Izquierda Anticapitalista there would have been no Podemos. That impulse was against the right, but also against the PSOE. Remember that the PSOE of the ERE ruled with

IU in Andalusia. That was key to understanding that we need a left that is not a crutch for the PSOE. The IU made that pact with Griñán, who has now been convicted.

We believe that this is not the political moment, neither in terms of economic forecasts, nor the territorial crisis, for a leftist force to govern in a subaltern way with this PSOE. It is a PSOE that has not broken with the period of the ERE, and nor has it settled accounts with its past with the GAL, industrial reconversion, employment counter-reforms, the ETTs, NATO, the Maastricht Treaty... Sánchez has a line of continuity with the whole neoliberal trajectory of this party.

In our opinion, governing with them is an obvious break with the foundational lines of Podemos. Podemos was born to govern, but not in a subaltern manner with the PSOE. There was no talk about it, about minority rule in a coalition with the PSOE.

We continue to defend the same thing we defended five years ago. We believe that it is a position that we must continue to defend: a left that aspires to change the rules of this country's game. With the current rules of the game it is not possible to change things. With the current Constitution, with the position it has on social rights, with how it regulates the territorial issue it is not possible to make leftist policies in this country. We aspire to a left that is not satisfied with being a crutch for the PSOE.

From “storming the heavens” at Vistalegre I to “the heavens are taken with perseverance”, in the last letter to the members from Pablo Iglesias. What does this evolution suggest?

That the heavens are taken by storm and not by consensus was said by Pablo at that assembly, because from our team there were also people who are now with Pablo like Echenique and other people, we appealed for consensus. A consensus was needed between the different proposals that were available. He said no, no consensus, that the heavens are taken by storm. Thus, a committee was created, a leadership, which had almost no control.

The result of that was good at the electoral level, but the heavens weren't stormed and nor was any consensus agreed with almost anyone and the political evolution has resulted in something similar to the IU of Cayo Lara or Gaspar Llamazares. The current result is more like that than what we aspired to in 2014.

Perseverance is good, you have to recognize the perseverance of Iglesias. Although the vote dropped in these elections, his political theses have been imposed: he wanted to enter the government at all costs, and it seems that he will succeed. I believe that perseverance should have been in other matters, such as having a territorially established organization, with an open and comradely relationship with social movements, which would have been able to integrate different sensibilities. The Podemos that exists today no longer has any of this.

Perseverance is a good recipe, Pablo has used it to enter a minority government led by the PSOE, from Anticapitalistas we will use it to defend the need for a left which is independent of the parties of the regime and the material pressures which are involved in forming part of the state.

Is Anticapitalistas already a project outside of Podemos, independent?

In some territories no, we are still

inside Podemos, but in the majority we are already outside. Yes, it is true that the Podemos project has been moving towards a strategic orientation that we do not share, this is increasingly evident. Anticapitalistas is a confederal organization, and there have to be debates in the regions. In March, we will have a confederal political conference of Anticapitalistas to decide on our political commitment for the coming years.

During these months, we will be debating, but this coalition government, if it is finalized and they finally get the numbers, shows that the distance is getting bigger.

I find it a curious contrast. It is said that Podemos has become a kind of crutch for the regime, but at the same time we see the rightists and representatives of the economic powers nervous and belligerent about Podemos entering into a national government. Perhaps Podemos governing will be dangerous for the privileged.

I think they want to discipline them before they arrive. We have seen that one of the main political powers of European geostrategy is the European Commission and the European Commission has given the seal of approval to the entrance of Unidas Podemos. In this country there is a Neanderthal right, a Francoist right not only in state institutions, but also in the economy.

Those fears are not founded either: Podemos already governs in six autonomous communities and nothing happens. They are not carrying out collectivization. Things are managed, more or less, as they were managed by the PSOE. No button is pressed that affects the large investment funds, the banks, the large holders of housing ...

It's an over-reaction so as to discipline Podemos in advance. This, in turn, puts more pressure on Sanchez and the PSOE to discipline the ministers of Unidas Podemos. But anyone who checks what is happening in autonomous communities or municipalities where Podemos has governed can see a more honest

management, which is not corrupt, but nothing to justify the fuss made by these great powers.

On the other hand, they would complain in the same way. Recall the first legislature of Zapatero. We already knew what Zapatero meant politically and, nevertheless, the right declared war on him with the bishops, the PP, the protests on any subject related to ETA ... They portrayed him as some kind of Lenin, and we saw what Zapatero did with article 135.

Podemos has every right in the world to be in government. What we say is that for a left that aspires to a deep social transformation, a profound transformation of the economic and political system, doing so leaves it in a very delicate situation for a project that has to be considered in the medium and long term.

Faced with a political, media, economic, social, right which is hyper-mobilized against the possible coalition government of PSOE and Unidas Podemos, would Anticapitalistas defend the government, mobilize in favour of the coalition government?

If the right manifests itself against an opening in favour of dialogue in Catalonia if there is a courageous position on the part of the government, no doubt. If the right were mobilized against the repeal of the employment reform, gag law, LOMCE, approval of laws in a left-wing sense, we will undoubtedly be supporting the government. There is no doubt about that.

What cannot happen is that the right exerts pressure and the government goes backwards, which is what we have seen many times. To avoid that, it is necessary to have a counter-power formed by the social movements and organizations of the political left that demands the government comply with the programme that the social movements have already put on the table in relation to the issues that I have just described and others, such as rent regulation. By the way, the European Commission is belligerently against this and I don't think that, with Nadia Calviño inside, they will

compromise.

If the government only has pressure from the right, it will increasingly turn to the right. Therefore, it is necessary to have pressure from the left. That does not mean that we are going to do anything with that right, but quite the opposite. That right and the extreme right are enormous dangers for the social majorities, we must fight them without rest, but for this we need a courageous left. There, we have doubts that the PSOE or Unidas Podemos can be that, with this correlation of forces and having to be loyal to the decisions of the Council of Ministers.

In the electoral campaign, Anticapitalistas called for a critical vote for Unidas Podemos and, at the same time, welcomed the possible arrival of the CUP in Congress. Finally, the CUP will be in the new Congress of Deputies. Some of the first statements they have made were to encourage the other pro-sovereignty forces of the state not to facilitate the investiture of Sánchez. Do you understand this position while the extreme right increases in each election?

Indeed, we have been happy with the result of the CUP. We believe it is healthy that an anti-capitalist force with which we have a friendly relationship has a presence in Congress. We understand what their position is, but it is not ours. Our

position is to negotiate strong programmatic points, supported by the movements, to facilitate an investiture agreement. We do not believe that a legislature agreement can be reached with the PSOE, but we can get a few commitments.

On the other hand, we understand that they reject the pre-agreement between PSOE and Unidas Podemos, that only talks about dialogue within the framework of the Constitution and sees the problem of Catalonia as one of coexistence. If they want to have the votes of a Catalan party, including the abstention of ERC, they will have to modify that point.

But it's not just about Catalonia. A third election holds the enormous risk that the extreme right becomes a second force or can even propel itself to being first. Although we are small, we have to think big, have a point of hegemony. We must make proposals that are not seen as too risky by the social majority of the left.

We understand why they say that, we believe that with the wording of point 9 of the pre-agreement there will be no investiture. We also understand that, in a situation like this, it is not the same as having a social-liberal government or a government with the extreme right inside. We have our differences in this matter, although we agree on other issues.

Finally, you say that in March you will hold a political conference. You have also suggested that a

leftist political force that is not “a crutch for the PSOE” is needed. Are we facing an embryo, before the creation of a new leftist political force beyond Podemos?

That we will have to discuss, also with people beyond Anticapitalistas, with many other comrades from other forces, even with many of those in Unidas Podemos. This debate must be had to the extent that Unidas Podemos leaves a space to its left. Being part of the government, it will surely develop practices that will not satisfy an important part of its social base. It will be discussed, the relationship between the left is dialectical, it is not static. It will be seen, in our political conference and beyond, if this possibility is real or not.

It will also depend on the political situation of the country. It is not the same to create a political force after great convulsions and mobilizations as it is without anything moving. Let's look at the mobilizations for the climate, the feminist and new mobilizations that arise in the heat of a new crisis. What is clear is that Podemos, as the catalytic force of all the alternative left of the state, has come to an end. That does not mean that something alternative will be created immediately. It will be seen. The deadlines are set by history.

*Source: interview by Sato Diaz, 20 November 2019 **Cuarto Poder**, translated by **International Viewpoint**.*

Who's who in Latin America's upheaval

25 November 2019, by **Claudio Katz**

The October revolts

The uprising in Chile is the most important event in the Latin American tsunami. It is the biggest rebellion in the country's history. Every day

thousands of young people leave schools, universities, and neighborhoods to face down the security forces. Their banners are simple: “Chile got tired. We woke up.” A people exhausted by humiliations has risen against the neo-liberal model. Seventy percent of households' entire income is eaten up by debts to

pay for private education, health care, and pension savings. Chile shares the podium with eight of the most unequal nations in the world.

The mass of the population is confronting an isolated government, one which took office in elections marked by abstention. Conservative

president Sebastián Piñera deploys savage levels of repression, which has already led to more than twenty deaths, thousands detained, and countless wounded. There are indisputable reports of sexual abuse against detained women.

The army conducts this vandalism to preserve its privileges bequeathed by Pinochet, but some soldiers have refused to take part in the repression.

Piñera is overwhelmed. He imposed a curfew, then had to lift it. He asked for dialogue, and then dialed up the bloodletting. Every day he announces some social concession but these bring no results. The populace continues to mobilize so as not to repeat the frustrated experience of mass protests in 2006 and 2011, which led to only cosmetic changes.

Meanwhile, the politicians of the center-left Concertación ("Agreement" or "Common Ground") pact - which includes both Christian Democrats and the Socialist Party - seek to dilute the uprising's demands. These forces supported the regime for 30 years and even initially justified last month's militarization. Now they are promoting a call to hold a plebiscite that will ensure continuity for Piñera's administration while blocking the decision-making sovereignty of any future Constituent Assembly elected to rewrite the constitution.

Ecuador is the second epicenter of revolt. Indigenous communities resisted an increase in fuel prices at the local level and were then joined by other popular sectors in a monumental march on Quito. Lenin Moreno escaped to Guayaquil (a conservative enclave) and opted for bloody repressive, resulting in seven dead and thousands injured. But after several days of intense battle he gave up. He canceled the gas hike and acquiesced to the victory achieved by CONAIE's intransigence - the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador. When the indigenous peoples marched into parliament, the fugitive president remembered how three of his predecessors were taken down by these same forces (1997, 2000 and 2005).

The protesters also occupied the IMF offices, warning the bankers what to expect from this new round of resistance. After winning on barricades, the social movements organized a Parliament of the Peoples, a sign of how the revolt is beginning to articulate alternative projects.

The fascist threat

The coup in Bolivia introduced a dramatic counterpoint to the uprisings in Chile and Ecuador. The right took the initiative and seized the government. It was a decisive action under the direct leadership of the army. President Evo Morales resigned at gunpoint when the generals refused to obey him. He did not resign simply owing to the pressure of the general crisis (as Argentine president De la Rúa did in 2001). He was removed from the presidency by the military high command.

However, the main peculiarity of this operation was its fascist tint. The security forces established their own liberated zones, occupied by thugs who launched a reign of terror. They kidnapped social leaders, invaded public institutions, and humiliated opponents. Coup leader and Christian fundamentalist Luis Fernando Camacho put far-right Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro's proclamations into practice. With bibles in hand and evangelical prayers, his supporters burned houses, abducted women, and chained up journalists. Camacho shouted racist slogans against the "cholos," while his henchmen mocked the "coyas," (terms for indigenous people that are racial slurs in the mouths of the racist elite), they burned the indigenous Whipala flag, and beat indigenous people in the street. Like Germany during the 1930s, Camacho has created legions out of the resentful middle classes to humiliate the indigenous.

The ruling class is gleefully taking its revenge. This class never accepted the fact that an Indian, Evo, won the presidency, and they look favorably upon Camacho's hoards. Bolivia's economic and military elite are hoping to stabilize the coup and - after a period with Camacho's gangs in the lead - then place their trusted men in

positions to manage the state. But their immediate priority is to consolidate Evo's overthrow.

The prominence of the United States in the plot was confirmed by Trump's praise for the army's intervention. International business offered the coup leaders generous support and succeeded in securing the European Union's blessing. Self-declared interim president Jeanine Áñez will try to hold the presidency long enough to rig new elections. The coup regime is oscillating between public relations efforts necessary to maintain its farce and the direct exercise of a dictatorship. In response to the coup, Bolivia has returned to its traditions of ungovernability.

Heroic popular resistance is growing under harsh conditions. In the first five days of the coup, 24 were killed. Despite the crackdown, mobilizations extended from the bastion of El Alto - an indigenous-majority city of one million people neighboring the capital city La Paz - to cities across the country. Hundreds of popular neighborhood associations are at the heart of the struggle, organizations that know how to organize street battles. In the course of these actions, the attitude adopted by Evo must be evaluated. The main problem with his strategy was not that he hoped to remain in office continuously, but his total lack of foresight that the coup was coming. The militants organizing the resistance are fully aware of this shortcoming.

A resounding victory and a positive example

Lula's release sparked immense joy among those organizing against his arrest. It also landed an important blow against the Lava Jato (Operation Car Wash) anti-corruption farce mounted by prosecuting judge Moro (currently Bolsonaro's Minister of Justice) and his accomplices at O Globo - Brazil's largest daily newspaper - and their campaign to prevent the tenaciously popular Lula from once again running for president. Now the right must deal with the mass

caravan protests demanding the full restoration of Lula's political rights in advance of a potential 2022 presidential bid.

That protests against Bolsonaro will resonate across the continent. And they will have all the more impact as he clearly lacks the minimal self-control required to exercise his executive role at the head of the Brazilian state. Instead, he will continue on with his carnival-like antics.

Bolsonaro's crude behavior in office is aggravating his government's internal crises. It has already come to light that several of his relatives committed money laundering crimes and testimony has recently emerged directly linking him to the murder of the Party for Socialism and Freedom city councilor from Rio de Janeiro Marielle Franco.

Despite all the damage he has done, Bolsonaro has not been able to translate his reactionary rhetoric into a concrete fascist program or state. Workers launched a huge strike against his neoliberal pension reforms and three million people marched against homophobia, a central component of Bolsonaro's political and personal profile. Meanwhile, student protests against budget cuts reached an unprecedented mass level, mobilized under the banner of "books yes, weapons no."

The unhinged Bolsonaro is planning a counteroffensive, including mobilizing his right-wing social base to demand Lula be sent back to prison. What happens next in Brazil will arise from this confrontation.

The democratic victory in Brazil complements an even more significant victory in Venezuela. Since Trump could not copy Reagan or Bush's invasions of Granada (1983) or Panama (1989), he had to content himself with the appropriation of the Venezuelan national oil company (PDEVESA) subsidiary in the United States. His Venezuelan lackeys tried every imaginable plot, but they were undermined by the failed self-proclamation of Juan Guaidó as president of Venezuela. Facing a very difficult social scenario (aggravated by

gigantic mistakes in economic policy committed by president Nicolás Maduro's government), David managed to stop Goliath. To this day, the Bolivarian camp (as the movement sparked by Hugo Chávez is called) maintains an intense level of street mobilizations and fights for control over public space every time the opposition appears. Furthermore, military cohesion and loyalty to the government has been preserved (Gaido failed to win over the high command, for instance) by means of constant political intervention in the army under pressure from the popular militias. These actions illustrate how to confront threats from the right. To beat the fascists, you must act without hesitation.

Relentless struggles and electoral confrontations

Protests in Puerto Rico forced the governor to resign after he mocked victims of the hurricane and spouted homophobic comments. In neighboring Haiti, demonstrations over the last few months have been monumental. Barricades are built every day in the cities to protest a government that aggravated the indescribable impoverishment of the population. Honduras continues to be convulsed by persistent resistance against the bloody regime that took power by means of an electoral fraud (2017 and 2013). The criminals who run the state not only assassinated environmental activist Berta Cáceres, they have murdered some 200 popular militants who dare defy the security forces mafia.

The struggle in Latin America extends to the electoral field as well. Last year, Andrés Manuel López Obrador won an overwhelming victory in Mexico, ending a suffocating cycle of PRI and PAN governments. Hopes are focused on ending violence endemic to the so-called war on drugs, which has turned the country into graveyard: 300,000 dead and 26,000 more unidentified bodies. Countless social leaders have been massacred in a war that goes

beyond settling scores between organized crime syndicates. Voters expect López Obrador to end the forced displacement of populations and to investigate and prosecute the perpetrators of massacres like the one in Ayozinatpa. The achievement of these objectives will clash with the recent enactment of new internal security norms, which authorize anti-drug actions by the armed forces. López Obrador's submission to Trump's blackmail and his demand to block Central American migrants on Mexico's southern border by deploying of the National Guard will only exacerbate this danger

President-elect Alberto Fernández's victory in Argentina marks another important electoral reversal for the right in Latin America with the return to power of the Peronist bloc, including Cristina Fernández de Kirchner elected as vice president. Argentina's movement will have to settle the score in the responses to the economic-social catastrophe left behind by conservative president Mauricio Macri. This dramatic scenario may lead to the resumption of political mobilization in the country with the highest level of union and social organization in the entire region.

In Colombia, we are witnessing the slow emergence of center-left forces, which for the first time is standing in elections in municipalities and for governorships against the oligarchy and the paramilitaries. [And, on November 21, the largest strike and mass protest in Colombian history shook conservative president Iván Duque's regime, forcing him to close the country's borders and declare a curfew.]

On the other hand, the center-left Frente Amplio (Broad Front) in Uruguay saw its vote decline in 2019 elections after 15 years in power. And a few months ago in El Salvador, an improvised right-wing coalition captured the presidency, ending a decade of shaky management by the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN).

These last examples prove why popular mobilization must be maintained and why the left cannot

restrict its actions to the ballot box. Instead, maintaining open communication channels with organisms that emerge from social struggles is vital. We can already glimpse exactly these sorts of modalities at play in the neighborhood associations (Cabildos) of Chile, in the Parliament of Peoples of Ecuador, in the Meetings of Movements in Bolivia, and in the Coordinated Organizations of Haiti.

Pretexts and wrecking operations

It is evident that the coup d'état has resurfaced as an instrument in the hands of the ruling classes. Bolivia crowns a sequence initiated in Honduras (2009), practiced in Paraguay (2012), and extended to Brazil (2016). In each case, the army has returned to the forefront of politics, as guarantor of new authoritarian forms maintained under a state of emergency. The media manipulates information, presenting corruption as a disease unique to center-left governments and promoting fake news stories provided by the intelligence services at the request of rightist groups. Meanwhile, the right buttresses its lies with various devices to confuse popular consciousness, including fostering religious fanaticism based on evangelical churches that contribute millions of dollars to stoke fear and destroy solidarity.

Washington's main priority is to recover the largest oil field in the hemisphere in Venezuela. It has also reinforced its embargo against Cuba and conspired to open access to the enormous reserves of lithium in Bolivia's Altiplano. Evo pursued extensive talks to expand the exploitation of this strategic resource with Chinese firms, a fact not lost on the Trump administration. The recent BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) summit in Brasilia, Brazil included clear statements of intent by China in favor of free trade in the region. Bolsonaro himself has begun to evaluate a Free Trade Agreement with China. To counteract

this growing rivalry for influence in Latin America, Trump has increased the regional presence of the U.S. military, forming close relationships with Latin American militaries as a means to assert U.S. corporate economic interests. U.S. intervention also serves to strengthen neoliberalism, which has been challenged by the Chilean uprising.

That revolt demolished the neoliberal myths most praised by the region's capitalists. The trans-Andean rebellion has reverberated internationally because it has exposed the Chicago Boys' cherished orthodoxies as scams. The protests have also pointed out how neoliberalism drives social disintegration in Latin America, producing massive migrations when local economies are opened to international competition and when small farmers are destroyed. Dispossession swells caravans leaving for the North, which no wall or security force can contain. Neoliberalism expanded crime and led to terrifying violence. Of the 50 most dangerous cities on planet, 43 are located in Latin America. This model is also responsible for the destruction of the environment and the recent fires in the Amazon. The intentional burning of large forests is perpetrated to plant soybeans or open pastures for livestock under the law of maximizing profit.

Interpretations and lessons learned so far

The right not only ignores the disasters caused by its management, it claims its model forged a thriving middle class, which now seeks greater participation in public life. But the "middle class" is just a label used by the right to improvise justifications. They mix apples and oranges to force interpretations of social development to fit their prejudices.

At the same time, controversies about the current scenario are not limited to the right. They also include certain confused thinkers who situate themselves on the left. These analysts fail to account for the differences

between popular revolt and reactionary clamor. We must make this distinction categorically. An anti-government barricade in Venezuela stands on the opposite side of the indigenous protests in Ecuador. The followers of Camacho in Bolivia are our enemies and those who defend Evo are our allies.

It is important to remember these self-evident facts in the face of neutralist positions, which are intended to elide the huge gulf separating the opposing camps. These neutralist views have criticized Maduro and Guaidó in Venezuela with equal virulence, and now they extend the same equivalency to Bolivia. Proper characterization of the confrontation in Bolivia is not an academic exercise. It is a precondition for organizing against the coup plotters and intensifying solidarity marches and actions. It is impossible to organize solidarity if one does not know who to fight and who to defend.

To defeat the coup, imperialism, and neoliberalism, mobilization must be redoubled and political action intensified. But we must also learn from mistakes committed on our side that have allowed the right to recover. It is very difficult to defeat enemies within our own movement. Their regeneration has been a permanent problem for our side over the past decade. The ultra-reactionary Lenín Moreno is only the most extreme case. Moreno not only reversed previous governments' reforms, he is implementing the ruling class' agenda. Nor should we forget that one of the main architects of the parliamentary coup against Brazilian Workers Party president Dilma Rousseff was none other than Michel Temer, her own vice president. The policy of "broadening the front" to include pro-capitalist elements has even led López Obrador to form a governing alliance with evangelicals, conservatives, and capitalists to the detriment of his radical core.

The right has tended to regain ground when progressive governments naively identify their electoral successes with permanent political support. They forget that the elections constitute a moment in the fight for power. But when effective control of the economy, the judiciary, the army,

and the media all remain in the hands of the dominant groups, the return of the right is only a matter of time. That return has usually coincided with an exhaustion of progressive efforts, including improvements in working-class standards of living. This paradox has been verified in Argentina, Brazil and El Salvador and could be repeated in Uruguay. In all cases, center-left governments provided relief and reform for the population, which then resulted in more conservative electorates. That contradiction also underlies the crisis in Bolivia. In recent years, the MAS suffered significant electoral setbacks, despite its unprecedented successes in managing the economy. It achieved high growth rates, a significant reduction in poverty, and strong investment flowing from the productive use of natural gas income.

The depoliticization of the popular movement is the most frequent explanation for this disconnect between socio-economic improvements and electoral decline. Some argue that voters become more individualistic as consumption expands. Yet, in reality, that depoliticization is a consequence of the continuity of a system that reproduces privileges for the capitalists. Ideology in a society does not float in a vacuum. If the ruling classes retain power, then their preeminence tends to extend to electoral expressions. The powerful regain control of the government because they never lost power.

The return of the right is not inevitable, nor is it merely a natural function of the supposed pendulum of political life. It springs from progressivism's lack of radicalism. Instead of encouraging substantial transformations at the appropriate times, the progressive political current adapts to the status quo. And as it discounts the possibility of wresting power from the great capitalists, it ends up strengthening capitalist domination. The experience of the center-left governments confirms that limiting radicalization opens the floodgates of revenge by the right.

The importance of the left

The current context includes certain similarities with the prevailing picture at the beginning of the century when a succession of rebellions in Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Argentina generated the conditions for the birth of the progressive cycle – the so-called Pink Tide. That period concluded with a conservative restoration, which now, in turn, faces challenges by a new generation of movements and leaders.

The similarity between today and what happened in 1989-2005 can be seen in the resemblance of the Ecuadorian uprising this fall with the 2001 Argentine Caracazo (pot banging protests). Both revolts originated in reactions against an increase in fuel prices imposed by the IMF. There are

also parallels between 2001 and Chile's uprising. Popular anger against the political regime ("¡Que se vayan todos!" or "throw them all out!") is now concentrated on the figure of Piñera and the form of government bequeathed by Pinochet.

But what is striking about the current cycle is the sheer scale of popular participation. The number of protesters in the streets is breaking all records set over the last two decades. In Ecuador, marches several times higher than previous peaks are being recorded. In Haiti, an estimated five million people have marched in the protests. In Chile, two million took part with another one million mobilizing in Puerto Rico.

Chances for achieving real gains and changes in power relations are huge. The reopening of the progressive cycle is not the only thing at stake. Today's ongoing battles could lead to new and unexpected scenarios. The most important thing is to understand is the content of the confrontations and to be clear that the interests of a minority of capitalists must clash with the wishes of the popular majority. A right-wing alignment of the powerful will clash with emancipatory proposals from the left. Our peoples' triumph requires we build, strengthen, and renovate that left.

*Source: this slightly abridged version was published and translated by **No Borders News** with permission from the author. Originally published by **Herramienta** and **Intersecciones**.*

Evo's Fall, the Fascist Right, and the Power of Memory

24 November 2019, by **Raul Zibechi**

Between efforts towards restoration and the advance of a coup, the Bolivian people are preparing, again, to resist.

"Mr President, from the bottom of our hearts and with great sadness we ask:

Where did you get lost? Why don't you live within the ancestral beliefs that says we should respect the muyu (circle): that we should govern only once? Why have you sold off our Pachamama? Why did you have the Chiquitaná burned? Why did you so

mistreat our Indigenous brothers in Chaparina and Tariquá?" So reads the Manifesto of the Qhara Qhara nation. On November 7th, members of the Qhara Qhara nation participated with a sector of the Indigenous movement in actions against electoral

fraud in Bolivia.

The Manifiesto of the Qhara Qhara is one of the most damning documents against Evo Morales, perhaps because it comes from the same forces which brought him to power. "Respect our cultures, stop spreading hate between our brothers from the country and those in the cities, stop dividing the people, you already abused their free choice. Stop sending Indigenous people as cannon fodder to back up your interests and the interests of those around you, which are no longer ours, stop sending killers to abuse our people, let us live according to our law, stop speaking in the name of Indigenous people, as you have lost your identity," it reads.

There is a marked contrast between what is taking place today and what took place in October of 2003, during the first Gas War. [45] Back then, the social movements fought the government of Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, and paid a very high price: more than 60 dead, and hundreds of people were wounded and mutilated. Regardless of the repression—the army shot at demonstrators from helicopters—the population beat back the government, forcing the President to resign.

But this time, after three weeks of opposition protests and accusations of fraud during the October 20th elections in which Evo Morales proclaimed himself re-elected, there were expressions of hatred toward the government from the leaders and supporters of social organizations. By late afternoon on Sunday November 10th, many, including the Bolivian Workers Central (COB), the mining federation and Indigenous organizations, demanded the president resign. That is why the most extreme right was able to enter into the government offices without any trouble, and why no one was immediately in the streets to defend Morales when the army suggested he resign.

Over the last 14 years of rule by the official Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) party, there were things the government did that social movements can't forget. Between 2002 and 2006, a Unity Pact between the main

campesino and indigenous organizations created the foundations for Evo Morales' government: the Unified Syndical Confederation of Rural Workers of Bolivia (CSUTCB), the National Council of Ayllus and Markas of the Qullasuyu (CONAMAQ), the Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Eastern Bolivia (CIDOB), the National Confederation of Indigenous and Campesina women of Bolivia "Bartolina Sisa," and neighbourhood associations in El Alto.

By the end of 2011, the CIDOB and the CONAMAQ had decided to leave the Unity Pact, because "the executive branch has factionalized Indigenous organizations, and value those closest to the MAS above others," which they said directly affected "our territories, cultures and our natural resources."

In June of 2012, CIDOB denounced "the interference of the government, with the sole aim of manipulating, dividing, and affecting the organic and representative organizations of Indigenous peoples (pueblos) in Bolivia." A group of dissidents from the Confederation, with the support of the government, refused to recognize the authorities and convened an "expanded commission" to elect new authorities.

In December of 2013, CONAMAQ dissidents who were "close to the MAS" took over the organization's offices, beating and ejecting those who were present with the help of police, who remained to guard the locale and ensure that the legitimate authorities could not take it back. The communiqué of the CONAMAQ that followed these events said the attack against them happened so that "all of the policies against the Indigenous movement and the Bolivian people would be approved, without anyone saying anything."

Into the Void

On Wednesday the 13th, an unprecedented series of events occurred, in a turn as important as the resignation of Morales three days earlier. Jeanine Áñez was named President in a parliament that was without quorum. The representatives of the MAS, which holds an absolute

majority, as well as MAS senator Adriana Salvatierra, were unable to enter the building. Salvatierra had publicly resigned her position as president of the senate on the same day as Evo Morales and Vice President Álvaro García Linera did the same, but she did not give up her seat. When she and others from her party tried to enter parliament, they were kept out by security forces.

For her part, Áñez was vice president of the second chamber. She was able to arrive to the presidency of the republic because all of the others in the line of succession, who were from the MAS, had resigned as part of the government's policy of denouncing a coup. Áñez is a member of the Democratic Union, an opposition alliance, and she is an unconditional ally of the racist elites from the department of Santa Cruz. This is how, three days after the resignation of Evo, a true coup was consolidated, though in reality a combination of interests led to this situation.

The chronology of these events begins with the elections on October 20, but especially with the interruption of the vote count and its re-starting, 24 hours later, with data that contradicted what was released the day before. This arose suspicions of the repetition of a very obvious fraud in a pattern long-established in Latin America, which could not be ignored. This led to protests, led by civic groups made up of middle class sectors that are well established in eastern Bolivia. These protests grew slowly until Friday, November 8th.

It appears that the Morales government underestimated the magnitude of these protests. The MAS had maintained an alliance with the Civic Committee of Santa Cruz after having defeated a separatist movement spearheaded from Santa Cruz in 2008. Initially, the circumstances appeared to continue to favor the MAS, which had a good relationship with the Organization of American States (OAS), and especially with its general secretary Luis Almagro, to the point that the opposition candidate Carlos Mesa had initially rejected the audit agreed to between the OAS and the government.

The situation changed abruptly on Friday the 8th, when a police mutiny that began in Santa Cruz and La Paz began to spread across the country. Versions claiming the police had been "bought" with money from a company with its headquarters in Santa Cruz began to circulate on social networks. What is known is that the police mutiny was an inflection point, and one that will be important to study going forward so we can better understand what took place.

The government couldn't count on the police, nor could it send the armed forces against demonstrators, creating an unsustainable situation. Worse yet, they couldn't count on strong popular organizations to defend them, as those had been purged and many of their leaders had been removed and condemned, some ostracized and others jailed. At this point, the President and Vice President decided to take a risk. Last Sunday, they left La Paz, which was full of barricades and protests, with the intention of returning later in better conditions.

The right continued to operate, and as is common in these cases, probably did so with the support of the US embassy. A sinister man came to the forefront in this moment: Santa Cruz businessman Luis Fernando Camacho. Employing radical and ultraconservative discourse, with a clear racist and colonial content, Camacho came up as a leader of the white middle classes of eastern Bolivia and a representative of the land owning elites in the richest part of the country. He called a town hall (cabildo) in which the results of the election were disqualified; his incendiary language went beyond both the "civicos" from Santa Cruz-who had previously co-existed perfectly well with the MAS - as well as beyond Mesa, who Camacho eclipsed as the face of the opposition within a few days. Camacho is an opportunist ultra-rightist, who should have asked for forgiveness after the burning of wiphalas by his supporters, in an action that demonstrates the thin line the conservatives hold in Bolivia today.

Women and War

The Santa Cruz oligarchy showed its extremism through Camacho, but officialism didn't lag far behind. As tensions built in the run up to November 10, Juan Ramón Quintana, the Minister of the Presidency of Bolivia, told Sputnik "Bolivia is going to be converted into a great battlefield, a modern Vietnam."

As one of the highest officials in the government of Evo Morales, Quintana showed how separated he is from reality when he said that "there is a political accumulation of the social movements that are ready to fight." He proposed a strategy that consisted of "a pitched battle in the face of the virulent lies of the media," which, in his opinion, is part of "a war that is very complex, with unknown dimensions, that is going to demand that we sharpen our thinking, our strategy of self defense."

It was women who responded with the most clarity and transparency, working to undo the mechanisms of war. In La Paz, the Mujeres Creando collective convened a Women's Parliament (a handful of men attended), where they worked to build "collective voices" to challenge the polarization underway. Meanwhile, in the city of El Alto, thousands of youth yelled "Yes, it is time for civil war," while flying the wiphala.

Many women manifested a double outrage: against Morales's fraud and against the racist right. In general there was a predominance of defending the advances that took place over the last 15 years, not all of which could be attributed to the MAS, but rather to the creative potential of the movements, which the authorities were never able to ignore.

I'd like to highlight the words of Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, a historian and sociologist:

I don't believe in the two hypotheses that are being pushed. The triumphalism that with the fall of Evo we have recovered democracy seems to me an excess, an analysis that is out of focus... The second wrong hypothesis, which seems to me to be

extremely dangerous, is that of the coup d'état, which simply legitimizes in a complete package, wrapped in cellophane, the entire Evo Morales government in the moment when it is most deteriorated. To legitimize all this deterioration with the idea of a coup d'état is criminal, therefore how this deterioration began must be considered.

Along the same lines, MarÃa Galindo, the spokesperson for Mujeres Creando, wrote the following in her column in *Página Siete*: "The feeling of abandonment and orphanhood that comes with seeing Evo Morales take off towards Mexico can be felt in the streets. People are calling the radio, and they are broken, sobbing and unable to speak, their feeling of weakness and abandonment means that the memories of the violences and arbitrariness of [Morales] (el caudillo) are forgotten, the people miss him as a protective father and benefactor."

An Uncertain Future

Morales and GarcÃa Linera's plan to return as "pacifiers" failed, and gave way to a complex situation. The fascist and racist ultra right has momentum, as well as a huge amount of material resources and media support, which allowed them to assume power, though they lack the legitimacy to maintain it.

Long memory, which is one of Rivera Cusicanqui's concepts, teaches us that the racist elites can stay in power for an extended period of time by way of blood and fire, even without social support, because they possess the means necessary to do so. However, short memory, which is complementary, points toward something different -at least since 2000 -in Bolivia: the power of those from below impedes racist and patriarchal regimes from enjoying stability and longevity. Women and Indigenous people don't let themselves get walked on, as we have learned from the people in the streets of Santiago de Chile and Quito, where new alliances are emerging on the ground and through actions, best represented by the Mapuche flag

being lifted in the hands of non-Indigenous Chileans, and by women who were able to open a fissure of hope in the heat of the conflict in Ecuador.

An exit to the tremendous situation that Bolivia is currently living could be found through general elections, which the usurper government of Evo Morales ought to convene immediately. As sociologist Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar notes, the choices appear to be “general elections or civil war.” If the ballot boxes speak, it is probable that the next president would be Carlos Mesa, but the MAS would retain an important number of

legislators, and could even be the party that receives the most votes.

Sooner rather than later, the diverse alliance that the MAS used to represent will return to the Palacio Quemado [the official residence of the president], as it makes up the social and cultural majority in the Andean country. It would be ideal that it not be a copy of the current MAS, which has deteriorated just as the passage of time spoils standing water.

To avoid a repeat, a new political culture would need to take shape, among leaders and members of organizations and movements. A culture that is capable of nourishing

itself from the waters of Andean traditions of rotating leadership and complementarity between genders, ages and world views. A culture that is permeated by the feminist rejection of the patriarchy, as they work to undo caudillo leadership and hierarchical organization.

Bolivia, like few regions in our America, offers contributions from both lineages, without which it will be impossible to communally weave an emancipatory future in which the oppressions that impact us all are overcome.

[New Politics](#)

Why ‘Generation Catastrophe’ is rising up

23 November 2019, by **Ben Hillier**

Activists believe that mainland police are being rotated through the riot squad to quell the protests. They say that behind the scenes, the police and the mafia are carrying out extra-judicial killings and raping young women activists. Cops have started to use live rounds and have promised to unleash greater levels of violence to bring the situation under control. And news of the People’s Liberation Army emerging from their barracks to clear Baptist University students’ blockade of Waterloo Road – a not-too-subtle warning to cease and desist the disruption – was widely viewed.

Yet on Monday, after a weekend of the most intense fighting so far between activists and police, pitched battles continued to rage in Hung Hom around the Polytechnic University, which has been under an intense police siege. In neighbouring suburbs Yau Ma Tei, Jordan and Tsim Sha Tsui, where roads everywhere were blocked, it was the same story. In some places, it wasn’t the back-and-forth of last week, when protesters and police fought largely at a distance – but street brawls at the margins as cops made arrests and activists de-arrests. Central district on Hong Kong

Island has also exploded in protest, while occupations continue at Hong Kong University, Baptist University and, reportedly, City University. Incoming police chief Chris Tang Pingkeung, due to be sworn in today, is quoted in the South China Morning Post as saying that the police force has effectively lost control.

The last week at the Polytechnic is illustrative of the lengths the young people here will go to make the point that is scrawled in graffiti around the city: “If we burn, you burn with us”. For days, hundreds of young women and men raced frantically to barricade every entrance and exit. In the canteen they stockpiled noodles, biscuits, muesli bars, and bottles of water. Along with their supporters, they took over the retail shops and turned them into 24-hour communal kitchens. They set up medical stations with boxes and boxes of supplies. They collected for distribution hundreds of gas masks, goggles, fresh clothes, towels and soap. They armed themselves with bins full of broken paving bricks and garden stones, baseball bats, hammers and metal bars pilfered from railings along the roadsides. And they built an arsenal of

Molotov cocktails, gas bombs, flour bombs and dye bombs. By Saturday afternoon, there were hundreds of petrol bombs to feed the front lines – and for the next 36 hours, a group of about 30 young people worked tirelessly to keep production going as the war raged around them.

“The rule is dead, and our life is alight”, Tin, a recent graduate from another university, said as he rested outside PolyU’s smashed up administration building. “The world has been reversed. You are supposed to follow the rules and that makes things work smoothly. But now the rules are the problem; we have an obligation to protest.” Tin is a member of what Au Loong Yu, a respected veteran activist and author, calls “Generation Catastrophe”, otherwise known as the ‘97 generation – those born several years each side of the return of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty. “This generation is very unlucky”, Au says. “At first, the older generation couldn’t understand – why are they so without hope? Why do they talk about revolution? It’s because they sense the catastrophe. Like Greta Thunberg and the climate, but much more intense in some ways. This

generation has continuous bad news."

Generation Catastrophe is, like all generations living under capitalism, economically and socially alienated. There is extreme wealth polarisation and many jobs are menial and low paid. But the political issues, Au says, are decisive in this rebellion. Interviews with activists in the movement over the last week seem to back this up. I've asked every young person I have spoken to about the impact of inequality, house prices and job prospects, but I've found them to be myopically focussed on the political demands, particularly universal suffrage and an investigation into police violence. And while some are arguing to add a sixth demand - for the sacking of the entire police force - there are no signs of the demands being broadened to include social grievances.

The rebellion is not animated by the same issues that have inspired young people in the US and Britain - poor health care, high student debt, high unemployment and so on - to rally behind Jeremy Corbyn and Bernie Sanders, for example. Nor is it like the Arab Spring, which, while democratic in aspiration, was underpinned by class inequality and economic immiseration. Here there are problems, but unemployment is low, the health service is good and, while there is unease about the price of apartments, public housing abounds.

The issue is impending totalitarianism. In the West, we have anxieties about the rise of figures such as Donald Trump and the mainstreaming of the far right over the last five years. This pales in comparison to the situation in Hong Kong. By law, the city will be subsumed under China's authoritarian dictatorship by 2047 - the end of the 50-year transition period, when "one country, two systems" ceases to operate. But the Chinese Communist Party is fast tracking the transition - it is integrating Hong Kong as quickly as possible through its control of nominations for the executive branch of government, through its influence over the composition of the legislature and through its effective control of the police and the city bureaucracy through the appointment of Beijing loyalists. This is what the young

people are raging against.

Local factors also help to explain the apolitical nature of the movement, which is not quite the same as the sort of "anti-political" moods in the West resulting from the long-term decomposition of centrist parties and the decline of the union movement. The mainstream democratic forces in Hong Kong, the so-called pan-democrats, have been discredited in recent years. But the main issue is that Hong Kong is transitioning from a bourgeois colonial "democracy" to a form of state capitalism widely regarded as communism. Under the circumstances, it is next to impossible for the left to grow - after all, "communism" is what everyone is afraid of. But the absence of a recognisable left should not inform Western attitudes towards the rebellion. All its demands are ones the left should support. The movement may be messy, but it could not be otherwise, given the history and the circumstances.

There is a widespread belief that Beijing will prevail, which gives the uprising a distinct mood. Unlike the Western student rebellion of the 1960s and 1970s which built the last solid left wing generation and had slogans of hope figuring a new world - "All power to the imagination!", "Be realistic, demand the impossible!", for example - the spirit here feels vengeful, tied not to visions of a new society of equality and liberation, but reflecting the almost hopeless task of clinging to something imperfect before inevitably falling under the heel of something much worse. There is more bitterness and reflexive defiance than hope in the content of "If we burn, you burn with us" and "Liberty or death".

This extraordinary rage, manifest in the destruction of symbols of Chinese capitalism in the riots in the more working class suburbs, is precisely what has rallied behind them a huge section of the population, which continues to offer support to this city-wide uprising. One small example happened on Sunday: before police surrounded the Polytechnic on all sides to prevent anyone leaving while they gassed the place, an armoured vehicle approaching the protesters

was hit by a Molotov. On a corner at the rear, a group of a dozen older locals walking past started cheering. One of them joined the young people digging up paving bricks, which were being smashed with hammers to use as projectiles.

There is, of course, talk about US influence. High ranking Beijing officials have accused the movement of being another attempted "colour revolution" - a movement purportedly for democracy but in reality just an intrigue to install a government favourable to Washington. Certainly, the students are groping around for allies, and many don't see any that are powerful enough, except perhaps the US. But the idea that the US can be a saviour is primarily a product of desperation, not a considered political analysis. And it certainly doesn't mean the US state is in a position to influence events. Any honest witness would be quickly disabused of such a notion if they saw firsthand what is going on: a widespread grass roots rebellion clearly reliant on the resources it can muster locally.

As gas and dyed water from the cannon rained on activists outside on Sunday night, medics worked overtime inside the campus tending to the parade of injured being carried up the entrance stairs. In one of the tutorial rooms turned into makeshift medical centres, a text from the library was abandoned temporarily: Ethics. It may not be Marxism, but the activists here are putting theory into practice. Even if the students recognised that an important potential ally is the mainland working class, they have incredibly limited means of reaching it. Perhaps workers across the border, in the Pearl River Delta industrial zones, would be inspired to act in solidarity if they witnessed the rebellion. But more likely, and perhaps Hong Kong's ultimate hope, is that those workers rise in their own interests and test the cohesion of the Chinese state.

The East Timorese, for example, were able to free themselves from Indonesian domination only because a revolution in Java loosened the Indonesian military's grip on the archipelago. The problem for the young rebels here is that the Chinese

state is vastly more powerful and cohesive than was the Indonesian state in 1999. The students understand its power, but they are not going to die waiting for ripe conditions: they willed a one-day general strike and delivered a week of insurrection. That in itself was an

enormous victory. And, as the streets yesterday attested, they are not done yet.

Late on Sunday, when police through loudspeakers warned that everyone would be gassed, sprayed with water cannon and charged as criminals if they did not disperse, the Polytechnic

occupiers respond by playing the opening notes of Beethoven's Für Elise over the top of them. Not only do they brawl, they do so with panache. Generation Catastrophe is showing the world how to resist.

Source [Red Flag](#).

The World Up in Arms Against Austerity and Authoritarianism

22 November 2019, by **Dan La Botz**

Around the world, people are rising up in arms, on nearly every continent and in more than a dozen nations. In the last six months there have been rebellions in France, Catalunya, Puerto Rico, Hong Kong, Lebanon, Chile, Ecuador, Honduras, Haiti, Iraq, Sudan and Algeria. These rebellions have in general had a popular and left leaning character and they are angry, militant, and defiant. The common feature is these are rebellions of the lower middle class, the working class and the poor. These various movements have everywhere overflowed the banks of the political system. The waves of protest beat against the foundation of the state. The activists in the street everywhere call into question the system, whatever that system where they live is called. When the governments have attempted to crush these movements, the people fight back, refusing to give up the streets. What lies behind these rebellions, what has caused them, and where are they going?

The political situation in each of these countries varies tremendously and the detonating events were quite different: from an objectionable new law to a stolen election, from decades-old dictatorships that have become unbearable to increases in public transit fares. In Lebanon it was the imposition of a tax on Whatsapp telephone calls. In Ecuador the government's decision allowed an increase in the price of gasoline. In

Chile an increase in the metro fare. In Honduras it was the discovery that the president aided his brother who led a drug cartel. In Puerto Rico it was a corrupt and misogynist president. In Hong Kong the promulgation of a law that infringed on local autonomy. In Catalunya in the State of Spain, the meting out of long sentences to Catalan nationalist protestors. In Iraq the people have risen up against unemployment, corruption, and an unresponsive government. In Algeria and Sudan, the populations' weariness with longstanding authoritarian governments. In Nicaragua, a social security pension reform. In Haiti too protests against a corrupt and authoritarian president.

Everywhere, there was a different trigger. Yet the central issue everywhere is the desire to be treated with dignity and respect.

There are common elements among these rebellions: economic inequality, the imposition of austerity, and governmental abuse of their power. The feeling is, they don't care about us. In many of these countries the state has lost its legitimacy and the citizenry no longer has confidence in the historic political parties, but generally speaking there is no political party in a position to put forward an alternative political agenda or a new leadership. Yet the revolts have shaken the powers-that-be in each country and sent powerful shockwaves

through the international political order. We seem to be in a period of synchronized though uncoordinated political revolts demanding democracy and a better life. We have been here before.

This is not the first time that there has been an apparent international simultaneity of revolt and even of revolutions. The first such wave—almost an entire epoch—occurred in the last quarter of the eighteenth century with the outbreak of the American Revolution in 1776, then the French Revolution of 1789, followed by the Haitian Revolution of 1804 and then the Latin American Revolutions of 1810 to 1821. Another such wave occurred with the European Revolution of 1848 that swept through France, Germany, and the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, and we might include in that wave the Chartist movement in England. The period from 1917 to 1919 brought revolutions in Russia, Germany, Austria, and Hungary, as well as the Ottoman Empire. And while 1968 brought no revolution, it was a year of radical upheavals from France to Czechoslovakia, to Mexico. Just as today, during each of these periods of radical upheaval the detonating events in each country were unique, yet at the same time one could see common elements and often also similar dynamics. While in most cases the bourgeoisie put itself at the head of

the revolutionary movements sooner or later, still it was working people and the poor who generally gave these rebellions their radical thrust and provided the cutting edge.

In different periods, different conditions created the pre-revolutionary situation and a wide variety of events sparked the revolutionary movements, but it is usually possible to discern commonalities in each wave. The growth of international trade, imperial rivalries, and the contrast between the old aristocratic order and the emerging bourgeois society conditions the revolutions of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. The rise of capitalism in England and then in France, the factory and then the railroad, together with the rise there of the liberal state and representative government, drove the conflict of 1848 as the ideas of the West pushed East, until the threat of working class revolution drove the bourgeoisie into the arms of the aristocrats, and those together then crushed the democratic and socialist movement both. The expansion and then the domination of capitalist financiers and industrial corporations in rival states led to modern imperialism and then to world war in 1914, and the war with its millions of dead and massive destruction led to revolution and then to the collapse of the old empires: Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman empire. The Russian Revolution of October 1917, an uprising from below of workers and peasants, led to the attempt to spread workers' councils and socialist revolution throughout Europe and beyond.

The Driving Force Behind the Upheavals

Today's revolts in all of the countries we have named are driven by several forces that have reshaped the balance of power between nation states as well as the social classes within those state and led simultaneously to the crisis of the neoliberal order and the more significant final collapse of the post-World War II order. The

transformation of China into a highly successful capitalist society, the fall of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the 1990s, and then the 2008 recession taken together have almost erased the old division of the world into capitalist, Communist, and Third World nation or the more recent developed and developing nations. We live now in a world with a mosaic of extreme wealth and unnecessary poverty in nearly all countries.

The driving forces underlying these developments—some of them hardly visible at the moment through the water-cannon's jets or the clouds of tear gas—will be found in financiers' reorganization of the world economy, driven by the desire for profit and economic control. The financial and corporate moguls have in the last fifty years, and at an increasingly rapid pace in the last twenty, transformed industry by satellite and microchip, by computers and automation, by new forms of managerial organization of the workforce and have created workplaces overseen by electronic surveillance. The incredible augmentation of production throughout the world—from mineral extraction to manufacture to services—all channeled through international trade agreements and carried by the logistics industry with its warehouses and shipping containers has, within the neoliberal economic framework, led to an enormous growth in economic inequality. Everywhere the capitalist class and its political partners have enriched themselves at the expense of the working classes and the poor. All of this has led to tremendous and well-justified resentment by the majorities in countries around the globe.

There is no doubt that in the aftermath of the Great Recession of 2008, we entered into a new political period where rebellion alternates with repression, beginning in 2011 with Movement of the Plazas in Spain, Occupy Wall Street in the United States, the Arab Spring in the Middle East and North Africa. The economic crisis also gave rise to new rightwing nationalist parties and political personalities, from the Northern League in Italy to the Alternative for Germany (AfD), from Boris Johnson in England to Donald Trump in the

United States. The ramifications of the crisis are still felt almost everywhere, though North America (Canada, the United States, and Mexico) remain so far practically immune to the radical contagion.

In all of the recent upheavals, we see the working classes and the poor rising up and taking action outside of or even against the social organizations and institutions, the labor unions and the political parties that have in the past pretended to represent them. When the left political parties and union bureaucracies have attempted to restrain these movements, as they have in many places, the workers themselves have either bypassed those institutions or they have tried to force them to act and have striven to push aside the current leaders and to alter the organizations' policies. Without political parties of their own working people have often been unable to formulate a clear program, but their militant actions and their slogans have made it quite evident that they demand an altogether different sort of society, one where workers' voices are heard and their needs met.

These concurrent revolts have diverse characters. In France the Yellow Vest movement, which for months tied up traffic throughout the country and then took their protest to the wealthiest parts of Paris, is made up of working people who have no unions, the hairdresser and the handyman, people who have not been defended by industrial unions of the General Confederation of Workers (CGT) or the Socialist Party. In Chile students detonated the rebellion by refusing to pay the new higher fare and jumping the turnstiles, but when the government put tanks on the streets for the first time since the dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet, the dockworkers walked out on strike. In Hong Kong everyone from restaurant cooks to computer programmers have joined the protests. In Nicaragua the elderly were joined by students and then by the general population that barricaded entire towns.

Almost everywhere the governments have responded with attempts to repress the movement using riot police, water cannons, tear gas,

beatings, arrests. Almost everywhere there have been deaths and severe injuries. In some places like Hong Kong and Nicaragua, the police have been supplemented by gangsters or paramilitaries. In Sudan and Chile, the army was sent out to crush the movement, while outside of Hong Kong the Chinese Peoples Army remains massed on the border, awaiting a call to intervene. But the people refuse to give up the street, call out others, look for new avenues of protest, and the many-headed hydra just keeps reappearing around the next corner. As the revolts spread, they can begin to shape the contemporary Zeitgeist, legitimizing the idea of rebellion and raising the question of revolution.

Still, one must not exaggerate and we must remember that all of this turmoil takes place against a backdrop of entrenched despotisms and authoritarian governments that rule most of the world's people: the Communist Party dictatorship that manages capitalism in China, the personal dictatorship of Vladimir Putin and his oligarchic mafia in Russia, Bashar al Assad in Syria, the personalist authoritarian regimes of Narendra Modi in India and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines, as well as the new rightwing government of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil. Those governments keep their populations locked down to prevent precisely the kind of militant movements for change we are discussing here.

Stand with the People in Rebellion

Returning to our discussion of the revolts themselves, where much of the population either sympathizes with or joins the protests, these become popular rebellions, that is, rebellions of the entire population. Consequently their class character may become vague and indeterminate, even if it is the working people are driving them

forward. Similarly their demands for democracy are sometimes unclear and undeveloped. Their call for democracy may obfuscate the inherent contradictions between those who want a liberal state and parliamentary democracy and those who want some sort of working class democracy where everyone has an equal voice and vote. Precisely because these are mass upheavals they contain within them many social groups and widely divergent ideas and are riven with controversy and debate and that is both necessary and very good.

The fact that many of these revolts are popular and not led by leftist parties and not guided by socialist ideologies, and that they contain many contradictory currents, has caused consternation among leftist groups both in the United States and elsewhere. Their confusion arises from the fact that they have not for almost fifty years had to try to understand and interpret such mass popular movements. When one Hong Kong demonstrator carries a sign that says "Trump Liberate Us" or a handful of Nicaraguans goes to Washington and speaks with Republican congressmen, leftists in other countries may abandon the rebellion because they have no experience with mass popular movements and their complexities and contradictions. Even in their own countries leftists may be unable to comprehend what's happening, as in France where for months much of the left characterized the Yellow Vests as fascists.

We should, on the contrary, recognize that mass popular revolts enter into a political quest and a search for their program and leaders. We know from history that if and when social revolts become political, the leaders, parties, and programs will be tested in the struggle against the old order and in the contest between different tendencies within the movement to establish a new order. The movements need time to work out their views, perhaps to divide into different or rival positions. And to get that time, they

need our solidarity.

Here again we can see some trends, though they are only that and not yet definite political alternatives. In places like Hong Kong, which want to keep the dictatorship at bay, or in Algeria or Sudan where the movement rises to overthrow and old dictatorial order, the initial demand is for a parliamentary democracy and civil rights, which represents an enormous advance over dictatorship. The same is true where the population thinks the government is betraying democratic norms, as in Puerto Rico, and Honduras.

Still, history suggests that in struggles for parliamentary democracy, working people will also raise economic and social demands while their struggles may produce new institutions as alternatives not only to the old parties but perhaps even to the old constitution and the parliament. In other places, such as France and Chile, from the very beginning the struggle over economic issues and for democracy are completely intertwined. The truth is, however, that with the exception of Algeria and Sudan, and perhaps Chile, almost none of these countries is in a pre-revolutionary situation, and in virtually none of them has the social rebellion given rise to a revolutionary political party. Yet it is also true that much of the world at this moment is a laboratory searching for the cure for capitalism, and the social scientists running the experiments are in the streets.

All of these struggles deserve our support, unconditional in many cases, though not uncritical. We support those fighting for democracy in the street, but we also understand that, much like ourselves, they have yet to clarify their political positions and produce the necessary political tools to change the society. We are witnessing a great concurrent movement from below for democracy and economic justice across the world and we stand with those movements.

Source 26 October 2019 [New Politics](#).

It's Election Time in Britain - is it the Brexit Election? Not really ...

21 November 2019, by **Susan Pashkoff**

While many were expecting (and hoping) for an election campaign solely centred on Brexit this campaign is already far broader addressing policies that the various political parties advocate for the future direction of the country. As a result, while Sky News has the headline "The Brexit Election" what we actually are witnessing is far more interesting. I expect an ugly and nasty campaign certainly (especially the use of red-baiting, divide and rule - especially the use of racist dog whistles - relating to immigration and absurd accusations of "rampant antisemitism" against the Labour Party; but it will be about far more than Brexit.

At the front and centre of the campaigns will be many issues, like the Environment and climate change, the NHS, housing, education, social care, and social and economic policy. So if the Tories, Brexit Party and Lib Dems were hoping that this is "the Brexit election" they are already in trouble.

Political campaigns in Britain depend on much more than advertisements on television, news coverage and billboards and debates between the party leaders. They are built upon campaigning and canvassing by members of the various political parties at the local level for each seat and support from members from other constituencies to bolster your campaign. In the absence of members in local constituencies raising money, knocking on doors, leafleting and setting up stalls as part of gotv, then campaigns will get nowhere here. This is a fascinating process of grassroots mobilisation by members of various parties. Registration to vote must be done by the 26th of November to participate in the General Election. Already voter registration has increased by 1.5 million people in the

2 weeks since the election has been called:

"Among these people, more than 110,000 were under the age of 34, with 67,000 under the age of 25 alone, representing the highest number of under-25s applying for voter registration during any single day in the election campaign so far." [46]

There is a lot at stake in this general election; specifically the future of the country on many different levels.

More than Brexit

Where the various political parties stand on Brexit is very clear at this point:

Tories: Leave on Boris Johnson's hard Brexit deal on 31 January 2020;

Labour: renegotiate deal for a softer Brexit and then a second referendum on their deal (their position on whether to vote remain or accept the deal to be decided at special conference);

SNP: Remain, Second Referendum;

Lib Dems: Remain: if they win - they will revoke Article 50; if they do not win - they will support a second referendum;

Greens: Remain, Second Referendum;

Plaid Cymru: Remain, Second Referendum; [47]

Brexit Party: Leave; clean-break Brexit;

Democratic Unionist Party: Support Brexit, but not Boris Johnson's deal as they will not have a veto over the customs agreement with the EU (and the EU will not give them a veto; they

have insisted that a majority decision by all political parties in Stormont which is the devolved North Ireland Assembly).

However, what is far more interesting is given those positions, what else are they articulating for the future of the country? What is also rather interesting is the reception that various political leaders are getting from the populace. So while the Tories have pinned their hopes on their hard Brexit position (they have sensibly not run on a no-deal Brexit which is the Brexit party position) and are campaigning in traditional Labour heartlands which voted to leave, the question is whether they can win these seats in the Labour heartlands?

The **Brexit party** (led by "man of the people" Nigel Farage) has agreed to not campaign in seats which were won by the Tories in the last election; however, they are competing against the Tories in Labour held seats. This may actually backfire on both parties. The Tories desperately need to take currently Labour held seats if they actually want to secure a majority government. Moreover, they do face the threat of Tory Remainers voting for the Lib Dems or former Tory MPs running as Independents (and there are many seats in which competition is between the Tories and Lib Dems, for example in Devon and Cornwall). Ruth Davidson (the former Tory leader in Scotland) has stepped down from both the Scottish Conservative party and its leadership; the Scottish National Party is campaigning hard to get those seats. If successful, that will be disastrous for the Conservatives nationally as those 13 seats will make getting an overall majority that much more difficult. [48] That means that it must win seats away from Labour.

However, if the **Tories** and the Brexit

Party split the leave vote in Labour heartlands and Labour voters support their parties, the Labour Party stands a very good chance of holding onto its seats. An additional problem is the Tories themselves.

For some bizarre reason, **Tory** members seem to think that Boris Johnson can sell well in areas that voted Brexit. The problem here is that Boris Johnson is like every nasty upper class arse that has been the bane of generations of working class people; his mien is that of an upper class toff - his inability to articulate even a basic level of sympathy with those facing horrific flooding in the North of England is impressive. The refusal of the government to declare a national emergency immediately (a Cobra meeting only happened 5 days after the flooding started) and the Tories' lack of funding for flood prevention and insufficient funds for rescue efforts has not endeared him to the locals as an understatement; his fumbling and bumbling attempts of meeting with the victims of floods has done nothing but anger those that he has attempted to speak with and he has been met with heckling and derision.

Consistent with their use of divide and rule, the Home Office minister of the Tories, Priti Patel, has said that they will reduce immigration overall (but not maintain Cameron's tens of thousands pledge) using an Australian based points-system which will let in those "whose skills we need" - honestly, how could they run the NHS without immigration as it relies on workers from not only the EU but other countries; but note that that requires an assumption that they want to keep the NHS running.

There is an additional issue that the Tories will have to address (perhaps legally as it has been referred to the Police by Labour's Lord Falconer and Scotland Yard has confirmed that they are examining the accusations) which relate to offers of Peerages to Brexit Party Candidates if they step down. Not a particularly clever idea on the part of the Tories and if they expected either Nigel Farage or Anne Widdecombe (both of whom, unfortunately, enjoy the limelight far too much) to keep shtum about the

offer that was quite delusional. That's a big oops and it is illegal, so stay tuned for further developments.

In Scotland, there is a very good possibility that the **Scottish National Party (SNP)** will wipe out the Scottish Tory seats which have been propping up the Conservative and Unionist numbers in Westminster; remember that Scotland voted remain strongly in the Brexit Referendum and that Ruth Davidson - the Scottish Tory leader who was behind their revival has stood down.

According to the BBC [49], their campaign will probably be stressing 5 points (their manifesto is not out yet):

"But here are five policies that are likely to feature in it:

- Hold another referendum on Scottish independence in 2020
- Keep Scotland in the EU, the single market and customs union - options include a referendum with Remain on the ballot paper if needed
- Greater powers for the Scottish Parliament
- Bring an end to austerity
- Introduce an NHS Protection Bill to block UK governments from using the NHS in trade talks."

The SNP have said that they will try to support a progressive alliance; Jeremy Corbyn's agreement that he would support another Scottish Independence Referendum (but has clarified that LP will not support it until after the next Scottish Parliament elections scheduled for 2021). Whether they will agree to a confidence and supply arrangement with Labour, if Labour wins the highest number of seats but doesn't secure a majority, remains to be seen - one does not bargain until the results are known. However, both the Tories and Lib Dems will oppose a second independence referendum.

Following their choosing an anti-democratic position on Brexit at their party conference (their policy "if they win" is to revoke Article 50 thereby ignoring the referendum result rather than have a second referendum on any deal negotiated), the **Liberal Democrats** have compounded this bad decision by calling for a

permanent budget spending surplus of 1% (meaning spending would be lower than incoming tax revenues) which essentially means that we will be living in permanent austerity. John Maynard Keynes must be turning over in his grave (yes, he was a Liberal); with an economy almost stagnant, the worst economic decision that could be undertaken is a permanent government budget spending surplus. They are really earning the epithet "yellow Tories" since they have decided that after at least a decade of austerity, with wages still lower than they were in 2007-8, with welfare services and public spending (for example, on healthcare and education) slashed to the bone, the only spending beyond tax revenues will be on capital investment. If you think that the benefits freeze imposed by the Tories should be abandoned, then don't vote for the yellow Tories as they have demonstrated their commitment to neoliberal economic policies irrespective of a stagnant economy where the working class have borne the brunt of austerity, especially the disabled and women. Commitment to austerity with an economy teetering on recession is ridiculous; let's be real, it is bad economics.

The Lib Dems have also set up a Remain alliance with the Green Party and Plaid Cymru agreeing not to run against each other in certain seats, there are 60 seats included in the pact including those of prominent Remain Tories like Dominic Grieve. [50] However, that alliance has already run into problems with the Green Left bloc of the Green Party rejecting the pact with the Lib Dems saying that they will not run against Labour as their Green New Deal must be supported - politically the Greens are closer to Labour and Brexit is not the only issue that this general election is being fought over. Moreover, the Greens have already pulled out of the contest in Chingford and Woodford Green in which there is a fierce battle between hard-right Tory Iain Duncan Smith (the architect of Universal Credit) and Faiza Shaheen (the Director of CLASS - the Centre for Labour and Social Studies). The Greens have also pulled out of the marginal seat in Ealing Central and Acton and Calder Valley.

Even more significant, a few Lib Dem

candidates (for example, Canterbury) have said that they will not run against Labour candidates and enable the Tories to win those seats. Rather than take this point on board, the Lib Dem leadership are looking for another candidate, but the local Lib Dem's oppose running against Rosie Duffield (a strong Remain Labour MP) who won the seat from the Tories at the last election (if they bring in someone from outside the constituency they may not get crucial support on the ground in the campaign). In the highly marginal seat of North Bury, the Lib Dem candidate has told voters to support Labour. By centring the pact on Remain, they have created a problem for themselves and the pact is already facing problems.

Even though the **Labour Party (LP)** manifesto has not yet been released (it comes out Thursday 21 November following a weekend of tough negotiations within the leadership of the party and with affiliated trade unions), some very clear policies have already been released (here are the [press releases](#) so you can see what has been advocated), but, e.g., nationalise broadband services and tax tech giants to offer free broadband for all by 2030 (which Boris Johnson has called a "crazed communist scheme"), a £10/hour real living wage, on employee rights, Labour supports empowering trade unions and eliminating Zero Hours contracts and supports the introduction of a 32 hour work week. They also support free dental check-ups, money provided for free further education (both vocational and university) for adults, and nationalisation of the rail network, water, energy grids and the Royal Mail. There is, of course, the issue of the NHS which has faced gross underfunding and privatisation through the back door under the Tories and the ConDem government; Labour has promised an end to privatisation and a £26 billion real-terms spending boost with increases in annual funding of £40 billion over 5 years of the Labour government if it wins; this includes capital expenditure and the expansion of public health services.

The centre-piece of Labour's policies

relate to their Green New Deal; this is a set of 9 general policies that recognise the class nature of climate change and which put social, political and economic justice at the centre of the struggle against climate change and saving our planet. [51] This is a game shifter; fighting climate change is more than decarbonisation by 2030, it is about just transition to well-paid, green union jobs, phasing out fossil fuels, investment in renewables, expanding public democratic ownership, green public transport systems, housing for life, provision of universal basic services, and the recognition of climate refugees and welcoming their migration and preventing further displacement of people.

Coming out of the LP women's conference in 2019, there were motions on eliminating Universal Credit and ensuring access to healthcare for migrants; these should be in the LP manifesto as both motions passed at the Autumn LP conference unanimously. Alternatives to Universal Credit were proposed in the motion, but we need to wait for the Manifesto to see what has been adopted as policy.

There clearly have been debates in the leadership and trade union affiliates on the issue of free movement of people; Unite the Union's leader, Len McCluskey, launched an attack on the free movement of people pledge that came out of the recent Labour Party conference. [52] Even though the conference committed to free movement of people; it seems that some of the trade unions have insisted on a shift away from free movement of people. Rather than make the progressive political points of guaranteed national living wages for all workers in Britain and trade union membership being carried across countries, McCluskey has fallen into the trap of blaming immigrants for capitalists undercutting workers' wages. [53] We will need to wait to see what the Labour Party Manifesto says on this issue; we can only hope for some leaks in advance of its formal unveiling on Thursday.

Conclusion

Like in the US, national polls are

incredibly unreliable and often useless; Britain has a first-past-the-post election law (whoever gets the highest number of votes wins the seat) in a general election. A national poll can tell you trends but will not necessarily give you clear answers as what happens depends upon how many come out to vote on Election Day. Exit polls have proven far more useful; although we do know that people do not always tell the truth. In the 2017 election, Theresa May was way ahead in the polls and wound up losing the Tory majority; the Labour Party manifesto with its excellent policies and their ground campaign shifted votes significantly leading to no overall majority and the dependence of the Tories on the 10 seats won by Democratic Unionist Party (DUP).

A winter election will affect the numbers of voters on the day; this is one major reason why they are not a common occurrence as getting voters out is important for all parties. What will happen depends on whether the Tories are successful in making this "the" Brexit election or whether this is actually an election decided more generally on the future of the UK. The Labour Party has already pushed the discussion beyond the issue of Brexit; with the release of their manifesto (which is expected to be further to the left than the last manifesto), the British people will have a clear choice over clear issues on where to cast their votes. In Scotland, the SNP is a major player; the voices of Scots are incredibly important in this election and can strongly influence what happens in Westminster.

Predictions at this point of the campaign will certainly be useless and I will not make one; but this is proving to be a very exciting general election campaign. The Tories currently are ahead, but don't count out Labour, or the possibility of a minority government led by either of the main parties. Politics in Britain is very interesting indeed; with each party fighting tooth and nail for seats.

Source *Daily Kos*, 18 November 2019
"Anti-Capitalist Meetup: It's Election Time in Britain - is it the Brexit Election? Not really ...".

“We are at the beginning of the end of neoliberalism in Chile”

20 November 2019, by **Franck Gaudichaud**

Révolution Permanente: According to mainstream analysts and economists, Chile was an island of stability and prosperity in Latin America. In view of the current mobilizations, how do you explain such a generalized explosion of anger?

FG: We can say that, in effect, the Chilean ruling classes really sold the image of a “Chilean Jaguar” as an indisputable model of economic growth for Latin America. President Sebastián Piñera even spoke of an “oasis of stability” in Latin American. Less than a week after these remarks, we witnessed the beginning of an unprecedented mobilization and then the president declared on television that: “the country is at war”. In reality, behind this showcase of “modern” and neoliberal Chile we find some of the deepest social inequalities in the world and especially in Latin America. The violence of capitalism applied since 1973 with the dictatorship and after 1975 with the “neoliberal turn” brought about by the Chicago Boys, was continued after the 1990s under the various democratic governments.

Thus, this model of neoliberal capitalism, sometimes called “advanced”, is an extreme model. There was a widespread privatization in all fields and social spheres (education, healthcare, pensions, transport, etc.). And although poverty has been reduced by half since the 1990s, social inequalities have continued to grow. This means that, at present, the country’s economy is dominated by seven large families of the Chilean bourgeoisie while half of all workers earn less than \$530 USD per month (while the price of a one-way metro ticket in Santiago is \$1.10 USD). The “democracy of consensus” born in 1990 legitimized this “model”

and the elites agreed to keep (with some reforms) the illegitimate Constitution drawn up in 1980, in the midst of the dictatorship.

RP: Undoubtedly, one of the distinctive features of the current Chilean process is the mobilization of the labor movement that the dictatorship wanted to crush and which the governments after 1989 have tried to break up. Are we witnessing an authentic renewal of the workers’ movement?

FG: The current social explosion is linked to an accumulation of previous collective experiences, such as large mobilizations of workers from 2006-07, and also protests of high school and university students. Let us recall the “student revolution” of 2011. There was also the multiplication of eco-territorial struggles around what are called “sacrificial zones” in Chile, zones of massive extractive activity and serious ecological and environmental destruction. We should also mention the important mobilizations around the pension system which is completely privatized and in the hands of pension funds (this privatization was brought about by the brother of the current president during the dictatorship...). Among the working class, the most combative union sectors are the port workers, the miners and the truck drivers, which have been at the forefront as well as other sectors of workers such as teachers and the healthcare workers.

One of the distinctive traits of the current movement is that it was not brought about by the traditional worker’s movement. What emerges

quickly are youth struggles, the unemployed youth, middle-schoolers, and the high school students that begin to jump the turnstiles of the Santiago subway and who called for massive, collective fare evasions. With the repression, the militarization of public space, and the proclamation of the state of emergency and the curfew, we witnessed the expansion of mobilized social spaces that reject repression and similarly the expansion of broad demands critical of neoliberalism.

It is then that some sectors of the workers’ movement begin to enter the scene, and in particular those of strategic and more politicized trade unions. Particularly noteworthy is the key role played by the dockworkers of the “Unión Portuaria”, who called for a strike starting on Monday, October 21, while the large union federation, the Central Añtica de los Trabajadores (CUT), for its part, was largely paralyzed. The CUT is a widely bureaucratized trade union in the hands of the political parties that have governed over the last three decades, the Socialist Party, the Christian Democrats and now also the Communist Party.

Nevertheless, the unions and the CUT eventually participated although some in the leadership and other organizations were hitting the breaks. It is interesting to observe the role of the dockers and miners, especially those of the big mine “la Escondida”, which called for mobilizations and strikes. Finally, the appearance on the scene of a broad unifying initiative, the “Unidad Social”, which includes the CUT, the “No+AFP” movement against pension funds, as well as the feminist March 8 Coordination, the sectors of the political ecology and several dozen social and trade union organizations, was a notable step

forward, under the pressure of the mobilizations. It is therefore a much broader space than trade unionism alone, although in the calls for a national strike the unions have played an important role in changing the balance of power and pushing back the President, particularly with regard to the state of emergency.

However, the Chilean trade union movement remains weak and fragmented as a result of the crushing defeat by the Pinochet dictatorship between 1973 and 1989. But it is also the result of the civilian governments of the Concertación (1990-2010 in particular), which did nothing to change this situation; quite the contrary, they did everything possible to maintain trade union activity directly allied with the governments and which was otherwise repressed and fragmented. Today, therefore, the challenge is to rebuild combative trade union collectives that can shift the weight of some of the more traditional union leaderships. We see that at this stage the organization of "the Social Unity" is much broader than the CUT alone. It is a space of organization and tensions that has allowed organizers to give a possible orientation and direction to the mobilizations, but with the risk of the temptation of wanting to capitalize them on the part of some and direct them "from above", which would channel the extraordinary force of the movement towards an institutional framework of "consensus" with the government.

RP: In the demonstrations and strikes, one of the most repeated slogans continues to be "Fuera Piñera!" Which calls on the President to step down immediately. However, the radical left, the Chilean Communist Party and the Frente Amplio—which have, as you say, an important weight in the trade union movement and the social movement—have refused to take up this demand in favor of an "impeachment" of Piñera or some of his former ministers or in

favor of a referendum. How do you explain such a political decision?

FG: There is a strong demand among the people mobilized around Piñera's departure, the "Fuera Piñera!" demand, in my opinion, is totally legitimate when we are talking about 20 dead people, hundreds of wounded (including some very serious), thousands of detainees, dozens of sexual abuses and tortures in police stations, disappeared, etc.

The social reforms announced by the Government are by no means accepted in the streets because they consist, once again, of State subsidies for the minimum wage, the privatized pension system and finally the private sector... Therefore, it does not propose any departure from the neoliberal subsidiary State. Nor is the change of cabinet considered as a measure of real change. On the other hand, the reaction of the parliamentary political opposition has been more than timid, if not disastrous. Some in the opposition have even called for repression, as is the case of the former socialist minister and former leader of the Organization of American States (OAS), José Miguel Insulza.

On the part of the CP there was a different reaction. With their long-standing political experience, the communists quickly understood the trap represented by negotiating with Piñera, so they called for a boycott of those negotiation meetings. As for the Frente Amplio, we see to what extent it is split by contradictory tendencies and the fragility of its project, at this stage, because there is an important sector, called "Democratic Revolution", that wanted to go to negotiate with the President in La Moneda in the middle of the state of emergency and with repression going on in the streets!

In the end, the Frente Amplio did not go to negotiate and instead denounced these maneuvers. But we can see the difficulties of the Frente Amplio in positioning itself at such a juncture of exceptional mobilizations, when I believe that this should have been a key moment for the left to push towards a rupture with the neoliberal capitalist model, to call immediately

for a Constituent Assembly, and to call for the Government to step down. But Frente Amplio was very confused, with sectors marked by the parliamentary logic of "negotiation" in complete dissonance with what is happening in the country, although it should be noted that the left sector of the FA, Social Convergence, has been clearer in that sense and also mobilized from the beginning.

There are, therefore, calls for "impeachment" against Piñera (with few possibilities of passing at the Senate level). Some also think that it would be possible to negotiate minimum agreements with the new Cabinet. But what is growing within the movement, in terms of what could be called a "transitory demand" for unity, is above all the call for a Free, Sovereign, and Popular Constituent Assembly constituted "from below," that is representative and proportional, and truly democratic, unlike all Chilean constitutions, not just Pinochet's.

This process would allow everything to be put on the table and then be approved by a referendum as a sort of "refoundation" of the Chilean social and political model. The left-wing, anti-capitalist forces should have a role to play in this regard. Except if it is an attempt by the Parliament to reabsorb and channel the mobilizations to a new constitutional reform (as the PS and sectors of the right are already proposing). But, on the contrary, the radical left should get involved to grow self-organization and politicization in a process in which the Constituent and Popular Assembly would be nothing more than one of the elements of an open process of democratization that would have to question and oppose the exorbitant privileges of the Chilean bourgeoisie.

RP: The elements of self-organization that appear in the work centers and at a regional level, in Concepción for example with the Provincial Assembly or in Antofagasta with the "Emergency Committee", give a "70s" air to the

current mobilization. Does the imaginary of the communal Comandos or the Cordones industriales, the active wing of the revolutionary process 1970-1973, does it continue to haunt Chile?

FG: In terms of the elements of self-organization, they have been very powerful in this movement, in the sense that it is a "spontaneous" movement that spread through social networks, through Facebook, horizontally and outside the traditional institutional channels (union, social or political). We see, once again, that there is a great accumulated experience coming from the previous movements, from the labor conflicts of 2006-07, from those of the students of 2011, from experience of groups like the ACES (Coordinating Assembly of Secondary

Students) or from the feminist and union movements, with the organization of multiple "town halls" and territorial and popular assemblies.

These are potential social forces of the movement but which are difficult to assess the extent of this assemblies at the national level. They are still dispersed and uneven depending on each place, while the levels of state repression remain scandalous. Somehow the collective memory of "popular power" and the industrial cordons of 1970-73 remains, although not always directly. We are, of course, very far from the levels of politicization and mobilization of the 1970s that characterized the Chilean working class with the experience of Unidad Popular, a working class that even began to surpass the limits proposed by Salvador Allende.

Today, we are at the beginning of the end of neoliberalism in the face of Piñera's government, but also potentially "re-institutional" in the sense that Chile is once again speaking, on a massive scale, of a post-neoliberal and democratic perspective that would seek to overcome - finally - Pinochet's legacy and 30 years of a "negotiated democracy". This is already one of the formidable achievements of these days of rebellion in October 2019 even though they don't open anti-capitalist perspectives for the time being. It is necessary to understand that the Chilean "model" still remains one of the most entrenched and "anchored" in Latin America, despite all the strong shocks that traverse it.

[New Politics](#)

Women-led protests in Lebanon inspire Middle East feminists

19 November 2019

A video of the scene has been clicked and reposted tens of thousands of times on social media platforms in Lebanon and other Arab countries. According to media reports, the incident occurred on October 17. That day, a convoy of vehicles accompanying Lebanese Education Minister Akram Chehayeb got caught up in a demonstration in the center of the capital, Beirut.

As the situation grew tenser, one of the minister's bodyguards got out of the vehicle and fired his rifle into the night sky, agitating the demonstrators. That was when the young woman in the video kicked the armed bodyguard in the groin. He apparently recognized the fact that he had nothing to gain by engaging in a fight with an unarmed woman. [54]

Protests in Lebanon have been raging for days "and have already led to some concessions from the

government. [55] Women are at the forefront. The video garnered many comments, most positive, some euphoric, with one user calling the protagonist "Lebanon's Lara Croft."

"All of society is interested in what is going on here," the Algeria-born sociologist Nasser Al-Jabi told DW, calling the protests peaceful and inclusive. "That could be an example for others to follow," he said.

The woman who kicked the bodyguard aside, women participating in the protests have attempted to enforce nonviolence. "There are a number of demonstrators who want to destroy public property during protests," the demonstrator Hanin Nasser told Lebanon's *Daily Star* newspaper. She said she and her friends were strictly against such actions. Instead, they place great stock in maintaining the peaceful face of the protests.

Megaphones, belly dance

The demands that women issue through megaphones range from intensifying the fight against corruption to the resignation of Prime Minister Saad Hariri and the rest of the political establishment.

Some women have used belly dance as the medium for their social engagement. Misogynists have written online that they are not amused by the open and fun-loving attitudes that some women are displaying.

Many protesters wear headscarves, and many do not. That comes as little surprise in cosmopolitan Lebanon, where Sunnis, Shiites, Druze and Christians live side by side. The comparatively casual clothing that Lebanese protesters wear has led to

heated discussions – but also support from women across the Middle East. [56]

'What masculinity is'

The Egyptian women's rights advocate Hend ElKholy wrote on Facebook that it was inspiring that women in Lebanon could wear shorts and walk through a group of men without getting harassed. "If anybody wants to know what masculinity is, they can see it here," she wrote. "Women feel safe in this group. Not one single man seeks to limit their freedom or to harass them – neither verbally nor physically."

ElKholy was contrasting the situation for women in Lebanon with that of women in Egypt, where they continue to face humiliation, harassment and attacks. Many who participated in Egypt's 2011 uprising were sexually assaulted by security forces – and even male protesters.

And the social media reaction from

some men within Egypt seems to make ElKholy's case for her. "I was watching the protests in Lebanon, but when my wife got home I quickly changed to the channel that was covering the war in Yemen," the Egyptian billionaire Naguib Sawiris wrote on Twitter, his "joke of the day."

Many women responded that it was an expression of masculine hubris. "Think back to when there were protests in your country," the Lebanese actor Nicole Saba fired back. "Nobody was making jokes. It is strange that you like those kinds of jokes, and it is shameful."

A user called Doja wrote: "Enough of ignorant and insulting jokes, enough male chauvinism already."

Another pointed out that "it is wrong to turn popular protests into a punchline, but it is even worse to make jokes about women."

An enduring fight

Many people were also extremely upset by an article in the Saudi

Arabian newspaper Okaz. A report on the protests was headlined "Lebanese Beauties: All of These Wonderful Women Are Revolutionaries."

The article consisted mainly of selected photos of "attractive" protesters whom the paper described as "not only wonderful, but also revolutionary." Needless to say, the sexism upset demonstrators in Lebanon. "That is miserable journalism, one that uses the language of perverts," one Twitter user wrote, adding that "these images are a provocation and have no place in a respected newspaper."

And the struggle for women within Lebanon is intense. A law that had kept rapists from facing jail time if they promised to marry their victims had remained on the books until 2017. And in 2018 a number of women's organizations banded together to start the nationwide "Shame on Who?" campaign to raise public support for people who had reported sexual assault with the reminder to "condemn the rapist – not the victim."

Source : [DW](#).

Work two hours a day to save the climate and biodiversity

18 November 2019, by **Daniel Tanuro**

This reasoning is confirmed by the IPCC special report on 1.5 °C warming. According to this, to have even half a chance of not exceeding 1.5 °C of global warming, net global emissions of CO2 must decrease by 58% by 2030, by 100% by 2050 and be negative between 2050 and 2100. Since fossil fuels cover 80% of mankind's energy needs, it is obvious that such a drastic reduction in emissions is not possible without a reduction in the amount of energy used, and such a significant decrease cannot simply be the result of consumption savings or a spontaneous rise in energy efficiency - in other

words: ultimately, it is necessary to produce and travel less.

Produce less, convey less, share more

According to the IPCC, a scenario without exceeding the 1.5 °C threshold requires reducing global energy consumption by 15% in 2030 and 32% by 2050. These figures are actually underestimated because they are based on a scenario in which the

share of nuclear energy increases by 59% in 2030 and by 150% in 2050 (about 200 additional plants worldwide). [57] If we exclude nuclear madness (and we must), it follows that energy consumption must decrease by at least 20% in 2030 and by 40% in 2050. Reductions of this magnitude are not feasible without a substantial reduction in activity in the sphere of production.

Proponents of green capitalism tell us that the ecological/climate crisis is a great opportunity to revive the global economy, to create new markets and therefore new jobs. This is an obvious

counter-truth. This productivist discourse leads us straight to the transformation of the ecological disaster into a cataclysm, what scientists call the "oven planet". To avoid the cataclysm, it is urgent to produce less, to transport less, to share more.

As a priority, sharing wealth and distributing the necessary work to all, that is, reducing working time without loss of pay, with reduced work rates, so with more than proportional hiring (This article does not examine the question of domestic labour, which should however be taken into account to draw up a plan of eco-socialist transition). This demand is at the heart of the eco-socialist alternative urgently needed today.

Quantity and quality of work

How much should working time be reduced for climate stabilization? The question can be answered from the "residual carbon budget" (i.e. the amount of CO₂ that can still be sent into the atmosphere to have a certain probability of not exceeding a certain warming limit). The scientific publications synthesized by the IPCC give estimates of this "budget" at the global scale, of 1.5 °C and 2 °C. Just divide them by the population to have the residual carbon budget per person.

Knowing the carbon intensity of the economy (the amount of CO₂ per unit of GDP) and the productivity of labour (in dollars per hour), we can then calculate the working time which respects the carbon budget. According to a researcher who did the calculation for 2 °C, this maximum working time would be a little less than six hours per week for OECD countries. [58]

It's only an estimate, and it should be taken with caution. First, it assumes a linear relationship between hours of work and greenhouse gas emissions, unchanged carbon intensity of the economy, and unchanged intensity of labour, and each of these points is questionable. Secondly, the sharing of the overall residual carbon budget is

done without taking into account the differentiated responsibilities of the countries of the South and the North, which is unfair.

Above all, the estimate is incomplete: apart from ignoring the free hours devoted to domestic work (which patriarchy imposes mainly on women), it only approaches work in terms of the number of hours worked; that is to say, in terms of quantity. However, the ecological transition also requires the quality of work to be taken into account: stopping the ecological and social disaster requires the elimination of unnecessary or harmful activities in order to develop others, or even to create new ones.

Suppressing useless and harmful production

A long list of unnecessary and harmful production and transport (in whole or in part) could be drawn up: weapons production, automobile production, agribusiness input production, petrochemical plastics production, transportation of fossil fuels (30% of maritime transport), agribusiness-related transport (a quarter of global transport), planned obsolescence of products and so on. We know - or we could know - for each of these activities the amount of fossil energy consumed, and therefore the greenhouse gas emissions. It would therefore be possible to draw up an emergency plan for the rapid reduction of emissions by eliminating this production and transport (it goes without saying that this plan must guarantee the maintenance of employment and the incomes of the workers in these sectors).

This angle of attack is almost totally absent from the scientific work on reducing emissions. There is not a single referenced scientific publication, to my knowledge, that makes an inventory of emissions that could be removed by stopping the production of weapons, for example. [59] Why? Because most researchers who work on climate

change mitigation scenarios are subject to the productivist dogma of capitalist profit, competition, and so on. The IPCC writes: "Climate models assume fully functioning markets and competitive market behaviour". [60]

Develop and create care activities for people and ecosystems

Activities to be developed or created can be classified into three categories based on their carbon footprint. Firstly, activities related to the transformation of the energy system (production of renewable energy converters, networking, massive conversion to rail and public transport and so on) involve significant greenhouse gas emissions. Secondly, many service activities that have a low carbon footprint are to be massively developed in the personal care sector (early childhood care, the disabled, elderly and sick, reinvestment in education and health and so on) and nature care (planting hedges, creating wetlands, ecological networks of territories and so on). The third category includes productive activities whose necessary ecological reorientation will reduce carbon emissions: the dismantling of agribusiness, the meat industry, productivist forestry and industrial fishing fall into this category. However, this ecological reorientation requires a huge increase in the number of people employed in agriculture, livestock, forestry and fishing.

We need millions of workers!

Take a sector that we do not talk about very much, that of fishing. The comparison between industrial fishing and small-scale fishing (boats of 15m or less) is enlightening. Industrial fishing and small-scale fishing each year take the same tonnage of fish for human consumption: thirty million tons. The first - receiving \$ 25-27 billion in subsidies - employs about

500,000 people, consumes 37 million tons of fuel, emits 8 to 20 million tons of fuel into the sea, and transforms another 35 million tons into oil or animal feed. The second - which receives only 5 to 7 billion in subsidies - employs twelve million people, consumes 5 million tons of fuel, rejects a negligible amount of catch, and transforms almost no fish into oil or animal feed.

In addition, the comparative efficiency of the two systems is irrefutable: one to two tonnes of fish per tonne of fuel for industrial fishing, four to eight tonnes for small fishing! [61] The data available for agriculture, livestock and forestry tell the same story: breaking with the industrial exploitation of resources is good for the climate, good for biodiversity, good for public health and potentially very, very good for employment. Neo-Malthusian misanthropists claim that half of humanity must disappear to save nature; however, this is false: in reality, "saving nature" requires changes in production methods that require the collaboration of millions of workers!

An eco-socialist plan is needed

Considering all of this, how much would it take to reduce working time? We see that the answer is not so simple. There is a certainty: it is certainly necessary to work much, much less: this is what is indicated to us by the calculation of the maximum number of working hours compatible with the residual carbon budget (less than 6 hours per week in the countries of the OECD), and the mass of useless or harmful productions to be suppressed. But the protection of psychological and physical health also requires working much less quickly, to

drastically reduce the hardship of work.

On the other hand, it is necessary to take account of all these activities to be developed or created, some of which can drastically reduce emissions or even absorb large amounts of carbon. These activities contain enormous amounts of jobs that are socially and ecologically useful, and therefore meaningful. Balancing all these components underlines the urgent need for very large-scale ecological and social planning. Democracy in developing this planning is absolutely crucial. This is a condition sine qua non of success and this condition reinforces the need for a radical reduction of working time, without loss of wages.

"The only possible freedom"

The overproduction-overconsumption cycle is the source not only of environmental destruction and social inequality, but also endless frustrations. The escalation of more and more disproportionate desires does not lead to freedom but to slavery. True freedom is in self-limitation. As Marx says, "Freedom in this field can only consist in socialised man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by the blind forces of Nature.... But it nonetheless still remains a realm of necessity. Beyond it begins that development of human energy, which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom, which, however, can blossom forth only with this realm of necessity as its basis. The shortening of the working-day is its basic prerequisite". The ecological crisis teaches us that, even more than

in the time of Marx, the reduction of working time is today the "essential condition" of a rational management of the "exchanges of matter" between humanity and nature.

Two hours a day

In the name of realism in the face of degraded power struggles, some people will shrink from the idea of fighting for the duration of work to be reduced to two days per week at most. "It is already so difficult to mobilize, to raise awareness of the ecological crisis, useless to load the boat yet," they say. This may not be quite the right conclusion to draw from the analysis of the situation. Certainly, our social camp needs victories, even limited ones (for example the restoration of the age of the pension to 65 years!).

But it also needs a social project. Perhaps the prospect of a very radical reconquest of time is the best way to win the popular classes to the need for an eco-socialist transformation that will certainly involve giving up the satisfaction of alienated needs, consumerist desires that are disproportionate and serve as a miserable compensation for a miserable social existence.

This was the message of Paul Lafargue, Marx's son-in-law, in his "right to laziness": a time of employment of three hours per day maximum. In the face of the ecological crisis, it is time, high time, to resume the process and update the demand. Two hours a day is probably enough to produce all the goods and services we really need "in the most dignified conditions and those most consistent with human nature." Three hours a day would give workers time to discuss what is done or produced, how, and for what purpose.

Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act (HKHRDA): A Progressive Critique

17 November 2019

Earlier this month, tens of thousands of Hongkongers marched to the U.S. Consulate in support of the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act (HKHRDA), in order to solicit the help of the U.S. to counteract the pressures from Beijing. The HKHRDA is an act in the U.S. Congress supported by some prominent individuals and organizations associated with Hong Kong's protest movement. The act was passed unanimously in the House of Representatives, and is currently being received in the Senate. The act promises "to support the democratic aspirations of the people of Hong Kong," but ultimately limits this support to only elements "directly relevant to United States interests in Hong Kong." Hence, the bill's sections are heavily entangled with U.S. foreign policy and its other national interests. In addition, the bill neglects to support the key demands of Hong Kong protestors and to condemn the central repressive legislations of the HKSAR government. Uncritical and unconditional support of this legislation may create opportunities for the further erosion of Hongkongers' aim for self-autonomy.

In the guise of lending support to Hong Kong's freedom struggle, some of the bill's provisions compel Hong Kong to help enforce U.S. sanctions on Iran and North Korea and even aid the U.S. in extraditing its political fugitives - including whistleblowers. In addition, numerous human rights organizations and experts have established that U.S. sanctions have been directly causing alarming shortages in basic medical supplies for Iran and other countries. How can we expect the international community to support our human rights if we agree to legislation that limits other peoples' human rights too?

From experience and history, we note that U.S. foreign policy directives have not protected human rights, peoples' right to self-determination, and civil democracy abroad, from the invasion of Iraq in 2003 to the sudden

withdrawal from recognizing the Republic of China, led by the Kuomintang at the time, as the sole legitimate representative of China in 1979. Regardless of one's position toward Taiwan's sovereignty, the fact remains that the U.S. has a record of betraying its protection of other people's self-determination, most recently demonstrated by the Trump administration's recent withdrawal of support from the Kurds. We must remember that Hong Kong once refused Edward Snowden's extradition back to the U.S., a decision broadly supported by Hongkongers at the time, as a demonstration of respect for human rights and freedom of speech. In keeping with the spirit of the movement, the recognition of Hongkongers' right to autonomy should be treated separately from another nation's foreign policy aspirations. The U.S. Congress had demonstrated before that delinking these matters is viable in such legislation: the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986, for one, stands with the international community to oppose South Africa's apartheid regime without any mention of the U.S.'s own national and economic interests.

Furthermore, this bill reaffirms the U.S.'s right from the U.S.-Hong Kong Policy Act of 1992 to determine whether Hong Kong is "sufficiently autonomous." While certain groups argue that the U.S. has economic incentive to never issue a negative certification, we think this is beside the main point of contradiction: that under the current conditions attached to the HKHRDA, Hong Kong's right to autonomy and democratic self-determination would continue to be bound, albeit to another foreign power. We see this as antithetical to the original aspirations of the anti-extradition bill movement.

The bill's most recent iteration also neglects to name its support for the movement's remaining four key demands, namely, 1) the retraction of the characterization of the protests as

"riots", 2) the release and exoneration of protestors who have been arrested, 3) creation of an independent commission to inquire into police's abuse of power, and 4) universal suffrage for Legislative Council and Chief Executive elections. It is deeply embarrassing that the HKSAR government has still failed to provide the basic right to vote for every citizen. And the bill must also be updated to condemn Carrie Lam's recent use of the colonial-era Emergency Regulations Ordinance act to ban masks, except under certain circumstances. This is a blatant violation of basic human rights in the city, tantamount to extra-judicially enacting martial law.

Lastly, the HKHRDA would be no more than mere gestural support if it does not help uplift other key struggles for basic democratic rights that have long predated this movement but remain unaddressed by the government. Labor groups and other political organizations have briefly won the right to collective bargaining for Hong Kong workers before the Handover, but the HKSAR government immediately struck down these rights mere weeks after its ascendancy to power in 1997. Many political organizations and other civil society advocates have been struggling to recover these rights since then, to ensure basic democratic rights for every worker. These demands for basic human rights have been consistently undermined by the HKSAR government, and any international support for Hong Kong human rights and democracy should address these elements.

Therefore, we ask civil society advocates, progressive organizations, and other supporters of Hongkongers' struggle to help ask Congress to address the following points:

1. Declare support for the remaining four demands of the protestors' Five Demands
2. Ask the HKSAR government to immediately stop the "Mask Ban

Law'

3. Support the Protect Hong Kong Act, which prohibits the sale of anti-riot and other crowd control weaponry to the Hong Kong police. The Hong Kong Police Force has been using U.S.-made tear gas weapons to terrorize the protestors and journalists, affecting communities even beyond those participating in the demonstrations /?

Edit the following points of issue in the HKHRDA bill

- Erase the sections of the bill that do not relate at all to supporting the "democratic aspirations of the Hong Kong people" and only benefits the U.S.'s own national interests often to the detriment of our own, particularly those relating to U.S. foreign policy: sanctions to North Korea and Iran,

assistance with the extradition of the U.S. "political fugitives", etc.?

- Delink this bill to the limitations included in the U.S.-Hong Kong Policy Act of 1992. Hong Kong's right to autonomy should not be left in the hands of any foreign power, be it China or the U.S
- Add sections in support of Hongkongers' right to collective bargaining agreements

If Congress truly wishes to respect Hong Kong's democratic struggles, as the name of the legislation suggests, then these points must be addressed.

Five Demands, Not One Less!

Signed

Asian American Feminist Collective

Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance (APALA)

Borderless Movement (HK)

Eli Friedman, Associate Professor, Cornell University

Scott McLemee, Editor, New Politics magazine

Nancy Holmstrom, Professor Emerita, Rutgers University

Lausan Collective

New Bloom Magazine

The Owl (HK)

Pacific Rim Solidarity Network

Parissah Lin, NYC

Pioneer Group (HK)

Red Canary Song

Solidarity (US)

Q-Wave NYC

Workers Committee (HK)

Success of 10 November march in Paris against Islamophobia

16 November 2019, by Julien Salingue

As the organizers of the march (including the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste - NPA) pointed out in a statement, the success of 10 November is all the more remarkable as "the march was, throughout the week that preceded it, the target of a real campaign of defamation, even hatred, intended to sabotage the initiative, to delegitimize and dissuade people from going to it. The initiators have also suffered numerous attacks, some of them receiving explicit death threats."

The political and media reactions to the demonstration are in continuity

with these weeks of denigration, with miserable polemics that have no other function than to try to hide the success of the mobilization of 10 November and continue to smear the organizers and the protesters. This is the case with the pseudo-scandal of the "yellow star": while we can legitimately disagree with an equivalence between the fate of Jews living in the 1930s and 1940s and the situation of Muslims today, you have to be stupid and/or dishonest to think that those who wore this sticker did so to minimize the barbarity of Nazi policies. On the contrary, it was an awkward expression of the recognition

of Jewish suffering and a warning cry about the violence, stigmatization and discrimination faced by Muslims.

Attempts - more or less successful - at diversion are also made to mask what was the subject of the demonstration: Islamophobia, which is very real, and the increasingly degraded situation of Muslims. The march of 10 November comes in effect in reaction and in opposition to the wave of Islamophobia that has been current for several weeks, driven by the highest peaks of the state, Macron, Castaner and Blanquer in the lead. We have not forgotten Macron's speech

during the tribute to the police murdered at the Paris Prefecture, during which he affirmed the need to build a "society of vigilance" in which everyone is invited to identify "the lapses, deviations, small gestures that signal a departure from the laws and values of the Republic". In other words, a society of suspicion against Muslims and widespread denunciation.

We wrote at the end of October: "The silence of certain sectors of the social and political left are disturbing. It is not yet too late to react, but there is no doubt that without the widest possible support for Muslim victims of stigmatization and violence, and without the support and strong involvement of parties, unions, collectives and associations in the mobilizations which are starting to organize, we will not be able to put a stop to the surge underway". The least we can say, and we can only rejoice, is that some clarifications have been made, or are being made, and that the call for the march (see below) on 10 November, as well as the success of the latter, have largely contributed to this. The social and political left ranging from the CGT trade union confederation to the France Insoumise parliamentary group, including also EÉLV (French Greens), the trade union federations FSU and Solidaires, the libertarians of the UCL, the PCF (Communist Party), Génération.s or Lutte ouvrière, demonstrated on Sunday against Islamophobia, in support of those most affected by it and alongside various Muslim organizations. [62]

A success that calls for others. As pointed out, again, by the organizers in their press release: "We will not stop here because, unfortunately, the success this march is also due to a particularly worrying context for Muslim citizens. The NPA will continue to lead the fight, and the debates, to build solidarity with Muslim people who are stigmatized and assaulted, and to refuse to be dragged into the realm of hatred and divisions facing a government. whose policies target all employees, the popular classes and young people."

On 10 November, in Paris we will say STOP to Islamophobia

For far too long, Muslim women and men in France have been the target of speeches sometimes from "political leaders", invective and polemics relayed by certain media, thus contributing to their growing stigmatization.

For years, the dignity of Muslim women and men has been thrown into the graveyard, pointed to the most racist groups that now occupy the French political and media space, without any measure of the seriousness of the situation being taken.

For years, the acts against them have intensified: discrimination, freedom bills or laws, physical attacks on women wearing headscarves, attacks on mosques or imams, even attempted murder.

The attack on the Bayonne mosque on 28 October was the most recent manifestation of this attack, and the State services are aware that the terrorist threat against Muslim places of worship is high.

It was necessary for this violence to emerge in the eyes of all, through the humiliation of a mother and her child by an RN elected representative at the Burgundy-Franche-Comté General Council, for everyone to realize what associations, academics, personalities, trade unions, activists and inhabitants, have rightly denounced for years: Islamophobia in France is a reality. Whatever we call it, this is no longer a debate of ideas or criticism of religions, but an explicit form of racism that targets people because of their faith. We must now unite and give ourselves the means to fight it, so that Muslims can never again be subjected to such treatment.

Since speeches and declarations of intent are no longer enough, because this is a serious time: on 10 November in Paris we will march to say:

- STOP to the racist speeches that are being broadcast all day long on our screens, in the general indifference and complicit silence of the state institutions responsible for combating racism.

- STOP discrimination against women wearing headscarves, leading to their progressive exclusion from all spheres of society.

- STOP violence and aggression against Muslims, who are gradually becoming dehumanized and stigmatized, making them potential terrorists or enemies from within.

- STOP abusive denunciations up to the highest level of the State against Muslims whose only crime is their real or supposed belonging to a religion.

- STOP to these mass surveillance devices that lead to the outright criminalization of religious practice.

The consequences, particularly for dismissed employees and destabilised families, are disastrous and can no longer be tolerated. This criminalization is at the expense of fundamental freedoms and the most basic principles of equality that should guide our country.

We, Muslims or not, say STOP to Islamophobia and we will be many to say it together on 10 November in Paris.

We call on all organizations, associations, collectives, parent federations, political parties, personalities, the media and people in solidarity to join this solemn appeal and to respond to the march on 10 November.

The same applies to the fundamental freedoms of all. The dignity and integrity of millions of fellow citizens are at stake. It is about the unity of all of us, against racism in all its forms, which today once again threatens France.

Appeal initiated by Madjid Messaoudene (local councillor Saint-

Denis), la Plateforme L.e.s. Musulmans; Le Nouveau Parti anticapitaliste (NPA); le Comité Adama; le Collectif contre l'islamophobie en France (CCIF); l'Union communiste libertaire (UCL); l'Union nationale des étudiants de France (Unef), Taha Bouhafs (journaliste).

First signatories : Action Antifasciste Paris Banlieue (AFA) ; Arié Alimi, avocat ; Pouria Amirshahi , directeur de publication de Politis ; Manon Aubry, eurodéputée ; Etienne Balibar, universitaire ; Ludivine Bantigny, historienne ; Yassine, Belattar, humoriste ; Esther Benbassa, sénatrice EE-LV de Paris ; Olivier Besancenot, NPA ; Saïd Bouamama, sociologue ; Leïla Chaïbi, eurodéputée LFI ; André Chassaigne, député, président du groupe GDR ; David Cormand, secrétaire national d'EE-LV ; Laurence De Cock,

enseignante ; Vikash Dhorasoo, ancien de joueur de foot, parrain d'Oxfam et président de Tatane ; Rokhaya Diallo, journaliste et réalisatrice ; Pierre Jacquemain, rédacteur en chef de Regards ; Eric Fassin, sociologue ; Elsa Faucillon, députée PCF ; Fédération syndicale unitaire (FSU) ; Fianso, artiste ; Front uni des immigrations et des quartiers populaires (FUIQP) ; Geneviève Garrigos, féministe, militante des Droits humains ; Vincent Geisser, politologue ; Alain Gresh, journaliste ; Nora Hamadi, journaliste ; Benoît Hamon, Génération.s ; Yannick Jadot (eurodéputé EE-LV) ; Mathilde Larrère, historienne ; Mathieu Longatte (Bonjour Tristesse) ; Philippe Martinez, secrétaire général de la CGT ; Jean-Luc Mélenchon et l'ensemble du groupe parlementaire La France insoumise ; Marwan Muhammad, auteur et statisticien ;

Younous Omarjee, eurodéputé ; Stéphane Peu, député PCF ; Edwy Plenel, journaliste ; Maryam Pougetoux et Mélanie Luce, Unef ; Jérôme Rodrigues, gilet jaune ; Julien Salingue, docteur en science politique ; Pierre Serne (porte-parole de Génération.s) ; Michèle Sibony et l'Union juive française pour la paix (UJFP) ; Laura Slimani, élue de Rouen, direction nationale de Génération.s ; Azzédine Taïbi, maire PCF de Stains ; Sylvie Tissot, sociologue ; Aida Touihri, journaliste ; Assa Traoré, comité Adama ; Aurélie Trouvé, porte-parole d'Attac ; Union syndicale Solidaires ; Dominique Vidal, journaliste et historien.

List of signatories as published on 1 November 019 in [Libération-https://www.liberation.fr/debats/2019/11/01/le-10-novembre-a-paris-nous-dirons-stop-a-l-islamophobie_1760768].

Dangerous liaisons: Can Podemos make a deal to govern Spain?

15 November 2019, by Jaime Pastor

Reading the pre-agreement obliges us to consider it a declaration of intent, full of generalities and ambiguities except, coincidentally, when it comes to the two most important questions facing a potential government. One is related to Catalonia, where the text states in point 9: "Guarantee coexistence in Catalonia: the Government of Spain will prioritize guarantees of coexistence in Catalonia and the normalization of political life. To that end, dialogue in Catalonia will be normalized, seeking formulas for understanding and dialogue, strictly within constitutional limits. Moreover, the federal state's guarantees of autonomy will be strengthened to ensure adequate provision of rights and services under its jurisdiction. We will guarantee equality among all Spaniards."

As you can see, this paragraph adopts

the thesis, not only of the PSOE but also of the conservative Partido Popular (PP) and the faltering populist right-wing party Cuididanos, that the Catalan issue is a conflict between Catalans and not a conflict between the majority of Catalans and the Spanish State. The pre-agreement also proposes to seek "formulas for understanding and dialogue, strictly within constitutional limits" to which they tack on the promise to "guarantee equality among all Spaniards." This is a faulty argument which denies the national and cultural diversity existent within of the Spanish State. There is nothing about pluri-nationality or a willingness to reject the criminalization of the conflict and past repressive consequences that continue to this day.

The other argument that, despite its

ambiguity, is made explicit is point 10, where - although it refers to "fiscal justice" (what?) - it accepts the limitations of EU budget discipline by using the euphemism of a "budget balance." And, that "the evaluation and control of public spending is essential for the maintenance of a sustained and lasting welfare state." In sum, neoliberal austerity restrictions are implicitly accepted without any mention of the repealing article 135 of the Constitution, whose amendment in September 2011 guaranteed constitutional obedience to the European debtocracy.

It is true that in the other points of the pre-agreement there is talk of "combating employment insecurity" (but not about the repeal of the last two joint neoliberal labor reforms passed by the PSOE and the PP), of "shielding of pensions," of "housing as

a right and not as merely a commodity" (what?), of the "fight against climate change" (although in point 1 there is talk of "consolidating growth"), of the "right to a dignified death," of "Spain as a country of conscience and dignity," of "feminist policies" and of "support for the abandoned regions of Spain..." But, as can be seen, none of this is concrete and there are striking absences and "forgotten" items. For instance, there is no mention at all of any change to the deadly migratory policies that have drowned tens of thousands in the Mediterranean, or the closure of the Immigration Detention Centers (CIEs) or the repeal of the gag laws, old and the new. All this stands in contrast to previously mentioned points 9 and 10 (covering Catalonia and the debt) that constitute the hard core of PSOE policy aimed at maintaining its hegemony in any potential new government. All of this notwithstanding, it remains to be seen if a PSOE-UP could win the necessary votes for securing the investiture of Sánchez as prime minister and the formation of a parliamentary government, even in a second round of voting which would require only a simple majority, meaning that some parties could abstain in the vote.

In view of the parliamentary arithmetic resulting from the last elections, all eyes are now on the Republican Left of Catalonia party (ERC) and its 13 parliamentary votes which has shown in recent times a willingness to dialogue with the PSOE, but which has so far not met with success. However, neither the continuity of a repressive Catalan policy, nor a potential call for new Catalan elections in spring, allows much room for maneuver for the ERC leadership as it finds itself in fierce competition with the pro-independence Junts per Catalunya (Together for Catalonia) and the left-wing, pro-independence Popular Unity Candidacy (CUP), which are both predisposed to vote against the creation of any PSOE-centered government. The ERC's reaction, therefore, to this pre-agreement has been to demand the "creation of negotiations and dialogue between

equals" at the state level where everything can be discussed, including recognition that the Catalan question is a conflict that must be resolved politically and not judicially, which implies, therefore, that Catalonia's right to self-determination can be put up for question. Of course, Pedro Sánchez - aside from some kind words - will never accept any of these demands, although we cannot rule out some rhetorical gestures towards papering things over in the coming weeks. Sánchez's ace in the hole will most likely be to accuse UP and the Catalan parties of siding with the PP, the far-right Vox and the right-populist Ciudadanos parties - a sort of parliamentary "lesser evilism" - if they don't play ball with the PSOE, this in hopes of securing their abstention, and therefore a potential narrow majority, in a final governmental investiture vote.

As for an agreement with the PP, which is the other potential investiture option for Sánchez and the PSOE - one that Spain's great economic powers and the deep state are pushing for - we should not be surprised by the conservative's angry reaction to the PSOE-UP pre-agreement. In fact, despite declarations from their leader rejecting any possibility of a pact with the PSOE, the PP was waiting for Sánchez to come begging so they could impose their own conditions on him in order to secure a PP parliamentary abstention (which might allow Sánchez to form a minority government) and thus avoid a new call for elections. Regarding Vox, we need not expand on their reaction which consisted of calling for a fight against the PSOE's alliance with communism and Bolivarianism, that is, what they see as taking the Venezuelan path.

Among people on the left, on the other hand, it is only logical that there is a sense of relief and of a realistic and modest hope for change, which is, after all, seen as putting the brakes on the threat posed by the rise of Vox and the potential for a pact between the PSOE and the PP. However, we continue to believe that neither a/ the nature of the PSOE as the dominant

party in a potential governmental regime, nor b/ the deteriorating relationship of forces within the UP after the elections, permits us to hope that - in the event that a PSOE-UP government is formed - this will lead to any significant radical response towards the two main challenges facing such a regime: the democratic resolution of the Catalan-Spanish conflict and disobeying the dictates of authoritarian neoliberalism. Can we even imagine radical UP leader Pablo Iglesias as vice president co-existing alongside neoliberal economist and EU-darling Nadia Calviño as Minister of Economics and co-vice president?

We will, therefore, follow the possible details of this pre-agreement in the coming weeks, insisting for our part on the risks it poses to the UP as it is ever more subordinated to an Iglesias-centered, hyper-leadership and with an already greatly weakened party structure as it seeks to enter into an agreement with the PSOE. Even if its express goal is to counteract processes of transformism, that is, of adapting itself to neoliberal Spanish state structures, I fear this process is already underway and it may become difficult to reverse.

In any case, we must remember that it is one thing to form a government and it another thing to govern within the confines of a particular correlation of forces in the Congress of Deputies and the Senate and, above all, within the systemic constraints in which the legislature operates. Our task should be not to look on as spectators in the coming weeks and months, rather - as is already happening in Catalonia in the wake of the democratic Tsunami of mass action - to once again give centrality to confrontation, to struggles in the streets and in our workplaces, to demand a radical turn towards the left and towards democratization based on mobilization, self-organization, and popular empowerment in the face of a regime in permanent crisis.

13 November 2019

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Against the coup in Bolivia

14 November 2019, by **Fourth International Bureau**

In the early 2000s, Bolivian social movements in the countryside and cities, led by indigenous peasants, built a long and arduous process of struggle against neoliberal measures, which accentuated the country's extreme poverty by privatizing everything, including water. Little by little, an anti-neo-liberal consensus was formed in the Andean country, and the right lost ground. Then Evo Morales, at the head of the MAS emerged as an electoral alternative to the regime. There was a pulsating, lively and intense process of mobilization and debate that brought Morales and Garc a Linera to power in 2006. Bolivia's history was changing, and a constituent Assembly with indigenous present and activity was formed, which shaped the Constitution that would transform Bolivia into a Plurinational State. In 2008, the extreme right, formed mainly by oligarchies of white landowners, attempted a coup d' tat by blocking the approval of the new constitution. Pressure and popular mobilisation were immense, and the Constitution was promulgated in 2009. A moment of intense dispute over hegemony thus closed and a period of greater stability began under the leadership of the MAS.

With the favourable international economic and political context, Bolivia laid the foundations for economic stability with growth, income distribution and poverty reduction. These were little affected by the international crisis of 2008, which brought so many negative consequences for the world and for Latin America. During the years of Evo's government, Bolivia transformed its state structure to broaden the forms of participation of indigenous peoples, quadrupled its GDP, reduced extreme poverty from 35.2% to 15.2%, and was the fastest growing country in the region. However, little by little,

both because of the country's structural limits and because of management errors, the so-called process of change began to show its limits. The tension between rhetorical well-being and a developmental and extractivist project led to serious crises in the government and the loss of support from its bases, as early as 2012. In addition to that, the difficulty of leadership renewal also reinforced the difficulty of sustainability of that process over time.

In Bolivia, the new constitution (promulgated in 2009 during Evo's first term) allows only one re-election. However, it was understood that Evo's first term, initiated under the previous constitution, did not count. He was therefore "elected for the first time under the new constitution" in 2009. He was then re-elected in 2014. Theoretically, he could no longer be a candidate. With the difficulty of renewing the leadership, the MAS proposed a referendum to decide if he could try again, and in 2016 Evo was defeated in the vote, his candidacy was prevented. He appealed to the Supreme Court and had his application approved. Under these conditions of attrition, in 2019, he was a candidate against Carlos Mesa, one of the bastions of neoliberalism that had been defeated in 2005 by social mobilizations. Evo won the first round of the elections in a poorly conducted and confusing process, and the opposition accused him of fraud. The OAS, with a political position to the right, has suggested new elections. Under pressure, Evo Morales accepted. But the extreme right has dealt a sinister blow.

The Bolivian extreme right, which had been defeated in 2008, returned with all its strength in an international context favourable to it, with Trump as president of the United States and Bolsonaro governing Brazil. Led by

Fernando Camacho, a Christian fundamentalist, she gradually managed to convince the military to join the coup, and that decided the process.

There is no doubt that the equivocations of Evo Morales, Garc a Linera and the MAS in leading the Bolivian change process contributed to the creation of conditions of social dissatisfaction and the construction of "democratic" arguments for the coup right. However, the coup did not take place because of the errors of Evo's government, but to counteract its achievements and its symbolic weight: social inclusion, autonomy and the emancipation of so many native peoples, the reduction of inequalities and poverty.

The method used to force the resignation of the president was violence, with the burning of houses of relatives and sympathizers, rape and public humiliation. Shortly after the resignation, the violence is continuing and all supporters of Evo Morales are under threaten. There are reports of forced "disappearances" and arbitrary detentions. It is a classic *coup d' tat*, with a coalition of police, military and civic committees.

Evo Morales and his co-religionists do not deserve to be arrested or persecuted. The Bolivian population has suffered too much historically. We want and will contribute to them gaining the strength to recover their country. All solidarity with the Bolivian people, all solidarity with Evo Morales and his comrades, all solidarity with Bolivia. May the wind that brought the coup not last for long and may the Bolivian people recover the country. The struggle never ends!

They shall not pass!

14 November 2019

Spain's permanent crisis regime

13 November 2019, by Jaime Pastor

With a participation rate of 69.87 percent, six points lower than during the last elections in April and probably reflecting a higher rate of abstention among the youth, the most relevant facts among the results was the enormous growth of Vox, the new far-right party that won more than 3.5 million votes, or 14.09 percent growing from 24 to 52 seats in parliament. Next in importance is the decline of Ciudadanos, which fell from 15.86 percent to just 6.79 percent, dropping from 57 to 10 seats, loses which forced the resignation of party leader Albert Rivera. Meanwhile, the center-right Popular Party (PP) rebounded less than expected from 16.69 percent in April to 20.82 percent this weekend, increasing its parliamentary representatives from 66 to 88, plus two more from its Navarra Suma joint list with Ciudadanos and the Navarre People's Union regional party. All this confirms a tendency of greater radicalization to the right by the conservative end of the electorate stimulated by the adoption of Vox's talking points throughout the campaign by both the PP and Ciudadanos. This went so far that these parties joined Vox to support a proposal to outlaw pro-independence parties in the Madrid City Assembly.

Faced with this reactionary pole, pro-sovereignty political forces in Catalonia (the Republican Left of Catalonia-ERC won 13 seats, Together for Catalonia-Junts per Cat won 8, and the Popular Unity Candidacy-CUP won 2 after deciding to stand in a federal election for the first time), the Basque Country (the Basque National Party-PNV won 7 seats and Basque Country Unite-EH Bildu won 5) and Galicia (Galician Nationalist Bloc-BNG won 1 seat), along with others without sovereign state ambitions (the Canary New Left Coalition won 2 seats, the Cantabria Regional Party won 1, and the newly-formed Tereul Existe won 1 as well), confirmed the growing national-territorial fracturing that is

extending itself across the entire state.

As for the PSOE, its results fell compared to April from 28.67 percent to 28.00 percent, losing more than 700,000 votes; however, owing to advantages from the electoral system, it only lost 3 seats, ending up with 120. For its part, Unidas Podemos lost nearly 600,000 votes and 7 seats, declining to 35 parliamentary representatives.

Más PaĀs (More Country), led by former Podemos leader IĀigo ErrejĀn and allied with CoaliciĀ CompromĀs in the Valencian Community gained around a half million votes, or 2.08 percent, winning just 3 seats compared to the 15 seats projected initially by some polling. This represents a complete collapse for ErrejĀn's aspiration to offer himself as a fulcrum in talks for the formation of a PSOE government by being willing to offer greater programmatic concessions than those Unidas Podemos could.

The campaign

Time will reveal what factors influenced the rise of Vox, but it seems probable that its entry into parliament during the April elections initiated within it a process of normalization achieved through its acceptance as an ally on the part of the PP and Ciudadanos. Both parties have taken on some of its main rhetorical points, especially with regards to Catalonia and they have adopted a policy of expressive silence - when not outright complicit - when it comes to Vox's calamities and lies targeting feminism and immigration. It tested this normalization during the televised debates, allowing it to snatch an important portion of both the PP and Ciudadanos electorate. It does this by presenting itself as the best guarantor of conservative coherence

by posing as an outsider, even though its principal leaders emerged from the PP itself. Additionally, this time Vox initiated appeals to the popular classes against the Brussels bureaucracy and "the rich" even if their rhetoric contrasts with their ultra-neoliberal economic policies.

Thus, we find a case of dangerously virtuous transversality that allows them to add their support in authoritarian enclaves (such as those studied by sociologist Manuel Antonio GarretĀn) inherited from the dictatorship (institutional, ethical-symbolic, and cultural) with new ones derived from exploiting resentment among Spanish-born popular sectors against the weakest and most vulnerable sectors.

As for the PSOE, SĀnchez's discourse throughout the campaign has been characterized by a rightward and increasingly authoritarian turn, offering guarantees of continuity in economic policies for the IBEX35 stock exchange (with economist Nadia CalviĀno tapped to serve as vice minister) and adopting new so-called exceptional measures, such as the digital state decree (already known as the digital gag law) and other tough measures against Catalan independence. This turn likely contributed to the PSOE's losses and, above all, their ill-fated effort to tear left-wing voters away from UP.

Regarding Unidas Podemos, it must be said that the party managed to fend off a major setback predicted in the polls thanks in part to a speech by Pablo Iglesias in which he played the victim, blaming the economic powers that be for vetoing his participation in a government with the PSOE. He also insisted on the defending the Constitution's social commitments and was willing to appear as a mediating force with respect to the Catalan question. Even so, his reduced capacity to push for programmatic

concessions from the PSOE does not seem to pose an obstacle for Iglesias to reaffirm participation in a progressive government with Sánchez. All this despite its right-wing drift, a drift denounced by Iglesias himself during the last phase of the campaign. This is a hypothesis that cannot be ruled out, one that would represent a genuine suicide by Unidas Podemos, and one that would leave Vox all alone – outside of Catalonia, the Basque Country, and Galicia – as the only party able to exercise parliamentary (and extra parliamentary) opposition.

What next?

The new correlation of forces in a more fragmented parliament – including the Senate (key to certain measures, either for the application of article 155 or for any reform of organic laws or constitutional reforms) in which the PSOE has lost the absolute majority – offers a scenario in which the difficulties that Pedro Sánchez faces in order to secure appointment as prime minister (and to then govern) will be greater than those in April.

On the one hand, an agreement with Unidas Podemos and Más PaÑs do not constitute a majority if it does not include PNV and ERC – whose support would be premised on them raising demands against a PSOE that has forgotten its federalist proposals and its increasingly criminalizing discourse regarding Catalan independence. On the other hand, the much sought after abstention vote by the PP that would allow Sanchez to form government might seem easy,

however, that would leave a flank on the PP's right, allowing Vox to accuse the PP of a cowardice.

Be that as it may, pressure from economic powers is growing in view of a potential economic recession in the European Union, as well as awareness that there is no longer the option of convening a new general election in the face of the enormous wear and tear that would entail for the political class. In general, there is reason to think that the Sánchez will run through all the different options until one that allows him to be confirmed as prime minister arises.

In any case, that investiture can no longer occur as easily as his access to the presidency of the government was achieved in the first place via a censure motion of the previous PP government. Sanchez will be forced to pay a heavy price either to Unidas Podemos, the PP, or PNV and ERC – the latter's price would also be conditioned by the next Catalan elections. Therefore, we should expect to be faced with new tactical versions of a Pedro Sánchez – still advised by his shadow guru Iván Redondo? – who, as a good Marxist of the Groucho variety, has demonstrated that neither principles nor convictions will impede his return to the presidential Moncloa Palace.

Given this scenario, and in the face of the contradictions that would be generated within Unidas Podemos in any hypothetical participation in a coalition government with the PSOE, perhaps it would be better for Unidas Podemos to seek a programmatic agreement with the left-wing, pro-

sovereign and independence political forces in order to try to force the PSOE into a radical change of course, both socially and nationally, as a precondition for deciding their joint position before the prime ministerial investiture vote. That is a battle that, although it probably would not to be won, would at least serve to demand a return to the militancy the PSOE displayed on election night as a means to counteract the pressures from above that will intensify in favor of an agreement that guarantees continuing the path towards a neoliberal and authoritarian restoration of the regime.

Whatever hypothesis finally comes to pass, the fractures and polarization reflected in the election results presage future challenges in terms of governance and stability. It is now up to the social and political left that is not willing to resign or adapt to new variants of transformism (that is, of adapting to the institutional parties) to learn from what has happened, to find out how to deepen the cracks, and to undertake a new phase of struggle for our civil, political, and social rights throughout the state. And we must do so in conjunction with the revolts that are spreading across the planet in the face of an increasingly predatory and authoritarian capitalism. The next mobilizations in defense of humanity will take place during the Climate Summit (the so-called COP25) to be held in early December in Madrid. These must be a first steps in that direction.

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Will Evo's resignation lead to Pinochet or resistance?

12 November 2019, by **Martín Mosquera**

We still do not know the scope of the events taking place in Bolivia, if the revolution can avoid being shot down,

if it can escape heaps of dead among the social movements, the indigenous peoples, and the social base of

Morales' political party, the Movimiento Al Socialismo (MAS). Evo's social defenses are powerful and

the ruling classes know they will have to break through them in order to move forward with their plans. The latest news is disturbing – burning houses, persecutions, arrests.

More big shocks lay ahead and the outcome is unwritten. El Alto – a one-million-strong, indigenous-majority city close by the capital city La Paz – has a heroic insurrectionary tradition that has brought down several governments in the past. It embodies the traditions of struggle in which Evo himself was trained.

I am interested to see what kind of polarization develops among left-wing militants and activists in the face of these facts. The left's positions are grouped into two major poles. Some are unable to position themselves properly in the fight against the coup because they stick to warnings or slogans that are already out of date. For example, the Argentine Partido de los Trabajadores para el Socialismo (PTS) published an article a couple weeks ago titled: "Neither with Evo nor with Mesa (the right-wing forces). For an independent political solution!"

even as preparations for the coup were underway and the government had to be defended. Others defend Evo and renounce their "right to criticize" a government that has just been overturned without a fight, even though it won nearly half of the votes in recent elections. It felt like a house of cards, upending what seemed to be the most stable progressive process in the region. Evo went down to defeat without putting up a fight and that fact forms part of our anguish, and should be part of our balance sheet.

We fight to win, and in order to win we must extract the proper lessons from our experiences. What Evo did yesterday, it must be said, is analogous to the actions taken by Juan Perón in 1955 in the face of a coup or those of Salvador Allende in 1973 (and the opposite of what Chavez did in 2002). Obviously these resignations and retreats, like Evo's, did not prevent any bloodshed, on the contrary they left social and political organizations and movements and the popular classes at the mercy of brutal reactionary violence. The executions of 1955 and Pinochet's genocide

testify eloquently to this reality. Counter-revolutions produce violence, not revolutions. There is no comparing the social and human cost between the two.

Evo's resignation (and that of his vice president Garcia Linera) was based on a belief that there was no other alternative. But if that were the case, it is the result of a naïve policy that was not prepared for a test of strength with the kind of authoritarian reaction that every progressive process provokes on the part of the ruling classes. It is the naivety of "class conciliation." The lessons of history in this field are incontrovertible – Allende's example remains too close to us to play with fire in this way.

Hopefully, it is not too late to avoid a historic defeat and the liquidation of one of the most notable experiences of the Latin American peoples of the last decades.

11 November 2019

Originally posted on FB. Translated by [No Borders News](#) with permission from the author.

More than just a "Spring": the Arab region's long-term revolution

10 November 2019, by Gilbert Achcar

When in late 2018 the people of Sudan took to the streets demanding an end to Omar al-Bashir's authoritarian rule, this immediately triggered memories of 2010, when Mohamed Bouazizi's self-immolation in protest against the Tunisian regime set in motion a process of popular uprisings and revolutions across the region that have since become known as the Arab Spring. Were the protests in Sudan going to set in motion a similar process?

Since then, massive protest movements have taken shape in Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon and Iraq,

each with their own specific triggers and dynamics, and with different degrees of success: whereas in Sudan and Algeria the people managed to rid themselves of their respective authoritarian rulers and in Lebanon the government was forced to resign, the uprising in Egypt was short-lived and violently repressed and the violent crackdown in Iraq already has cost the lives of hundreds of protesters.

ROAR editor Joris Leverink spoke with Gilbert Achcar, Professor of Development Studies and International Relations at SOAS, University of London and author of

many books on the Arab Spring and the geopolitics of the region, to try to make sense of it all.

How are we to understand and frame this current wave of uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa and what is their historical relevance? What are the unique dynamics of each uprising, and what are some characteristics they have in common? Why have some protest movements booked historical victories, while others were violently crushed? In this in-depth interview, Gilbert Achcar responds to these, and other, questions.

Joris Leverink: Earlier this year, when the people of Sudan and Algeria took to the streets en masse, the question was raised whether what we were seeing was the beginning of a “Second Arab Spring.” Since then, mass revolts have erupted in Egypt, Lebanon and Iraq – each with different outcomes, and the latter two still very much developing stories. You have pointed out that the terminology of an Arab “Spring” was misleading to begin with, that the revolts of 2011-13 were not a come-and-go seasonal event, but rather the beginning of a long-term revolutionary process. Could you explain this?

Gilbert Achcar: The events we see happening now across the globe occur at two different levels. One is a general crisis of neoliberal capitalism, which was exacerbated with the Great Recession of 2008. This triggered a number of social protests across the globe, and caused a political polarization expressed in the rise of the far right, on the one hand, and fortunately, on the other hand, significant developments of the radical left in some countries, including most surprisingly the United States and the United Kingdom.

Within that global framework, the most spectacular chain of events is that which started in Tunisia in December 2010 and spread to the whole Arabic-speaking region in 2011, becoming known as the “Arab Spring.” My point has been that there is something specific about the revolutionary shockwave in the Arab region – the Arabic-speaking countries of the Middle East and North Africa – which reached very spectacular proportions. The year 2011 saw major uprisings in six of the region’s countries, with all the others witnessing a very sharp rise in social protests. The general crisis of neoliberalism revealed in the Arab region a very deep structural crisis related to the specific nature of its state system.

The region’s developmental blockage was exacerbated by the prevalence of rentier patrimonial states, “patrimonial” in the sense that they are dealt with by ruling families as their private property in the region’s eight monarchies as well as in some of its so-called republics. The developmental blockage – whose most striking consequence is the fact that for decades the Arab region has had the highest rates of youth unemployment in the world – caused a gigantic explosion of social unrest across the region, which can only be overcome by a radical change encompassing its political, social and economic structures.

That is why I emphasized from the start in 2011 that this was only the beginning of a long-term revolutionary process that will carry on for years and decades with an alternation of upsurges and backlashes. It will carry on as long as no radical change has occurred in the region. The year 2013 saw a shift from the initial revolutionary wave into a counter-revolutionary backlash with old regime’s men on the offensive in Syria, Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen and Libya. From then on, the euphoria of 2011 gave way to gloom.

At the time of euphoria, I warned against the illusion that the region’s transformation will be fast and smooth, and at the time of gloom I kept asserting that there will be other uprisings, other “springs” to come.

Indeed, social eruptions have kept occurring in one country after the other since 2013: Tunisia, Morocco, Jordan, Iraq, Sudan were the most affected. And then, starting from December 2018 – eight years exactly after the start of the first wave of uprisings back in 2010 – the Sudanese protest movement shifted into uprising mode, followed by Algeria in February, with now, since October, Iraq reaching the boiling point followed by Lebanon. The global media started speaking of a “New Arab Spring.”

What is now unfolding in the Arab region proves that it is indeed a revolutionary process for the long haul that began in 2011.

This specific long-term revolutionary process in the Arab region, could you provide a few of its characteristics? What is common to all these different revolts?

What they have in common is a rejection of political regimes held responsible for increasingly intolerable social and economic conditions. Youth unemployment in the Arab region affects young graduates disproportionately in this part of the Global South, characterized by a relatively high rate of enrollment in tertiary education. The connection between this fact and uprisings that are mostly youth rebellions in which educated young people play a leading role is obvious.

Beyond the natural difference in the specific issues affecting each country, several themes are common to all the regional revolts: a longing for social equality – what the protesters call “social justice” – and for a radical change in economic conditions. They want the means to lead a dignified life, starting with a decent job.

Another common theme is freedom and democracy: political and cultural freedoms and the people’s sovereignty. The protests and uprisings have displayed a lot of cultural creativity, as happens normally with revolutionary processes – at least in their peaceful phases. I recently quoted Jean-Paul Sartre’s phrase about the May ’68 protests in France: “Imagination in power.” These are some of the common aspirations and features of the region’s struggles spearheaded by the new generation.

The recent revolts in Sudan and Algeria have both achieved significant successes – the removal of their respective long-term authoritarian leaders and a push towards the democratization of their political systems. Although it remains to be seen, of course, how these short-term victories will play out in the long term, what they have achieved thus far is remarkable. What has been the secret to the success of the uprisings in Sudan and Algeria? And what are the challenges that

lie ahead for the movements in both countries in the next few months and perhaps even years?

The uprisings in Algeria and Sudan are the two larger events of the ongoing second wave of the regional revolutionary process. [63] They have obvious similarities, but they are different in one key respect: leadership of the struggle. This difference determined different outcomes beyond toppling the president that was achieved in each country. In Sudan, Omar al-Bashir presided over a military dictatorship that worked in close alliance with Islamic fundamentalists since 1989, the year of the coup led by al-Bashir. In Algeria, the military had coopted in 1999 a civilian, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, in the role of president. In both countries, the mass uprising prompted the military to remove the president.

But these are not exceptional victories. Similar ones happened in 2011 in Tunisia, where the president was removed by the security-military complex. In Egypt, a month later, the president was removed by the military in a way very similar to what has occurred recently in Sudan and Algeria.

However, the popular movements of the latter two countries have learned the lesson of the Egyptian events. Protracted revolutionary processes are also learning curves: popular movements learn the lessons of previous revolutionary experiences and take special care not to repeat their errors. The Sudanese and the Algerians avoided the trap in which the Egyptians had fallen when they bought into illusions about the military's democratic intentions. When Egypt's military removed Hosni Mubarak from power in February 2011 and again when they toppled his successor Mohamed Morsi in July 2013, this was greeted by masses who were fooled into believing that the military were going to bring about democracy.

The masses in Sudan and Algeria had no such illusions. In both countries, the uprisings remained defiant of the military. They understood that the army, in removing the president, only sought to preserve its dictatorial

power. These were conservative coups, not even reformist coups. The Sudanese and the Algerians understood that and kept their movement going. [64] For several months now, it has become a tradition in Algeria to hold huge popular demonstrations every Friday, explicitly rejecting whatever the army proposes as a way out of the crisis.

But the key difference between the two movements "a hugely important difference indeed" is that there is no recognized leadership of the mass movement in Algeria, whereas there is very clearly one in Sudan. In Algeria, the army command is therefore behaving as if it could ignore the popular movement. They have set a date for a new presidential election in December, even though the mass movement is rejecting that unambiguously. The military are showing determination to go ahead with the election nonetheless, but it is not sure that they will manage to achieve that. The point is, however, that there is no representative counter-demand on the table: no group of people can speak in the name of the mass movement.

In Sudan, by contrast, the driving force of the movement is the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA) which was formed in 2016 as an underground network of associations of teachers, journalists, doctors, lawyers and other professions. The SPA was decisive in laying the ground for what eventually led to the popular uprising. They then convened a coalition of forces that included, along their association, feminist groups, a few political parties and some of the armed groups waging ethnic struggles against the regime. This coalition became the recognized leadership of the uprising and the military had no choice but to negotiate with them.

After months of struggle, including some tragic episodes when a section of the military tried to repress the movement bloodily, both sides reached a compromise, which can only be provisional. I characterized the situation as one of dual power "they formed a governing body in which the two opposite powers are represented: the military and the popular movement. How long they will

coexist is difficult to tell, but what is certain is that they cannot coexist forever. One of the two will eventually prevail decisively over the other.

Nevertheless, the movement in Sudan has already achieved much more and gone far beyond what has been achieved in Algeria, where the military are just ignoring "or pretending to ignore" the popular movement. The grassroots social organization that the SPA constituted in Sudan grew massively when the uprising started: it was joined by independent unions sprouting up in various sectors until it ended up organizing the bulk of the country's working class. This kind of leadership, this coordinated network of unions and associations, has been the most advanced type of leadership to emerge in the region since 2011. And it has become a model: in both Iraq and Lebanon, there are ongoing efforts at grassroots organizing inspired by the Sudanese model.

In late September protesters across Egypt took to the streets demanding the resignation of President Sisi. This time around, unlike 2011, the movement failed to mobilize the numbers needed to bring about any kind of political change. It was quickly and violently crushed by Sisi's security forces. Looking at Egypt, what is the difference between 2011 and 2019? And why did the people of Sudan and Algeria succeed in occupying the streets whereas their Egyptian brothers and sisters failed? What is different in Egypt this time around?

I have already mentioned the illusions that the Egyptian people held about the army when it toppled Mubarak in 2011. These illusions did not last long. But in 2012, the Muslim Brotherhood came to power through the election of Mohamed Morsi as president. One year later, against the background of a gigantic popular mobilization against his rule, it was Morsi's turn to be toppled by the army, with a renewal of popular illusions about the military as a force for progressive change. The illusions were even stronger this time, because of the big scare created by the way the Muslim Brotherhood behaved in power. This resulted eventually in Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's

election as president in 2014, with high popular expectations. He quickly turned out to be much worse than any of his predecessors.

Sisi has created the most repressive regime Egypt has seen in decades, a dictatorial neoliberal regime that implemented most brutally the full range of IMF's austerity recommendations, leading to massive impoverishment and huge inflation. The prices of food, basic staples, fuel, transport "all basic needs" have risen massively. Normally, people would have taken to the streets in great numbers to demand that these measures be repealed, but they were deterred by the repressive context.

Since the bloody repression of the Muslim Brotherhood that followed the second coup of 2013, a climate of terror has descended over Egypt. Add to it the fact that the population can't see an alternative to the regime at present. That's a crucial part of the problem indeed. And it brings us back to the question of popular alternatives represented by groups, organizations and associations "the problem of leadership. The recent attempts at mobilizing against Sisi in September were significant, but they failed in reaching the level required to take down a dictatorial government. It would need something on the scale of what happened in 2011 at the very least.

The recent protests were triggered by a young entrepreneur who used to do business with the military, including Sisi's entourage. For some reason, he got alienated from them and took refuge in Spain from where he started calling for an uprising through social media. That proved not enough to create the huge popular mobilization required to get rid of Sisi.

Another factor of weakness is the legacy created by massive errors of the Egyptian left, the bulk of whom supported the coup in 2013, contributing thus to fostering illusions about the military and discrediting themselves. Egypt will need something like what we have seen in Sudan; that is, the formation of a grassroots network capable of mobilizing the population and providing an alternative in its eyes. Only if

something like that emerges will there be a mass movement powerful enough to bring Sisi down.

Your home country, Lebanon, is currently witnessing what is probably the biggest popular uprising in its history. The movement has already forced the government to revoke some of the regressive taxes that it was planning to implement, and which sparked the initial protests. Prime Minister Hariri announced his resignation. These are significant successes, but the movement shows no signs of slowing down and keeps demanding the removal of the entire ruling class. What is the historic relevance of the current protests and how should we understand them in the context of the long-term revolutionary process unfolding in the region?

First, I must point to the fact that the ongoing mass movement is not the largest that Lebanon has seen in recent history. In 2005, you had a huge mobilization against Syrian domination of the country and the presence of Syrian troops, which took more impressive dimensions in the capital city Beirut. But at that time, the country was divided along sectarian lines: a mass counter-mobilization of mostly Shia people took place in support of the Syrian regime.

This time, what has been most impressive about the movement is that it has spread all over the country. It is the first time, indeed, that an uprising is not restricted to one part or one half of the country. The whole country is involved: all regions, and "most importantly, given the sectarian nature of Lebanon's political system" people belonging to all religious sects. That is hugely important.

Sectarianism is the key tool through which Lebanon's ruling class has traditionally controlled society and prevented the rise of social struggles. Previous waves of social struggle were nipped in the bud by whipping up sectarian divisions. What is most important about the ongoing movement and allows to create horizontal solidarity is that it is rising up against very crude neoliberal

policies in a country with very high degrees of corruption and social inequality. [65] The population simply got fed up of all that.

The movement encompasses various social groups: the poor, the unemployed, workers and the middle-class. The Lebanese state has been so deplorably dysfunctional over so many years that even people from the middle classes are fed up with the ruling system, they all want this to change. Against that, there have been attempts at countering the social mobilization with sectarian mobilization. Most prominent behind such efforts is Hezbollah, which is part of Lebanon's governmental coalition. It has come forward as a prominent reactionary force, threatening the demonstrators with thugs and defending the existing structures of power.

That the uprising managed to obtain the resignation of the prime minister in this context has been perceived as a key victory. But that is only one first step; they are demanding the organization of new elections to be prepared by a government that is not another coalition of the parliamentary political parties, but by what they call a "government of experts." However, in Lebanon, as in Algeria, there is not yet a recognized leadership of the movement, which started as a truly spontaneous uprising. Important steps have been taken towards organizing in recent days, inspired by the Sudanese experience.

"Leaderless movements" are fine in the early phase of an uprising, but to go forward, the movement must organize in some form. Leadership is needed "not in the sense of some charismatic leader or "vanguard party," but in the sense of a network of grassroots organizations that can coordinate and steer the movement towards fulfilling its aspirations. From this angle, I do not expect any radical change to occur in Lebanon soon. The best that I hope for, at this still initial stage, is that this first countrywide mass uprising results in the build-up of organizational structures able to play a leading role in a future wave of popular struggle with clear and radical goals.

In Lebanon there have been groups of people, mainly supporters of Hezbollah, attacking protesters and burning down protest camps. In Iraq, Iran-backed militias have been responsible for most of the killings. We know the Iranian regime's involvement and connections in Lebanon, Iraq and Syria. Why is Iran keen on suppressing the protest movements in both Iraq and Lebanon, and how do you see that developing?

Iran is a theocratic government – the only theocratic state in the world if you leave aside the Vatican. It is a clerical government, a sort of regime that can only be deeply reactionary. The fact that this government is opposed to the United States and to Israel does not mean that it is progressive as some people wrongly assume following the very flawed rule that “the enemy of my enemy is my friend.” If you are truly progressive, the Iranian regime cannot be your friend even though it is at odds with Israel and US imperialism.

Iran's regime is not motivated by anti-imperialism; actually, they do not even use that term. They refer to the US with a religious phrase – “the great Satan.” The regime has its own expansionist agenda and spreads its influence through the build-up of sectarian paramilitary forces in neighboring Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, and in Yemen as well despite the lack of territorial continuity between Iran and that country.

In spreading its influence by such means, Tehran is not pursuing some progressive agenda but it is building up a regional empire that is as neoliberal and corrupt as the Iranian regime is. In Syria, they intervened on behalf of the regime against the revolution that started in 2011. Iran and its regional proxies have been crucial in enabling the Syrian regime to turn the uprising into a civil war, and to eventually win that war with its help and that of Russia. This was a blatant counter-revolutionary intervention that those who support it try to portray as part of an anti-Israel and anti-US strategic design. But that is not true: neither Israel nor the US

wanted the overthrow of the Syrian regime. What Obama called for was a compromise between the regime and the opposition with the president stepping down to make it possible.

The counter-revolutionary character of the Iranian regime is also obvious in the way it repressed mass protests in Iran itself. One major wave of protests in 2009 was brutally repressed; it was followed by big social protests in 2018 and early 2019 that were put down in the same manner. Likewise, the Iranian regime, through paramilitary forces connected to it, has been engaged in the repression of the Iraqi people's uprising. A similar attempt occurred in Lebanon, albeit at a more modest scale for now. Iran is thus definitely part of the regional counter-revolution. Along with the Saudi kingdom, they constitute two rival counter-revolutionary poles at the regional level, as both Russia and the US are at the global level.

Do you think it is part of Iran's strategy to provoke popular uprisings into taking up arms in response to an extremely violent repression, so that it has an excuse to intervene militarily? Are they purposefully pushing the protesters to respond in a violent way, especially in Iraq?

The situation in Iraq is complicated by the fact that protesters there are essentially Shia until now. That is the very community that Iran is keen on keeping under its control. It is a fact of utmost importance that the uprising in Iraq involves the Shia population in open opposition to Iran's domination. Tehran cannot afford to alienate these masses completely, which is why it is now trying to defuse tensions and find a compromise. In Lebanon, the uprising is cross-sectarian. It involves people from all sects and communities. Hezbollah's repressive intervention led for a short while to a reduction in the participation of Shias in the protests in parts of the country controlled by Hezbollah. But the continuation of the uprising has emboldened Shias to join it again.

An important difference between Lebanon and Iraq is that, in the latter country, the Sunnis have mostly stayed aloof – not because they

disapprove the movement but because they do not dare yet to join it. Arab Sunnis have become a repressed minority in Iraq since the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime, oppressed first at the hands of US occupation forces and then at the hands of Shia sectarian forces dominant in government. That is why Arab Sunni regions have been receptive successively to Al-Qaeda and ISIS. The present uprising there has therefore been essentially restricted to Shias until now, whereas in Lebanon it has been cross-sectarian from the very start.

The fact that the anti-Iran character of the uprising in Iraq is much more pronounced than in Lebanon, where Iran's direct interference is less prominent, is one reason of the harsher repression in Iraq where a high number of people have been killed already. On the other hand, the protesters are very keen on sticking to nonviolent forms of protest – especially in Lebanon, where the movement resembles those of Algeria and Sudan in that regard. That is because they know that if they fall in the trap and allow violence to escalate, it will provide the reactionary forces with the opportunity to crush the movement and deter it from carrying on.

Regarding international solidarity, it is clear that what is happening in the Arab region is not solely happening there. We are now talking about Chile, Ecuador, Haiti, Hong Kong, Catalonia: it is all connected. For people outside those countries, what is the best way to engage with the protests in your view? What is the best way to show international solidarity in confronting the system against which people are revolting globally? The struggle needs to be global as well. How do you see the best way for this to take shape?

The best way to be in solidarity with an uprising in another country is to do one in your own. That's obviously the best support. The global spread of uprisings and revolts creates a dynamic that benefits all of them. It is very clear now. The conversation has shifted globally from talking about the far-right to talking about global anti-

neoliberal revolts, which are essentially progressive revolts. But it is also important, of course, to express cross-border solidarity with the uprisings, with their progressive goals and their progressive demands.

It is also crucial to condemn any reactionary attempts at putting the revolts down. Any forces that try to

repress the uprisings, whether frontally or through manipulative stratagems, must be denounced. In the future, one hopes that “with a maturation of grassroots organizations” there will be more direct connections between local organizations than the little that exists now. There has been a lot of talk since the 2011 “Arab Spring” about the role of social media and new

communication technologies in facilitating the coordination of local struggles. The same goes for solidarity between the movements of various countries. At both levels, the national and the global, it is imperative to build real physical networks to carry the struggle to a higher stage.

[Roar](#)

Solidarity with the popular uprising in Chile

9 November 2019, by Fourth International Bureau

Piñera’s brutal government repression, based on a state of emergency and the use of the curfew, as well as the mobilization of the army with techniques reminiscent of those of the Pinochet regime, instead of stopping the mobilization, has fed it and has generalized indignation in the country and the isolation of the government. Along with the victory of the popular mobilization in Ecuador, led by the indigenous peoples a few weeks earlier, the Chilean uprising places Latin America once again in the vanguard of the confrontation with neoliberalism.

The centrality of youth in unleashing the movement

The movement began as a response to the increase in the metro tariff by the right-wing government of Sebastián Piñera on 4 October. On 7 October high school students mobilized under the slogan “Evade, don’t pay, another way to fight,” traveling without paying. This gesture of rebellion has lit the fuse after years of social unrest, but also of resignation and depression of the popular sectors. The “awakening” is one of the most present slogans in the mobilizations. We must underline the fact that the student’s struggles “in particular

the ones that took place in 2006 and 2011” have played a key role in the radicalization of the youth and in the molecular process of social remobilization that has hatched out with the current movement.

On 14 October, the “evasion” in transport was already massive and subway stations were being closed. On the 18th the direct conflict with the government forces broke out, with the first confrontations with the carabineros, the first pots and pans. That same day, Piñera (who is also one of the richest men in the country) decreed a State of Emergency, which limits freedom of movement and assembly, in response to the fires in subway stations and some supermarkets, something that ignited spirits even more. At that moment Santiago was paralyzed and the movement spread to the regions. Then the government imposed a curfew. The masses did not abide by the prohibitions and a savage repression was unleashed.

Brutality of repression

According to data from Chile’s National Institute of Human Rights, in just 15 days, 1,574 people were injured in hospitals, including 473 shot by pellets, 305 by unidentified firearms, 40 by bullets, 30 by bullets and 157 with eye injuries. The agency

has filed 179 lawsuits, including five for homicide and 18 for sexual violence. In addition, 4,271 arrests have been recorded throughout the country. What’s more, some sources have already counted 42 dead and 141 disappeared in the protests on October 27. These figures give an idea of the intensity of the repression. In spite of it, the popular indignation only increases the mobilization, that after the general strike of the days 23 and 24 of October, has known another peak moment in the march of the last Friday day 1 of November.

Rebellion against neoliberalism in its first laboratory

Rage, discontent, anguish accumulated over many years. Peaceful protests were ignored. Chile is the pioneering country in the application of the neoliberal model and is characterized by one of its structural consequences: overwhelming social inequality as a consequence of a highly regressive distribution of national income (near to OECD countries, on the other hand). Submissive to the International Monetary Fund and to the conditions imposed by free trade agreements, a path chosen for the subordinate integration of the country to the world market and to the interests of transnational companies. A model that

deepened extractivism and agribusiness, with all its destructive environmental consequences. For years, Chile was cited as an example of the "good that neoliberalism does to countries that want to develop". Thousands of Latin Americans migrate to Chile in the hope of integrating into the paradise of consumption.

The neoliberal order privatized and turned into commodities all social rights and the elements that allow life and its reproduction. Health, education, housing, social security, road traffic, electricity, water, etc. All privatized and working with market logic. In a context of insufficient salaries, there are only two ways to obtain the necessary goods and to integrate as consumers to this expanding market. One way is to work twice as hard and the other is indebtedness. Either way is a time bomb.

Institutional crisis

The end of Pinochet's military dictatorship and its replacement by democratic governments did not put an end to neoliberalism. The Concertación, Nueva Mayoría and right-wing governments have maintained the essence of the social, economic and constitutional regime established during the dictatorship. The working people, the students, the women, the pensioners, the native peoples, have struggled for years to put an end to this order of things. Those who promised changes in order to be elected with popular votes - the Concertación and the New Majority - betrayed in all respects the hopes that the people had of recovering in democracy the rights taken away by the dictatorship.

The distance between the people and the political parties that led the transition to democracy grew day by day. Today, an abyss separates them. The model of limited democracy contemplated mechanisms that deepened the divorce between the people and the political elite.

Today the people rise up not only against neoliberalism and its consequences, but also against the political regime inaugurated in 1990,

which maintained the political power of the Pinochet's military unchanged. Today the hatred of these thirty years of democracy designed to enrich the richest and to keep the people atomized, fragmented, alienated at work, in consumption and in drugs is manifested. The fragmentation of the popular subject is encouraged by legal mechanisms and by the model of labor relations also inherited from the dictatorship. Preventing the rearticulation of forces that allow the development of the class struggle is a strategic objective of the ruling class.

Corruption and abuse cross the state apparatus, businesses, and Catholic and evangelical churches. Carabineros, military, senators, deputies have stolen billions of pesos, businessmen pay legislators to dictate laws in their favor and have been discovered. Important figures in the churches have sexually abused children. And the country has found out. Rage and distrust of all institutions is growing. "Not due to 30 pesos, due to 30 years" claims a viral content on the social media, referred to the 30 pesos of the increase of the metro fare versus 30 years of "transition to democracy", through a deal between the parties and the military regime in the plebiscite to reform the 1989 Constitution. Precisely this agreed and monitored democracy on the dictatorial pillars consecrated in the pinochetist constitution still in force in the country is one of the reasons of the enormous restrained unrest. And this also explains the importance of the extension of the demand for a Constituent Assembly among broad layers of the popular movement.

Popular self-organization

Without a doubt, the popular struggles of recent years have prepared in Chile the substratum on which new forms of popular self-organization are being developed. The uprising of students for the right to public education in 2011 (the "penguin rebellion"), the anti-extractivist socio-environmental struggles, the struggles of native peoples for their rights, the uprising of university and high school students

against discrimination and the harassment, the strikes and women's organization on March 8, 2018 and 2019, have created the objective and subjective conditions for the current social outburst, which is led by the working classes, the women organized in their local and regional committees, the impoverished middle classes and the most impoverished sectors. It is as if the unique experiences of each sector in struggle in recent years have been channelled into a national movement against the oppressive and exploitative regime.

Piñera has dismissed a good part of his cabinet without the maneuver having any effect and is maintained to a large extent by the passivity of a very broad sector of the parliamentary opposition. But the radicalization of the process and the growing antagonism with the Executive is opening up dynamics of neighborhood and local self-organization, here lie the so called "cabildos populares". The massiveness and duration of the protests, together with the aforementioned dynamics of self-organization, seem to be laying the foundations for a joint recomposition of the Chilean workers' and popular movement, which still has not been able to reconstruct itself after the terrible blows of the dictatorship, the neoliberal atomization and the precarious labor relations that accompany it. The intense politicization of these days makes the idea grow among the people that it is necessary to put an end to the current Constitution, but that the necessary Constituent Assembly be Popular, that is to say, that it not be restricted to a representation detached from the self-organization of the people. The Popular Constituent, therefore, must be based on a national debate between workers, in local assemblies and neighborhoods, among the original peoples, women's organizations, youth and trade unions.

Solidarity with the popular struggle in Chile!

From the IV International we want to send all our solidarity to the Chilean

popular movement, denounce the brutal repression of Piñera and demand his resignation as a previous step to a real political change in Chile. We believe that the popular mobilization is allowing a true democratic rupture with the legacies of the dictatorship and is a key point of support to block and overcome the neoliberal policies in the country where they were applied for the first time.

We especially support the anti-capitalist, ecosocialist and feminist sectors of the Chilean popular

movement that are encouraging the most advanced processes of self-organization and that are struggling to raise an anti-capitalist and revolutionary program capable of articulating a breakaway block that is both radical and unitary, capable of providing elements of orientation and a strategic horizon to the ongoing process.

Solidarity with the Chilean people!

Stop the repression!

Down with Piñera!

Forward to self-organization and popular power!

For a Popular Constituent Assembly, based on the self-organization of the people!

All our support to the anti-capitalist, ecosocialist, feminist and revolutionary left in Chile!

Executive Bureau of the Fourth International

8 November 2019

“The working class is in the process of constituting itself as a political actor”

9 November 2019

Where are we at in terms of the mobilization in Chile? Yesterday, we learned of the resignation of the cabinet and the end of the state of emergency. What does that mean? How has Piñera, the president of Chile, reacted in the face of the movement?

Javier Zúñiga I think Piñera's bet with his government right now is based on the analysis that the political response through the state of emergency to contain the mobilization did not work. Massive mobilizations have grown steadily until the demonstration on Friday, October 25 which was an eloquent expression of this. This shows that the repressive response did not deactivate the driving elements of the mobilization. Piñera is trying to head off a certain level of discontent that started with the rising price of the metro tickets and has widened to other problems of society. The layers of the people who have mobilized begin to demand profound changes. The change of cabinet is part of the idea of letting go of the ballast little by little, for communication purposes. But that does not make the mobilization run out of steam. There is no consensus on

this cabinet change.

Karina Nohales In my opinion, there is a popular uprising in Chile, an uprising against the political system whose content takes the form of a record of 30 years of an agreed democracy. It started with the mobilization of the youth against the rising price of the metro tickets, then extended across Santiago and across the country. But this does not yet translate into concrete demands, because it is a challenge to the entire political system, the political parties that participated in this agreed democracy. Piñera responded to the extent of how the movement presented itself. That started with the price increase on the subway, Piñera suspended it and deployed the military on the streets. The movement challenged economic abuse and social inequality and Piñera announced a package of economic measures. None of these measures worked. Thus, the mobilization took different forms. Explosive at its beginning, diffuse in the territories. After that, there was a decrease in the mobilization on Tuesday, October 22nd. From Wednesday, it took its current form: massive and concentrated in the

centres of cities. In the territories, social and political activities are maintained.

What does military repression mean in a historical perspective in Chile? What methods of self-defence and protection exist?

K. N The government only waited eight hours to deploy the military in the streets of Santiago and declare a state of emergency. This is a big decision, because it implies an image of instability for the bourgeoisie, with what that means for the stock market and investment capabilities. This decision breaks with the slogan of the transition from the end of the dictatorship, which had been “Never again”. For us, that meant the end of the military presence. For the bourgeoisie, it meant “Never again class struggle”. It must be pointed out that the present army and that of the dictatorship are not two different armies. Obviously, the people who compose it have changed. But the army is an institution that has been left intact, which represents a continuity between dictatorship and democracy, as is the transition. The armed forces remained unpunished.

Now, there is a change of period in Chile. Something curious happened, people did not feel fear and went out on the street, despite the military presence and the curfew. In terms of self-defence, an unarmed people have two solutions that they have used: their creativity and or the size of their mobilization.

J. Z. A first dimension is what Karina said. Recourse to military force expresses, in the last instance, the means of the bourgeoisie to resolve a situation of insurrection. To guarantee bourgeois democracy, the army appears. But in our case, that does not solve anything, it even becomes a problem for Piñera's government. What demonstrates this? The curfew ended last Saturday. A context thus opens: what will the government use to try to disable the mobilization? What has the government to offer after that? It is probable that, with the change of cabinet, figures from the transition of the Christian Democracy, completely worn out, will participate. But that makes no sense for the mobilized working masses. What could this context lead to? There is a political crisis, but is it or will it be a crisis of hegemony? That is to say, a crisis of any capacity, for the whole capitalist network, to produce hegemony over the whole of society, to recompose itself with a social base. The capitalists are trying to resolve the crisis with the military at first, and now they will return to their barracks. In this context, we will see the different types of violence and human rights violations that have occurred (and are still practiced with repressive measures). For the capitalists, this means a challenge as to the forms in which the revolts will appear, of how to contain the mobilization in this opening political cycle. It could set in place a context that involves a fundamental questioning.

K. N. The official figures show more or less 20 deaths. It is likely that we will discover more cases: the National Institute for Human Rights will investigate cases of people killed in fires, to see the origin of their deaths. There are also cases of sexual violence. Currently, unlike the time of the dictatorship, we are able to recognize this type of violence. Sexual violence under the dictatorship was

invisible, but with the work of feminists, it has been recognized that these were not excesses, but a form of women-specific repression, a way of disciplining the body. There is one case these days: police, not soldiers, tortured a young man, raped him and forced him to declare publicly that he was a homosexual. This is a political dimension of discipline on the part of the forces of repression, not an excess on their part. From now on, the violation of human rights is approached in a multidimensional way. On the other hand, in the south, a young man was murdered. His father said that the man who said we were at war and put the military on the street was responsible. This shows that the violence is not the only political responsibility of the military, but of Piñera. That's why we are asking for his resignation.

Piñera announced a legislative package of social and economic measures. What are these measures? What do you think of them?

K. N. This package was announced on Tuesday, October 22nd. Piñera is a businessman. My first impression was that he behaved like an employer during collective bargaining. He responded as if it were a company, not a society, making demagogic offers. Basically, 70% of the measures are about pensions, because Piñera knows that this is a very important point of conflict. Then, there are the themes of health and wages. So, what he has offered is to expand medical coverage by subsidizing drugs in the hands of private companies. To guarantee a minimum income, he proposed to subsidize private companies with public money. In the case where a worker earns less than the minimum income, the state completes it. For pensioners, the increase in the amount for retirees is done without affecting pension fund administrations that are financial institutions. It is therefore a question of deepening the logic of subsidizing private companies of the Pinochet constitution. Everyone is contemptuous of these measures.

J. Z. It seems to me important first of all to point out the influence of social networks in the circulation of political

messages, calls to demonstrate, to organize. When Piñera announced these measures, the reaction was immediate on the networks. From one minute to another, the reaction was not to believe it and rejection. For the same reason, last Friday, the event was the largest in Chile's history. The political message is that the announcement of this legislative package is meaningless for the people. It did not have a demobilization effect and it does not allow the co-option of sectors of the movement. The measures have not been perceived as being able to improve living conditions. It amounts to a media manœuvre. Today I was at a meeting and a woman in her sixties said, concerning Piñera's speech: "this has had no impact, because we have woken up".

What is your assessment of the general strike last week? Are there sectors still on strike?

K. N. There has been only rarely been, and never since the return of democracy, a general strike in Chile. The days of protest from 1983 to 1986 began with calls for a general strike but faced with the impossibility for the working class of mobilizing under dictatorship, it turned into a national protest. As the March 8 Feminist Coordination (CF8M) said, strike was a forbidden word, the content of which was unknown. It is from feminism that the general bedrock was established again as a method for the working class. The CF8M proposed a general strike call for Monday, October 21 to a broader space, called Social Unity, in which it participates. The CUT trade union federation responded that it was unprepared and considered this proposal irresponsible in a curfew context. So, we decided to launch the appeal on Sunday with high school organizations and other human rights organizations. The next day, the trade union corporations of Social Unity had a meeting calling for a general strike for Wednesday. Without the pressure of youth and feminists, we do not know if there would have been this call. On Monday, October 21, the twenty or so ports of Chile were on strike, as well as the workers at the largest private copper mine in the world, the Escondida. It is very significant. However, it was difficult to

assess the real impact of the strike because everything was paralyzed in fact. Industrial unions reported that the companies staying open operated at 30% and the majority were closed because there was no transportation. However, the strike has appeared again as a method of action in Chile. Next Wednesday, a new general strike has been called. We can have a better view of whether it works.

J. Z. The working masses had been mobilized since at least Friday, October 18, building a subjectivity involving methods such as barricades, *cacerolazos* and a willingness to occupy the public space. At this moment, calls are constantly circulating spontaneously. The political concern on whether to call a strike requires taking into account the fact that there is already an uprising. People were already on the street before there was a call. It is different to the process of the feminist general strike called for on March 8, 2019: the work of the feminist comrades was to prepare keynote events, in wage labour, and building a base in reproductive labour, with meetings, spaces of prior deliberation and so on. Therefore, the difference with these calls is that they are mounted on events already in progress. What is at stake with the call to strike if people are already mobilized? In my opinion, a dialectic is set up, as Gramsci says, between spontaneity and direction/orientation of the movement. The gamble of the strike is to give a meaning to the mobilization. This process is supported by a large part of the socio-political organizations, although this does not mean "putting ourselves at the front" as some sectors want. The subjectivity established, of rage and mobilization, cannot be decreed, but it is possible to contribute to the marking of an orientation. Thus, calling a strike condenses the influx of ongoing mobilization. The political cycle may be marked by an anti-neoliberal perspective, at least that is what the popular assemblies say. This could open a new context in society. In this sense, the strike becomes again an instrument recognized by the mobilized masses. And if this is successful, the strike comes to be appropriated as a tactic of accumulation of forces. The strike is

not then an affirmation of self-indulgence, but a resource incorporated by the working masses. With key elements such as strikes in strategic sectors of the economy, this method tends to mean that the working class stops working and organizes itself according to the strike. It becomes a repertoire of action of the class, and not only of the trade union and organized world.

The Social Unity space seems to direct or at least influence the movement. What does this sector propose? How does it relate to mobilizations?

J. Z. Social Unity is a referent that is positioned as a legitimized entity. Because, for example, in the assembly where I am coming from, people recognize the need to have an interlocutor at the general level. Social Unity is a complex network of organizations. For me, three tendencies occupy this space. Firstly, a sector composed by the big unions and traditional corporations: the CUT, the No + AFP movement [for a public pension system], a part of the National Confederation of Municipal Health (Confusam), the teachers' union (Colegio profesores), the National Confederation of University Professionals of Health Services (Fenpruss), the National Association of Administrative Employees (Anef). They represent a certain leadership of the space. This sector is characterized by its urgency to be those who lead the movement, to appear as the actor at the head of the movement, and not as an actor who makes themselves available, proposes, brings together demands and so on. The second sector is made up of feminist, environmental, student, *pobladores* [people living in peripheral and popular neighbourhoods] organisations, human rights associations, that do not fit into traditional trade union logics. We are not in harmony with the understanding of the situation that these union corporations have, because we understand that this is a moment of urgency to challenge the neoliberal regime. We must be up to the task, not around corporate claims. For this, it is necessary to keep the situation open with popular participation through councils (*Cabildos*) and grassroots assemblies.

Our goal is not to cede to the negotiations that will surely take place, but to open a process of politicization from the challenging of the regime. It is no longer possible to live as we lived a month ago. We therefore understand the idea of a Constituent Assembly as an element of dynamism to enable the political participation of the people. Finally, there is a third less permanent sector that sees Social Unity as a roof under which to put itself to allow the coordination and direction of the protests. Social Unity therefore appears as a relatively legitimate agent of the people, although differences are noted. It is in a conflictual space that brings together popular organizations.

KN My personal analysis is that, since the last presidential election, a new opposition bloc has appeared (Frente Amplio) and destroyed the Nueva Mayoría as a government bloc after the Concertación [these two coalitions mainly integrate the Socialist Party, Christian Democracy, Communist Party and social-liberal and centrist organizations]. This creates a problem: forming a new opposition bloc. The Communist Party is the keenest to put itself at the head of a new configuration of the opposition. This worked with, for example, the 40-hour work-reduction project, which forced the opposition to come behind the CP. As proof of this role, the CP managed to gradually exclude the Christian Democracy from the opposition bloc. Then, there came the eruption as we know. The CP continues what it has achieved in parliament through the CUT. The federation joined with Social Unity after its formation and directed it quickly. What happens from that is a lot of other organizations are joining this space. While the CF8M, which has been part of Social Unity since the beginning, a space that has been proposed by No + AFP, decided to participate critically. Indeed, this space is perceived as made up of summits of organizations, led by conservative union sectors. For the latter, the class struggle is conceived in its trade union form, ecology and feminism are considered subordinate. We have made this criticism explicit.

In the conjuncture, Social Unity dared

to call for a general strike. But, between the CUT and the CF8M, the conception of a general strike is different. For the CUT and the other union organizations, it was necessary to go on strike to demonstrate that we are serious organizations, call for discipline and show leadership. As if the disobedience of the working class was an insignificant thing. In the end, it proposed a big demonstration for October 23, which in the context could appear very much below what the situation demanded. Openly demobilizing actions have also been proposed. The general strike is understood by these sectors as a moment and possibility to place its leaderships in the movement

Feminism understands the general strike as a process, in which the working class, with women and gender and sexual minorities at the head, can organize itself and think about the life it wants and how it wants to organize it. In a strict sense, we feminists consider that no strike is general, because the work of care does not stop. The strike is not only to stop working, but also to think a lot. In short, we are talking about two meanings of the general strike: one is to create, the other is to direct. These conceptions have now been put on the table.

What relationship does Social Unity have with the institutional left? What is the latter doing and proposing, especially in parliament?

KN My personal opinion, shared by other comrades in the last assembly of the CF8M, is that if there is no ungovernability for the executive power it is because the parliamentary opposition has maintained parliamentary activity. Social Unity launched the idea of a legislative strike, but it did not happen. For example, the plan to reduce working hours to 40 hours a week was adopted during the state of emergency, with soldiers on the streets. In the Frente Amplio (FA), which emerged during the last presidential election, there was no agreement between its different sectors. On the part of those who want to maintain parliamentary activity, the idea is that if they do not do so, the framework of democracy

could be closed again. But in the end, the opposition eventually legislated, even the set of measures proposed by Piñera. It meant giving a hand to the government. At one point, the government proposed a meeting with the opposition parties. The Christian Democrats (DC), the Radical Party and the Party for Democracy attended. The Socialist Party, the PC and the FA didn't. Revolución Democrática, the main sector of the FA, wanted to go at first. It's serious. The CP is now raising a constitutional accusation against Piñera and the FA agrees with that.

J. Z. The role of the CP in this has been very important. Immediately, it announced that it was not going to attend the meeting convened by Piñera. The significant political experience of the CP is recognised, so it has an influence on the entire arc of opposition parties, standing out from the DC, and putting pressure on the Socialists and the FA. In a statement that discusses the situation, the CP recognizes Social Unity as a legitimate actor, and moved the centre of dialogue to civil society. The CP has therefore played an important role in this shift in legitimacy. In any case, the movement was not going to accept a meeting of the opposition parties with Piñera and rejected them in the same way. This has been skilfully understood by the CP. At the same time the journey of recognition begins in terms of legitimacy and roles as interlocutor of Social Unity. Part of the opposition is exerting constitutional pressure, in continuity. Secondly, Social Unity includes activists from FA, CP and Socialist Party elements, but it cannot be said that this front is party-led. The movement and internal dynamics of Social Unity do not allow these groups to put themselves at the head, at least for the moment. And this for a fundamental reason: because the mobilization in which Social Unity is involved has emerged uncoordinated but driven by the working class as an actor that challenges the whole of society. It changes the way of doing politics. However, that the working class emerges does not mean that it organizes itself and necessarily becomes aware "for itself" of its experience as working people. Although there are strong embryos of

organization and struggle that go in this direction. The power of Social Unity, in a context where the class arises as an actor, is that it can contribute to the political re-composition of the working class, if it does not think only of dialogues with the government or of restricted demands which are corporate and conciliatory.

Yellow vests appeared during these days of revolt. José Antonio Kast, a figure of the Chilean extreme right, called them to protest last Sunday. Is there the possibility of a reactionary social base in this situation?

K. N. The initial media discourse was that the first days were looting by criminals, creating a sense of insecurity. Groups appeared in the neighbourhoods that used yellow vests, with sticks or other forms of domestic weapons to prevent theft and defend their homes. This expressed a somewhat fascist trend. Quickly, the far right called for these yellow vests to participate in a demonstration for October 27, with the slogan of the right to live in peace, that is to say using the song of Victor Jara ("El derecho de vivir en paz") which became a popular anthem during the curfew. This caused confusion. But, the far right made the decision to cancel this demonstration on Friday, October 25, after the big demonstration that took place the same day. We can imagine, and this is a question, that the demonstration on Friday, October 25 would not have been so successful if there had been no military in the streets and if the government had continued its discourse on the movement as if they were thieves ransacking small businesses. But when the military comes onto the streets, there is a feeling against the army because of our history. This mobilized many people. The military presence in the streets opened a traumatic memory. This may be optimistic, but it leads me to say that the people of Chile are not right-wing. There could have been more yellow vests without the military on the streets. The extreme right is clever, but it was surpassed. The discourse of theft and insecurity lasted between two and three days. When the government promoted the idea

that “We are at war”, the media went from the discourse of theft to the discourse of terror, when the terrible videos of repression come out, with soldiers firing at people and entering the houses. The idea was, “If you go out on the street, they’ll kill you”. From this story, which did not work, the media turned to the discourse, following the big demonstration, that the people are peaceful and can hope for a better future, because those who have power are listening. For example, Piñera said it was nice to see families protest, when in fact people were asking for him to resign.

J. Z. Right-wing sectors, police and the military tried to take people who were afraid as a social base. This feeling of paranoia and hysteria that has existed, the extreme right is trying to capitalize on it. The latter wants to give a turning point to a corporate exit, targeting that part of the working people who want peace and tranquillity now, against the part of the class that is betting on protest because it understands that this is the time to make demands. However, the biggest protest in history last Friday has disrupted the supposed harmony between the far right and some of the people. It should be noted that the yellow vests were not necessarily favourable to an even more militarized outcome, or in favour of Jose Antonio Kast, the far-right figure who obtained 8% of the votes in the last presidential elections and looks like Bolsonaro under certain aspects. Many wanted to be quiet. For example, in my neighbourhood, which is in Puente Alto, a suburban town, the yellow vests celebrated the highlight of Friday, they made a “barbecue”, listening to popular music and identified as from the left. This event brought us back together as a class, after the media tried to exaggerate the most reactionary aspects of the convulsion we are experiencing. In any case, Kast has a discourse that has been able to win support among poor people, but his economic program preserves neoliberalism, which is the source of the malaise we are experiencing. This is a radical limit of his project. He cannot therefore offer a programmatic exit from the mobilization, which says that the neoliberal way of life and the malaise it provokes are unbearable. It

should be noted that the appearance of yellow vests reveals a real problem: there are organized gangs in outlying neighbourhoods that commit crimes affecting working class neighbourhoods, around drug trafficking. This is the sector which the yellow vests confront as an effective threat, which in no way implies support for the government, Kast or repressive measures.

The forms of struggle and the slogans which seem to have the most force are the general strike, which we have already discussed, the territorial assemblies and the Constituent Assembly. What is the reality of territorial assemblies right now? Which self-organization processes are developing? How have these slogans been forged: spontaneously, resulting from the struggles of recent years?

JZ There is a mix of self-convened territorial assemblies and the fact that people have gathered at subway stations and other public places, where people sing, deliberate and perform cultural activities, and so on. This phenomenon appears spontaneously. Also, sectors quickly seize this moment and give it a conscious direction, calling for the creation of territorial assemblies. Tactically? Why are these assemblies important? First, they are getting together, they are organizing in several territories and that is a fact. I have seen similar self-activity processes, but never with this much magnitude in the contents that are debated as in the magnitude of the phenomenon. People’s assemblies must push for a constituent assembly, which must be seen as a legitimate mechanism for changing the Constitution, an objective that is obviously not sufficient in itself. Sectors are talking about a new constitution, with a new parliament, and that’s not what we’re talking about. It’s something else. We add the adjective “popular” to assert the sovereignty of the process. The Constituent Assembly can push and change the political scene. The challenge to the regime allows a participatory democracy in which the working class presents itself as a significant and leading actor. The second tactical importance is that the

territorial assemblies are forming a base, a social fabric that will not disappear, although the intensity of mobilizations may decrease at some time. It is a common class experience, a learning of historical organization, which can allow the maintenance of a counter-power in the parliament, the institutions of the capitalist state, developing other values in the neighbourhoods and other modes of self-organization. However, the emphasis I have has to do with the possibility that the Constituent Assembly has the ability to move the political context in an anti-neoliberal way. There is an unusual force that generally challenges the educational model, management of natural resources, pensions, financial debts and so on. It is necessary to combine the Constituent Assembly with a program that challenges, in a radical synthesis. This is at least what is happening in the territories. But this is not taken up by some sectors that claim to be leading the movement.

K. N. These are strategic questions. The reality of the assemblies is that they are sectoral and started at subway stations, which correspond to neighbourhoods, with people living in the same area. They arose because activists participated from the first day and because they were needed. People got to know each other in the revolt, we got to know each other, to talk and to ask questions. The current challenge is so general that concrete claims do not arise. People have met in the struggle, trying to detect what we were challenging, why and how we imagined what we wanted. It sounds very simple, but for me it’s already a constituent moment, not in the sense of changing the Constitution. The class is building itself in this process. It is difficult to have a general picture of the country, in terms of assemblies, demonstrations and repression because the situation is convulsive, and no organization has the capacity to grasp the totality. It is an explosion on the margins of traditional organizations.

The CF8M and the Movement for Water and Territories have spurred the existence of these assemblies. They were created to provide food faced with the closure of shops, to ensure security in the face of

repression and looting, and to support the mobilization. The demands are that the military go away, that Piñera and the Minister of the Interior resign and there is the perspective of a Constituent Assembly. None of this is totally spontaneous, but it is impossible to be sure what previous experiences of organization, propaganda and mobilization have been significant. What is certain is that for 30 years, sectors of the people were organized, struggling, sometimes in total solitude. The No + AFP movement is easy to detect, because it was massive and very recent. March 8th, too. Constituent Assemblies seek to create a new constitution, and any constitution addresses the problem of how to base political power. This is important in Chile because the Pinochet constitution is explicit about its purpose. What it has established is not to return to the institutional framework that existed before, because to return to the previous situation is to reopen the institutional path of the workers' parties, which became Popular Unity. But, more than the 1980 Constitution, the constituent moment of present-day Chile is the 1973 coup. Opening the constituent theme is therefore not an easy option for the bourgeoisie, because it opens up the dangers of political participation of its antagonists. It opens an irreversible moment when it is no longer possible to ignore and omit the political problems of the working class. These days, fear has passed to their side.

At the institutional level, a new constitution is a central problem and there is no doubt that it needs to be changed, but it is important not to put the need for a new constitution as the major fundamental problem, as many sectors do, otherwise the anti-capitalist perspective is evaded. What is expressed in Chile is the class struggle, which also existed before the Pinochet constitution. The problems posed do not begin or end in a constitution. We must pay attention to the way in which the Constituent Assembly is concerned. On the one hand, it can close a political moment

and guarantee rights, but I will not present it as the basis that has determined the current situation.

J. Z. I agree with that. Before 1973, there was not a better country than today. This debate is inconvenient also. In Social Unity, the theme of the Constituent Assembly appears, but does not challenge us, it does not appear as a debate that organizes politics. By the urgency of the moment, the most important question is how we are going to mobilize. Before this, in our socio-environmental organizations, for example, the Constituent Assembly was not our theme, but rather how to preserve our socio-environmental rights in the face of corporate plunder. The existing conflict directed us, according to the class struggle, to contribute to the working class organizing to preserve itself from this situation. The Constituent Assembly, in this sense, implies the risk of understanding politics in a very formal way: "we change the Constitution and thus we change the country". A singular possibility of this conjuncture is that from now on we have the chance for the working class to assume the direction of a constituent process, so that it is a political success. But at the same time, the social classes are organizing themselves in an antagonistic way. To approach the Constituent Assembly as if it were not class struggle seems to me to be a mistake. We want to at least warn, in this context, the anti-capitalist, feminist and eco-socialist sectors that it is about the class struggle and not about formal and abstract debates on the best forms of constitutional change.

K. N. There are sectors of the former Concertación and the right that have been open to the need for a new Constitution, but not the Constituent Assembly. This becomes a broader, cross-cutting theme.

What are the challenges for the anti-capitalist, feminist and eco-socialist left?

KN What the working class is facing

right now, what it has opened up by its action in a context where it has no parties and its organic strength is weak, will bring it, I think, to a bottom-up political activity, which in fact has been more or less true since 2005. It will be more difficult if we do not prepare organizationally, with an orientation that cannot continue to be sectoral: to strengthen the feminist trade union, pensions and socio-environmental movements is no longer enough. This perspective is general because a situation of protest has opened. There must be a proper narrative of what is happening, and it must be put together by left-wing political organizations, which must also strengthen. Otherwise, it will be difficult to build an alternative.

J. Z. This historic moment allows already existing organizations to launch into the water to seize the new historical dynamics that organize politics. This is not, for example, a question of ill-will, but smaller organizations are not able to respond and deploy meaningfully in this situation. In the Frente Amplio, an organization of several currents, there has until now prevailed a disposition to electoral and intra-institutional politics, and it was not able to be located in an efficient way in this context. My question is: how can the organizations themselves be transformed to anchor themselves in these new political springs that are beginning to open up? What we can at least do is reformulate our organizations, build new networks to fit in, and become part of the popular politicization processes that emerge. I am betting on the unification of the organizations of left and those which will arise from this moment. We must pay attention to these dynamics and contribute to develop anti-capitalist, feminist and eco-socialist perspectives within them, by adding the recomposition of political organizations, and seizing the new forms of politicization. We are very busy, and we have little time, but we cannot lose sight of thinking about new forms of organization in this context.

The coming crisis and the rise of “national liberalism”

8 November 2019, by **Henri Wilno**

The theme of the “crisis” is everywhere: in the press and in a host of economic analysis texts, but often without specifying what exactly it is about. Sometimes, reference is made to what various economists have called “secular stagnation”, a state of exhaustion of growth with periodic recessions - one version of this emphasizes that the “digital revolution”, despite appearances, does not generate significant productivity gains. [66] Among Marxists, this analysis sometimes overlaps with the long-wave theory of capitalism developed by Ernest Mandel, one of the essential propositions of which is that the history of capitalism is marked by a succession of long periods, with specific characteristics, which alternates expansionary and recessionary phases. [67] We would on this understanding be in such a recessionary phase, marked by globally weak and chaotic growth. The idea has also been developed that capitalist production is now confronted with barriers that it cannot overcome, particularly in the destruction of the balance of the ecosystem, notably of the biosphere. This important thesis has been supported by François Chesnais. [68]

These two questions are serious and decisive, especially the second, but this text focuses on the immediate: the analysis of the “coming” crisis in the sense of a net slowdown in GDP growth possibly accompanied by a fall in the financial markets. This type of crisis, which periodically returns under capitalism, can be more or less serious.

Where is the

global economy going?

Schematically, there could be 3 scenarios:

- Slower growth (possibly accompanied by a fall in stock markets);
- A financial crisis and a one-off recession (i.e. negative growth in a significant number of capitalist countries;
- A financial crisis with a deep recession.

The global economy is already in situation 1: all indicators mark a contraction in growth. The question is whether situations 2 and 3 can arise from this conjuncture. We can “understand each concrete crisis only in the relation which it maintains with the development of global society.” (Paul Mattick, “Crises and theories of crises”, 1974, quoted by François Chesnais). It is therefore insufficient to repeat dogmatic truths about the fact that crises are inevitable under capitalism, or to be content with scrutinizing the variations in the rate of profit (even if it is essential to try to grasp them). A fortiori, contrary to what the media do day by day, it is not a question of focusing on finance, nor of attributing the slowing down of growth to Trump’s protectionist initiatives alone.

Trump is not a bull devastating an otherwise flourishing china shop. Cumulative processes leading to slower growth mark the movement of the global economy. Last July, the IMF (International Monetary Fund), for the fourth time in a year, again revised its forecasts downward. On September 19, 2019 the OECD (the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, the other major world

capitalist observatory) went in the same direction and now expects global growth of 2.9% this year and 3% next year. This is, to quote the report, the “weakest growth since the financial crisis with risks that continue to rise”.

The US situation is uncertain, but pessimism is growing. The Eurozone globally is static or even on the brink of recession (i.e. the move to negative growth). Industrial production fell 1.6% in June 2019 compared to June 2018 and the downward trend continues. Germany is particularly affected with a decline in GDP of 0.1% in the second quarter of 2019. Italy is also in a difficult situation. In France and Spain, growth is weakening but remains positive. In China too, growth is slowing despite repeated measures to support the economy. Brazil remains in the doldrums and Argentina is in net recession.

Only some countries in a catch-up situation (such as India or Vietnam) are maintaining growth (and Indian growth is slowing) with relatively few clouds (other than inequality and environmental damage). International trade is also experiencing a marked slowdown: growth in the volume of trade is expected to fall from 3.7% in 2018 to 2.5% in 2019.

Overproduction is obvious in the iron and steel industry. ArcelorMittal estimates the decline of the European steel market in 2019 at between 1 and 2 %. The automotive industry remains the most important industrial sector of global capitalism and its developments are significant of the general trend. A decline of around 3% in global automotive production is expected in 2019. Then there will be a period of lethargy that will only allow a return to production above that of 2018 in 2022. China, the world’s largest market, would fall to less than 25

million vehicles in 2019, a decrease of 6% from its 2017 peak. The profit rates of recent years do not seem to have returned to their 2007 level.

The increase in the rate of exploitation is today the main instrument of capital's struggle to safeguard profits. Wages are stagnating (except for the higher categories and niche industries) in developed economies (including those with low unemployment rates like Germany and the US). States also play their role as "crutches" in the United States (and other countries), corporate tax cuts have supported (after tax) profits, and for the most recent quarters the profit rate appears to have fallen in the US. This will weigh on investment which, in any case, will suffer the consequences of the uncertainty of the economic and geopolitical climate (US-China trade dispute, Brexit and so on).

Corporate profits have been used extensively for merger transactions, share buybacks and dividend distributions, or remain in liquid investments, while private investment remains limited. Public investment is constrained by austerity policies. Capitalism is more than ever financialized. Financial assets continue to grow after the shock of 2007-2009. Share prices appear disconnected from actual corporate performance. Currently the financial markets are tossed about at the mercy of US announcements and international uncertainties. Interest rates are now clearly downward or negative. Today, these rates show an apparent irrationality: they have plummeted, and medium-to-long-term rates tend to be higher than rates for short-term securities.

Return to 2008-2009

To understand this situation, we must go back to 2008-2009. Central banks have for the last ten years poured free or almost free liquidity into the banks. Indeed, once past the nadir of the crisis, it is they who have ensured the "steering" of the economies. In fact, three factors made it possible, in 2008-2009 and after, to avoid the

collapse of the banking system and the economies of the major capitalist countries:

As a first step, states either incurred expenditures (support for banks, businesses, some social measures) or did not compensate for revenue losses or increased expenditures - see unemployment benefits - through additional tax levies. This resulted in an increase in the public debt.

But very quickly, in most capitalist countries, it was time for fiscal rebalancing: in the Eurozone (within the framework of the treaties again reinforced in 2012) while in the United States the Republicans blocked all budget initiatives under the Obama presidency.

Central banks lowered interest rates and pursued quantitative easing (QE) policies, by buying public debt securities or debt securities from banks. QE aims to encourage banks to more easily make new loans to boost production and employment. QE thus increases the amount of money in circulation which in theory has the effect of reviving the economy and avoiding any risk of deflation (an uncontrolled fall in prices).

These policies prevented the collapse, that is to say a "purge" of the system by many bankruptcies of banks and companies. But the capitalist economies did not really get out of the quagmire and the "cure" had a cost in terms of creating the conditions of financial bubbles: the sums poured in fuelled stock market speculation.

Finally, another factor played out in support of the economies of OECD countries: China, whose imports grew strongly and where outsourcing and investment operations helped sustain the profits of OECD firms. Between 2007 and 2018, Chinese imports doubled, a much faster increase than world trade. US exports to China increased by 86% in ten years, and during the same period, exports to the rest of the world grew by only 21%.

At the same time, the world was shifting: China increased its exports and reduced (unequally according to the sectors) its relative technological backwardness. Today, the slowdown

of the Chinese economy affects the global situation and more specifically certain countries: Germany among OECD countries, and exporters of primary products.

A financial system at the mercy of the economic situation

Since 2015, central banks have sought timidly to restrain the policies followed since the crisis (low interest rates and quantitative easing) but that did not last because the capitalist economy is in a way dragged by low interest rates and liquidity discharged by central banks. In 2019, faced with the economic slowdown, many central banks around the world lowered their rates. The Fed did it on July 31 and the ECB on September 12. The resumption of QE was also announced. The financial system is fragile. The indebtedness of the states and especially of the non-financial companies has gone up again. The global amounts outstanding of bonds issued by non-financial corporations reached a record high, close to \$13 trillion, at the end of 2018; this is double what it was before the 2008 crisis. The bonds (debt securities) issued by the companies are of variable quality, which could lead to an increase in repayment defaults in the event of an economic downturn.

Since 2008, there has been a proliferation of what the international organizations call "zombie companies" that survive only by indebtedness and taking advantage of low interest rates: their share is 6% on average in the 14 main developed countries. The main element of fragility of the system is therefore now probably the debt of companies that could unleash a banking crisis in case of prolonged economic slowdown. Finally, what is called "shadow banking", that is, finance not subject to banking regulation (which does not mean that it is necessarily conducting illegal operations) is growing, especially in China. At the end of 2017, it represented 14% of global financial assets.

An additional illustration of the

fragility of the financial system was given in mid-September: on Tuesday, September 17, 2019, the US Federal Reserve injected \$53 billion into banks because the interest rates on the Interbank market (the market on which banks lend each other money on a day-to-day basis) had risen sharply to 10%. It continued on the following days and thus dumped \$300 billion. What is most striking is that Fed officials are examining the roots of this outbreak of fever. This type of intervention is reminiscent of the month of September 2008 when the big banks in disarray stopped lending each other money (which led to the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers) and had to call on the central banks.

Capitalism disarmed in the face of a new crisis?

So, not only is there a sharp slowdown in the economies, but there are elements of a financial crisis. Many economists argue that if a new financial crash occurs, states would have less resources than in 2008 to cope: public debts are already high (which would prohibit plunging into budget deficits) and bank rates can only fall marginally further. [69] This assumption of state powerlessness is questionable: if a crisis seriously endangered economic stability, we can think that the states and central banks would not hesitate to overcome these constraints, however displeasing it would be to the more neoliberal, and develop “heterodox” solutions. Moreover, the wind is in the sails of questioning and debate, even among orthodox economists, academics and advisers of international economic organizations. Ideas are flourishing BlackRock, a US asset management giant with \$68 trillion invested in companies, has proposed that central banks create support funds that distribute money to businesses and individuals (through zero-rate perpetual loans). [70]

We are also witnessing a return of hitherto marginal ideas, notably with “modern monetary theory” which

professes the possibility of freedom from debt constraint on public spending, notably with the objective of financing expenditure and creating jobs (hence its vogue on the US Democratic left) [9]. These ideas are a symptom of the search for room for manoeuvre. In the immediate future, as we have seen, central banks are on the alert and have returned to lower interest rates and securities buyouts. As for China, it has announced several measures to support the economy since the beginning of the year. In terms of the budget, the situation has changed in the USA with Trump, who has massively lowered the taxes of the rich and enterprises, hence a rise in the deficit now accepted by the Republicans. Last July, with the presidential blessing, a consensus budget between Republicans and Democrats was adopted that increases military spending and further widens the US budget deficit and its huge debt. Trump maintains a perfectly neoliberal course on social and fiscal issues, but on other grounds, he does not hesitate to disregard what has been economic orthodoxy for about four decades.

He relativizes the preoccupation with balanced budgets. Not only did he weigh in for a budget to increase the deficit, but in mid-August, his administration suggested that further cuts in taxes and social security contributions are being considered in the event of an economic slowdown. He despises the independence of the central bank and does not hesitate to admonish it publicly to encourage it to lower interest rates further. He challenges the rhetoric about the benefits of free trade and trade multilateralism. The key objective is to limit the US trade deficit, curb the transfer of US technology to China, and continue to demonstrate US military might in the Asia-Pacific region. Finally, Trump has a competitive view of monetary policies. He keeps making accusations against China and even the Euro zone and demands that the Fed fight back.

Is there still a pilot

on the world plane?

The current developments in the United States do not correspond to Trump’s simple fads and his desire to win the next presidential election: they are basically the expression of a rejection of the relative decline of US imperialism in relation China. But another question arises: is there still a pilot on the world plane to launch coordinated actions? A few decades ago the American economist Charles Kindleberger provided an interesting analysis of why the crisis of 1929 was so long and deep: for him, this was due to the hesitation of the United States in taking the lead of the world economy when, after the First World War, Britain could no longer assume that role. For Kindleberger, the capitalist world economy needs a stabilizer, a pivotal state. [71]

In the wake of Kindleberger, other economists have defined the characteristics that such a state should have: the ability to create international standards and to enforce them, the will to do so, and economic, technological, and military predominance. It should be noted that Trotsky also emphasized the importance of international relations in 1921 in his “Report on the World Economic Situation”: “International relations obviously play a very important role in the life of the capitalist world... The grave crisis, arising from the constriction of the world market acts to aggravate extremely the struggle between the capitalist states, depriving world relations of any kind of stability. Not only Europe but the whole world is being turned into a madhouse! Under these conditions there is hardly any necessity to speak of the restoration of capitalist equilibrium.” [72]

The United States has played a stabilizing role in capitalism since the Second World War (and has taken advantage of it). Today, Trump is making every effort to defend the status and interests of American capitalism. Sometimes it recedes or delays, but the climate of uncertainty is increasingly clear. It is therefore doubtful that, in the event of new

financial turmoil, the United States will have the opportunity and the will to assemble the other capitalist states under its leadership, and it could even prevent attempts at cooperation. It could be (as was the case in 1929, and without wishing to assimilate the two situations) an important factor in deepening the crisis. "Global cooperation is deteriorating," Benoît Coeuré, one of the most influential members of the Executive Board of the European Central Bank, said in early July. He added: "The type of coordinated action we saw in 2008, would be much more difficult to implement today. I'm not saying it would be impossible, but it would be harder." [73]

"The future belongs to patriots"

The coming crisis could be that of the end of the world of multilateralism and the end of the so-called harmony resulting from globalization. After the crisis of 2007-2008, bourgeoisies and rulers stuck with neoliberal

globalization at the economic level (while reinforcing the security and anti-immigrant aspects of the management of the social order). Today, they are changing, unevenly and differentially across states. In a book published in 2017, JF. Bayart proposed the concept of "national-liberalism" to characterize the framework in which a large part of today's leaders act, whatever their differences and their conflicts: they claim to identify with both global economy and national sovereignty and try to mask the contradiction with muscular speeches. [74] "The future belongs to patriots," Trump told the UN on September 24; he is not alone in taking this posture. A "de-globalization" is probably not on the horizon, but states will be a factor again and geopolitical parameters will weigh more heavily on international trade and investment.

However, the structures of production and exchange, the levels of economic interdependence, will not return to what they were before the beginning of the 1990s. Companies are always looking to reduce their costs by manufacturing where it is cheaper, less restricted, less environmentally friendly. Value chains (that is, how

companies organize the steps of an activity to compete and maximize their profits) have for the moment been reorganized only marginally (with, for example, transfers from China to Vietnam). Finally, as has been widely emphasized elsewhere, geopolitical risks of all kinds are growing: nationalisms; rejection of immigrants; resumption of the arms race; reinforcement of authoritarianism, the bourgeoisies clinging to the defence of "social order"; beyond Brexit, the prospect of a paralysis and a possible return of the European crisis and so on. [75]

To conclude:

- A significant slowdown in economic growth is underway and it will have implications in terms of rising unemployment and redoubled attacks on workers' rights and social gains in general;
- Financial crisis is likely on a fairly short horizon;
- Major transformations of the international "rules of the game" and states are underway.
- It is obvious that, as always, the course of events will depend on social and political resistance.

The automotive industry will be at the heart of the coming economic crisis

7 November 2019, by Winfried Wolf

In the United States, GM and Ford have been reducing their investments for months. The Japanese auto industry is also weakening. An extensive consolidation process is currently underway in this country, where only four of the eight current groups are likely to survive as independent companies. This will be associated with the removal of tens of thousands of jobs.

The situation in China is extremely dark. On July 28, the *Financial Times* announced "Shrinking Chinese car

market sparks fears over foreign groups' future". There, car sales have already fallen by 4% in 2018. In the first half of 2019, a dramatic drop of 14% was noted. China is the biggest market for most Western automakers. For example, Ford's sales in China fell by 27% in the first half of 2019. A new Peugeot plant in China sold only 201 cars in the first half of 2019.

All indications are that we are facing a deep crisis in the world's largest industrial sector since the second half of 2018 in China and since mid-2019

globally.

In order to recognize the importance of the new crisis in this industry, we will first examine the weight of the international auto industry in globalized capitalism, then the changes in the regional concentration of car manufacturing, and finally the financial structure of automotive groups.

The global automotive industry

The automotive industry is the most important industrial sector in the world capitalist system. That's not to say it's the biggest industry in terms of jobs. The textile industry is much more important in this respect. In Germany, on the other hand, mechanical engineering [machine tools, etc.] represents significantly more jobs than the automobile industry. The export rate is even higher than in car manufacturing and the car industry is concentrated in only a few countries. However, these are extremely powerful states: at the top is the quartet of the United States, China, Germany and Japan, four countries that set the tone in world capitalism. This quartet is followed by the weakest trio of the countries of automobile production: France, Italy and South Korea. In all other countries with an automotive industry, it does not play - or no longer plays - the role of leader.

However, in the global economy, the automotive industry is the decisive industry in the sense of being "the most powerful". The huge concentration of capital in the automotive industry makes it the leading industry. It is also the rising star of the global capital cycle and has played a key role in the ups and downs of global gross domestic product and world trade over previous economic cycles.

So far, the automotive industry has been closely linked to the oil industry. The term "fossil capitalism" characterizes this industry well: the manufacturers of motor cars that burn oil derivatives - diesel and gasoline - show the way. Recently, it has sometimes been claimed that the oil and auto industry has lost its weight in world capitalism, or at least was in decline. This thesis does not resist confrontation with reality. The weight of oil and auto among the ten largest companies in the world has remained about the same for decades if sales turnover is taken as the basis. In 2018, oil, automotive and aircraft

construction accounted for about one-third of the total sales of the "Global 500" [the largest 500 transnational companies]. Among the 10 largest groups in 2018, there were six oil groups and two automobile groups.

It is true that there is a rise of electronics and Internet companies. With the production of electric cars, however, there is an alliance of these sectors with the basic production groups. And with the intensification of the elements of "autonomous driving", this energy cartel also merges with these same electronic and Internet groups. The "traditional" automotive industry is likely to strip down and reinvent itself once again. Without control and expropriation of this concentrated power of capital, it will not be possible to make a shift in transport without the conversion of car companies.

The automotive industry is the "clock" of global capitalism. Like the world economy itself, it operates cyclically around the world. This cycle first appeared in the international automotive industry after the Second World War in the mid-1970s. Since then, there have been five global cycles and five sectoral crises. And in all five cases, these sectoral crises have been associated with global recessions or global crises of capitalism as a whole. These crises occurred in 1974/75, 1980-82, 1991/92, 2001/02 and 2008/2009. This latest crisis has been the worst and most profound that the automobile industry and global capitalism have known since the global economic crisis of 1929-1932.

Dramatic changes in the "geography of production"

Changes in global capitalism are closely linked to changes in international car manufacturing. For more than half a century - from the early 20th century to the 1960s - the global auto industry was dominated by the United States. It was the period of unlimited American domination in the world capitalist economy.

The dominance of the US auto industry was followed by a period during which the Japanese auto industry set the tone. It was also the time of Japan's rise to globalized capitalism, where there was talk of a "triad" between the United States, Western Europe and Japan.

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, China has seen a meteoric rise to the largest workshop (not an established one!) for cars. By the end of the 20th century, more than four-fifths of all motor vehicles produced in the world were produced in North America, Japan, South Korea and Western Europe. This share has fallen to less than 50% since 2018. During the same period, China's share rose from just over 3% to just under 30%. In 2018, according to the ACEA (Automobile Manufacturers Association), the production of passenger cars is distributed among the countries or regions as follows:

Europe: 24.0%

EU: 20.5%

Russia: 1.9%

Turkey: 1.3%

North America: 16.4%

of which USA: 10.2%

South America: 3.5%

of which Brazil: 3%

Asia: 53.5%

of which China: 29.2%

of which Japan: 10.4%

India: 5.1%

South Korea: 4.7%

This production by country does not correspond to the distribution of production in terms of car manufacturers. Specifically, the world's 12 largest car manufacturers still controlled three-quarters (75.2%) of global automotive production in 2017. In 2005, this share was not significantly higher (80.3%). According to our definition, eleven of these twelve companies are to be considered "Western" in the broad

sense. In 2017, there was only one Chinese automaker in the top twelve, SAIC. It is a state company linked to VW as part of a joint venture and does not have a major presence in the global market - outside of China.

The balance sheet

The new crisis in the global auto industry is not yet fully developed in

the West, but it is already a hard reality in China. With the crisis of the automotive sector in China, the world's largest car market is affected. And it is also Western companies that are affected by this industrial crisis in China. Because they are also the champions of production in China. The fact that VW, Daimler and BMW were not affected until the summer of 2019 can be explained by the peculiarities of these manufacturers (prestige and manufacturers of high-end passenger

cars for the "Chinese upper middle class"). But German manufacturers should also be hit hard by the new industrial crisis in 2019.

In the context of the crisis in the global economy as a whole and the intensification of trade disputes, there is every reason to believe that the evolution of China and the automobile industry will be at the heart of a new general crisis of global capital.

Update: ESSF/MiHANDs emergency appeal: earthquakes in Mindanao (Philippines)

6 November 2019, by **Mark Johnson**

The main earthquakes occurred on 16 October (magnitude 6.3), 29 October (magnitude 6.6) and 31 October (magnitude 6.5). These earthquakes were not anticipated and no warning was announced. The Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (PHIVOLCS) warns that aftershocks, even new earthquakes could continue over the next few weeks. There are associated risks of flood damage and water-borne disease.

According to the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council, a total of 37,716 families or 188,583 persons have been affected as of 5 November. [76] At least 755 schools have been damaged or destroyed, as well as 36 health facilities. [77] The full extent of damage, casualties, missing and displaced persons is still not known.

Government services are of poor quality and not focused on the needs of the urban and rural poor, as well as the Moro and Lumad (indigenous) peoples. Government resources have long been concentrated on protection of corporate investors and a low-intensity confrontation with various armed rebels. Although the government has promised financial and material assistance via the Department of Labor and Employment

(DOLE) and the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA), previous experience suggests that this will be largely consumed by bureaucracy and corruption.

In this context, grass-roots relief and reconstruction is an essential component of building a better Mindanao, for all its peoples.

The MiHANDs network of 50 progressive civic associations has mobilized its volunteer base to conduct a needs assessment and extend emergency assistance to the affected communities.

In recent years, ESSF has supported MIHANDs' efforts to develop an innovative, grassroots mechanism for emergency intervention, rehabilitation, and reconstruction. This has involved a conscious effort to avoid the 'NGOization' that has deformed many progressive initiatives in the Philippines and elsewhere. MiHANDs is also committed to a non-partisan support to the multi-ethnic peace and democracy movements in Mindanao and across the Philippines.

These recent earthquakes, the 300+ aftershocks and flooding have affected the towns and villages where MiHANDs members live and work.

The MiHANDs office in Cotabato City office has been damaged.

ESSF will soon receive MiHANDs' consolidated needs assessment and intervention strategy. We already know for sure that financial solidarity is needed. We are asking for donations to support movement-led humanitarian relief and reconstruction.

To send donations

Cheques

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

ESSF
2, rue Richard-Lenoir
93100 Montreuil
France

Bank Account:

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

International bank account details :

IBAN : FR85 3000 2005 2500 0044 5757 C12

BIC / SWIFT : CRLYFRPP
Account holder : ESSF

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[HelloAsso.](#)

Regular information on Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières [ESSF](#).

Emergency Situation: Mindanao (Philippines) hit by a series of earthquakes, after-shocks and flooding - A call for solidarity

6 November 2019, by **Pierre Rousset**

The main earthquakes occurred on 16 October (magnitude 6.3), 29 October (magnitude 6.6) and 31 October (magnitude 6.5).

These earthquakes were not anticipated and no warning was announced. For two years now, the attention of the government has focused on the 7.2 magnitude earthquake which could occur in Manila - known as the BIG ONE - but no one imagined that it would first happen in Mindanao. Now, the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (PHIVOLCS) warns that the people must be ready all the time as disasters like these can possibly happen again even until December.

No exact data of the damages, casualties, missing persons and displaced populations have yet been published. Assessment is still ongoing. International organizations and OCHA (United Nations) have been receiving masses of information. Persons have been reported dead, injured and/or missing; some hotels, government buildings and infrastructure fell to the ground. People on highways are begging for help and food from passers-by, as the rains continue and become more frequent and heavy.

MIHANDs is also mobilizing its volunteer members in conducting a ground assessment and is preparing to extend emergency assistance to the affected families.

MIHANDs is a network of some 50 associations mobilizing together their members and combining their know-how to respond to the situation of humanitarian disasters. For many years now, ESSF have been supporting each step of their groundwork (emergency intervention, rehabilitation, reconstruction...).

So far, none of MIHANDs members are reported hurt, but their hometowns, villages, and family properties have been affected by the earthquakes and the many aftershocks (more than 300 already). Some parts of the walls of their Cotabato City office cracked. A wide area has been affected by the successive earthquakes and it is taking some time to gather and plan out actions. The need to support has already started in certain areas where MIHANDs members live.

MIHANDs will soon publish a consolidated picture of the situation and the needs, based on its teams' groundwork.

What we already know for sure is that financial solidarity is needed. ESSF is already calling for donations.

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Through HelloAsso

You can also send money through the association HelloAsso: see its button on the upper right side of [ESSF English home page.](#)

Mobilize now against climate disaster

5 November 2019, by **Fourth International Bureau**

A new generation is emerging, born from collective and political action. Its strength and determination are leading other sectors of society - trade unionists, scientists, parents...

The climate and social disaster is now.

The 1.1°C increase in the earth's average temperature since the middle of the 19th century is already having dramatic effects. The multiplication and aggravation of extreme phenomena - fires, floods, droughts, hurricanes and typhoons... - devastate entire regions. Famine, which has increased for the third consecutive year, affects more than 820 million people worldwide. A quarter of humanity is threatened by a water shortage. There are more than 2500 conflicts over access to fossil fuels, water, food and land.

Environmental inequalities further aggravate social, racist and gender inequalities. If the rich destroy the planet (the richest of the richest countries can emit up to 2000 times more GHGs than the poorest of the poorest countries), it is the working classes, the peoples of the South, the racialized people and women who suffer most from climate disasters, who live in the most polluted areas, who suffer from the lack of drinking water and the degradation of agricultural land.

Lands, oceans and

frozen areas: vicious circles to be broken urgently!

A quarter of the land area is already degraded by industrial agriculture and livestock farming, which also contribute a third of greenhouse gas emissions (IPCC report of 8 August 2019). The more the climate crisis worsens, the more land is degraded. However, the more degraded the land is, the less CO₂ it absorbs and therefore the less it participates in the fight against climate change.

Melting ice, warming seas and rising sea levels threaten a quarter of the world's population in coastal areas, high mountain regions or the Arctic region, particularly indigenous peoples (IPCC Report of 25 September). The expansion of water under the influence of heat and the melting of ice caps (Greenland, Antarctica) are causing sea levels to rise by as much as one metre at the end of the century. The oceans play a major role in the fight against climate change, absorbing a quarter of the CO₂ emitted and 90% of the heat due to greenhouse gas emissions since 1970. But their warming and acidification, in addition to destroying biodiversity, reduce their absorption capacity and thus aggravate climate change.

The IPCC Special Report (SR15) confirms what those concerned in the front line who imposed the reference to 1.5°C in the Paris Agreement have long known: the 2°C increase in the average temperature of the earth is far from being a safe limit.

Inaction is killing the climate

COP25 was scheduled to take place in Santiago, Chile. It would have been cynical and caricatural to organize it under the threat of an army that made a name for itself under Pinochet's dictatorship. It will finally take place from 2 to 13 December in Madrid. Self-baptized "COP of Action", like every new international meeting, it has the ambition "to increase countries' commitments". The Paris Agreement at COP21 in 2015 recorded the Determined Contributions at the National level, the addition of these commitments, even if they were met, which is far from being the case, leads to an increase in the average temperature well above 3°C. It is therefore necessary to promise new and revised upward commitments for... COP26 in Glasgow in 2020.

Climate-negationists Trump and Bolsonaro boycotted the UN Climate Summit in September 2019 and are guilty of the worst ecocides. However, the rhetoric of the leaders of the other powers is no better. The objective of "carbon neutrality by 2050" promoted by Antonio Guterres and adopted by some 60 countries including Germany, Canada, France, Italy, Japan and the United Kingdom is a dangerous fraud. Carbon neutrality or "zero net emissions" does not imply zero GHG emissions. Emissions can continue to grow, as they are doing now, under the condition that they are "offset" by negative emissions - in other words, carbon removals. Behind these "negative emissions" lie risky and destructive technologies such as BECCS (bio-energy with carbon capture and sequestration) which, in order to significantly absorb excess

carbon, would require devoting the equivalent of the land area of India to growing biomass at the expense of food crops and biodiversity, in defiance of the rights of peoples and peasants.

Market or technological responses are inefficient, dangerous and unfair, but they are the only ones that can be envisaged within the capitalist system.

This system is unable to respond to the climate challenge because it is unable to take the problem at its root: fossil fuels.

To have a 50-50 chance of keeping global warming below 1.5°C, carbon emissions must be drastically reduced by 2030 (-58% compared to 2010). However, 80% of GHG emissions are due to fossil fuels, which in the current system covers 85% of energy needs. This is not a transition, but an energy revolution. However, the fossil energy system and oil, gas and coal reserves are concentrated in the hands of capitalist groups (or states) and represent huge masses of capital (1/5 of the world GDP for installations alone). Capitalists will not voluntarily renounce their capital and no government at their service will compel them to do so.

The only way out is to mobilize youth and peoples.

We need a programme of ecosocialist transitional measures that combines real democracy, social justice and climate change, that meet needs while respecting ecological constraints: Produce less, share more.

Expropriation without compensation or repurchase, and socialization under the control of employees and populations of the energy system as well as the banking system, are essential conditions to get out of fossil

and nuclear energies and move to a 100% renewable, decentralized, economical and socially just energy system. It is not only a question of changing energy sources, but of breaking with the productivism inherent in capitalism, of eliminating unnecessary and harmful production, the waste of energy, resources and labour due to advertising and programmed obsolescence. An ecological, peasant agriculture, supplying short circuits is a weapon of social and climatic justice, it supposes the end of the agro-industry which destroys the land and ruins peasants. Transport is responsible for one fifth of greenhouse gas production. Air or container transport must be drastically reduced, car traffic must tend to disappear in favour of free public transport and by redeveloping cities and territories.

Overall, it is a question of democratically defining what should be produced and under what conditions. The massive and collective reduction in working time without loss of pay or intensification of work must be accompanied by a change in the organization and content of work. Sharing must include the social reproduction work that is now largely invisible and carried out by women. This requires public health services, early childhood care, care for the elderly and dependent people....

The historical responsibility for GHG emissions is disproportionate between imperialist countries that have long based their industrial development on fossil fuels and dominated countries. The Green Fund promised since 2010 to finance the transition and adaptation of the countries of the South is still awaited. Carbon accounting, on which the negotiations are based, erases the recognition of this "common but differentiated responsibility". Trading, marketing and compensation mechanisms consider that all tonnes of carbon are equal in all places and under all social and historical conditions. Far from

acknowledging climate debt, they are the basis of a new environmental imperialism that places the burden of reparation on the first victims of climate change. On the other hand, the reparation of colonial crimes requires the abolition of debt, freedom of movement and settlement for migrants, and the recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples.

Capitalism plunges the whole world into a global, climatic and ecological, social and economic, political and democratic crisis, a crisis of civilization. However, this system will not collapse on its own. Increasingly authoritarian and militarized, it causes war, ruins millions of lives and destroys biodiversity, the Earth and the climate... and will continue to do so as long as it remains in control. But everywhere people are rising, and in these uprisings young people are in the majority and women are in the vanguard.

The simultaneous emergence of a global climate movement and the new feminist wave responds to the fact that capital, in addition to exhausting workers, also exhausts and destroys all life, that of humans and that of nature inseparable. This provides the basis for a 99% convergence to change the system by abolishing capital and building a democratically planned economy and a social system that is based on democratic, feminist and ecological principles. A democratically planned economy is the only way to protect the employees of companies that are to be eliminated (mines, oil wells, etc.) by giving them the opportunity to change jobs without losing their status.

This convergence can only be built in the heat of real mobilizations, in debates, self-organization, strikes and blockages.

Executive Bureau of the Fourth International

4 November 2019

For a Social and Democratic Coalition in the Moscow City Parliament

4 November 2019, by Russian Socialist Movement (RSD)

Thanks to all those Muscovites, who spent countless hours collecting signatures or coming out to rallies, the most odious of the government's or big business's appointees were blocked. Among them—the real-estate magnate Metelsky or the university boss Kasamara, whose name has become synonymous with careerism and hypocrisy.

The opposition candidates, alas, don't have a majority in the Moscow City Council. There are districts where some of them lost by a handful of votes, painfully highlighting the mistakenness of the boycott of the election or the spoiling of the ballot. Nevertheless, the result is significant.

We are especially elated by Natalia Pochinok's defeat. In the spring, we chose this district so that we could support the candidacy of an independent leftist, Sergey Tsukasov, and oppose Pochinok's, with whom we had scores to settle. She had been one of the more outspoken propagandists of the pension reform. Since then, this district, traditionally inconvenient for the authorities, became a site of major struggle. In the first place, the Communist Party of the Russian Federation suddenly pulled out of an agreement to second Tsukasov's nomination, limiting itself to informal support. That meant that together with local activists, we had to quickly gather the 5,600 necessary for Sergey. Then upon the application of one of his competitors, the Electoral Commission took Tsukasov's name from the list of candidates ostensibly because of a technical mistake in his documents (he had left one of the fields of his application—about debts owed to foreign entities—unfilled instead of writing “n/a”). Then Tsukasov proposed: “The

Communist Party supported me, an independent leftist candidate. I ask Communist supporters in my district to vote for Maxim Kruglov. Unlike many other members of the (liberal) Yabloko party, Maxim is sympathetic to leftist ideas and willing to collaborate with us to defend citizens' interest. Only through a united left-democratic front can we block Pochinok's victory.”

In the last weeks, Sergey and Maxim conducted the campaign together. Sergey sought to persuade his supporters to vote for Kruglov. In the end, Navalny's system of Smart Voting [umnoe golosovanie] also supported Kruglov. The latter's victory over Pochinok is one of the sensations of these elections.

What will happen next? Can the newly installed opposition members of the Moscow City Parliament—people with different histories, political views and relationships with the authorities (from the liberal Daria Besedina to the left-conservatives such as the actor Nikolay Gubenko)—resist the pro-government majority determined to rubber-stamp Mayor Sobianin's agenda and divest the City Parliament of any real decision-making powers. Will the authorities resort to intrigue and provocations to compensate their failure at the elections?

We think that the only possibility to succeed lies in the creation of a democratic and socialist coalition in the Moscow City Parliament.

It should be based on common democratic demands: freedom for the political prisoners [whose numbers increased over the course of the July-August protests with sentences up to

five years given for literally nothing], unconditional acknowledgement of the Muscovites' right to protest the arrests and sentences had taken place because the city authorities refused to give permission to the protests and sent police against those who dared come out], the end of the police and legal tyranny over the city. And social demands: immediate end to the “optimization” and commercialization of medicine and education, a ban on cutting down forests and on destroying the city to make way for new building projects solely in the interests of the real estate business, social support for the most vulnerable sections of the population, from single mothers to the casualties of the pension reform.

We have not fought against Pochinok so that the Moscow City Parliament could host adepts of neoliberalism and decommunisation. We did not spend our days as polling station observers so that we could see there abortion opponents or fighters with “the orange plague.” We—and all those who voted for them—should keep demanding of these deputies adherence to the democratic and social agenda on the basis of which they were elected. We would consider any attempt to sideline these conversations as splintering of the Muscovites civic unity, as a provocation in favor of the authorities.

We now have the possibility to work towards transforming Moscow, from a hated monster sucking the wealth of the rest of the country, into a place of self-governance and justice.

Congratulations with the victory: the struggle is just beginning!

[LeftEast](#)

Detroit Foreclosed

3 November 2019, by **Dianne Feeley**

More than 35 years later, in her late seventies and living on a fixed income, she had trouble paying her property taxes, but managed to do so before the deadline. However, her home was foreclosed and sold in the county auction that fall because she failed to pay a \$600 fee she didn't realize she had.

A California investor snatched it up for \$2300. It was only when her granddaughter saw a notice that she found out she no longer owned her home. Not knowing what to do, the two came to a Detroit Eviction Defense meeting. We organized a delegation to go to the local management company and demand that the investor sell the home back for what he'd paid. Initially he refused, demanding six times his investment.

But when the media picked up the story, he agreed to do so if she could come up with the money within the week. Mrs. Jones-Sanders was able to borrow from a non-profit, United Community Housing Coalition, and DED held a fundraiser. With her family's help she proudly paid the loan back within six months.

Unfortunately, she is not the only Detroiters who lost her home for less than \$1,000! Since the economic crisis hit Detroit in 2002, half a decade before the rest of the country, more than 200,000 residential properties have gone into foreclosure. The initial cause was the prevalence of adjustable rate mortgages. In Michigan 52% of all subprime loans were sold to African Americans, even higher-income African Americans.

As the interest rate went up and the value of the home plummeted, Black families were twice as likely to be "underwater" as white homeowners and less able to weather the crisis. Banks and mortgage companies such as Detroit-based Quicken Loans foreclosed on approximately 65,000

Detroit area homeowners.

As African Americans lost both their investment and their home, their assets were wiped out. Across the country, Black homeownership dropped more than 10%.

Between 2008 and 2010 Detroit's rate of vacancy doubled and abandoned homes, along with boarded up schools and businesses, deteriorated. As a Detroit Future City report remarks, "This large number of abandoned structures has become one of the defining features of the city."

Detroit used to be a city of working-class homeowners. Although African Americans, who now make up 80% of the population, didn't become homeowners in large numbers until the 1960s, owning a home was an aspiration.

Starting in the 1950s, the auto industry left for the suburbs and beyond, and thousands of white workers, able to obtain federally-financed mortgages, followed. The city bled from this flight to the more affluent, job-rich and de facto segregated suburbs.

Contours of City's Crisis

The city shrank but still had more than a million residents. So the results of the 2010 census shocked city officials, who learned that 25% of the city's residents had left over the decade "including a large portion of African-American families.

Some walked away from their "underwater" homes while others moved to the suburbs because of the turmoil in Detroit's public schools, then under state receivership.

One-third of the remaining households were living on \$15,000 or less; 24%

had little access to health care. Twenty-five percent were 55 or older; and in a city with limited public transportation, one quarter of the residents did not own a car.

Even today the majority of working Detroiters commute to jobs beyond the city limits. Of every 100 Detroit jobs, only 30 are held by residents.

The foreclosure crisis continued, this time through tax foreclosure. Twice as many homes have been lost from tax foreclosure as from mortgage foreclosure. While Detroit's property taxes account for only 2.5% of the city's budget, they are proportionally among the highest in the country.

Assessed taxes are based on homes' market value. As the value plunged, the handful of city tax assessors couldn't possibly carry out the mandated annual reassessment. So the tax assessment office continued to bill at the old rates.

Between 2009 and 2015 an estimated 75-85% of the assessments were too high. Yet if they were not paid within the year, an 18% fee was tacked on. And during the Emergency Manager's reign, unpaid water bills "again among the highest in the nation" were added.

After three years of non-payment on the full amount, residential property goes into foreclosure. It is turned over the Wayne County's treasurer's office to be sold at a state-mandated yearly auction. These unpaid taxes range from \$160 to more than \$100,000.

The auction occurs online in two phases "with the second pretty much of a giveaway, but where homeowners are excluded from the bidding. The idea behind the auction is to restore properties and strengthen the city's tax base. It has done neither.

While the state does provide indigent

homeowners with a poverty exemption, in Detroit the exemption has not been widely publicized. Of approximately 35,000 homeowners who could qualify, less than 6000 did so in 2017. Most importantly, even when granted the exemption is only for the current year.

Of course some homeowners are able to enter into a payment plan or receive the poverty exemption while others manage to stave off eviction at the last minute. But over the last five years, an estimated 17,000 occupied homes were auctioned off. That's approximately 40,000 people displaced.

Foreclosures peaked in 2015 with the auction of 28,000 properties. By 2019 fewer than 3000 parcels were auctioned, including 521 occupied homes. In a supposedly "recovered" economy, that still means at least 1000 people may face eviction. How does that benefit Detroit or stabilize neighborhoods?

After thousands have lost their homes, Detroit's mayor and two Wayne County executives have come up with a plan that could keep people in their homes. But it would have to pass the state legislature and of course would not restore the homes of all those who have already suffered displacement.

Keeping Detroiters Poor

After undergoing massive foreclosures and evictions, in July 2013 Detroit was forced by Michigan Governor Rick Snyder into bankruptcy. Appointed by the governor, Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr cut budgets and "restructured" the city's \$20 billion debt. Over half of the cuts were benefits that retired city workers had earned. Their pensions were shaved by five percent, while a small monthly stipend replaced their health care coverage. Current city workers also took cuts in wages and benefits.

Detroit emerged from forced bankruptcy in 2015 only to downplay the statistics that reveal an impoverished population, a severely polluted city and aging infrastructure.

More than one-third of the adults and half the children are poor, a majority living in areas defined as "concentrated poverty."

High rates of asthma and lead pollution "from paint rather than water pipes as in Flint or Newark, NJ" attack children's health. More than 70 hazardous waste sites are awaiting remediation. Foreclosures continue to dispossess the poorest Detroiters and destabilize neighborhoods.

In a city of 672,000 there are 238,400 jobs. Fewer than 50,000 are held by people who live and work in Detroit. For the 112,000 residents who work outside the city, 36% earn less than \$15,000 a year. The lowest paid 10% commute the furthest.

Of the 158,000 who come into the city for work, 59% earn more than \$40,000. Detroit's official unemployment rate is typically twice that of the national average; today it stands at eight percent, but that vastly underestimates the reality.

There isn't enough affordable housing for a city with a high poverty rate and a high proportion of seniors living on fixed incomes. Affordability is based on the idea that no one should pay more than 30% of the median income of the area for their housing. But what's the "area"?

While the 2017 median income for a family in Metro Detroit was \$58,411, in the city it was \$32,924. Given that the Black and brown residents represent 88% of the city's population, the difference might stand as a rough approximation of what racism costs.

This figure, however, does not reveal family assets, whether we are talking about education, savings or home ownership. For many, owning a home is a family's greatest asset. But the catchup that African Americans were able to accomplish in the brief post-civil rights period unraveled in the economic crisis.

Auction a Tool of

Renewal?

Ninety percent of all those purchasing homes at the auction are speculative investors buying in bulk. Since the majority of the city's housing stock (73%) is the single-family home "from a developer's point of view rehabbing a home isn't economically viable.

As a result, investors park the property for a more opportune moment or rent the house without making improvements. They favor "rent-to-own" contracts that saddle the prospective homeowner with the responsibility not for only the rent, but for its property taxes and repairs.

When even one payment is missed, the landlord has the right to break the contract and quickly evict the tenant "and start over again with another family. Such contracts do not have to be registered.

Detroit housing is in such turmoil that there have been cases where the landlord (or someone posing as the landlord), collects the rent, pockets the money and doesn't pay the taxes. Eventually the home goes into foreclosure and auction. Meanwhile the family continues to pay rent "until they are informed they are being evicted.

A 2018 Detroit Free Press survey of two dozen homes found that over a seven-year period although three fourths were occupied when auctioned, 78% became vacant. A 2015 survey carried out by Loveland Technologies, a mapping service, discovered that almost one out six homes purchased in the 2014 auction were already vacant, with 180 candidates for demolition. That is, the city program helps to perpetuate vacancy and blight.

As Joshua Akers, assistance professor of Geography and Urban and Regional Studies at the University of Michigan-Dearborn remarked, "The Wayne County Tax Foreclosure Auction is one of the greatest destabilizing forces in Detroit."

Those homes that go unsold in the

auction are then turned over to the Detroit Land Bank Authority, now the city's largest landholder. It owns 95,000 properties, including vacant and occupied homes, shuttered businesses and vacant lots. It has had the double task of selling properties that could be restored as well as organizing the demolition of those that can't.

Set up in 2011, the Detroit Land Bank has established a number of programs through which it sells homes to investors, nonprofits and individuals. Given that these homes have a low market value and need major repairs, people who want to purchase a home can't secure a mortgage. Just three of the 635 homes the land bank sold between November 2018 and February 2019 were able to obtain such a loan.

As Detroit Free Press reporter John Gallagher noted, "The mortgage market doesn't exist or barely exists in more than half of the city." The reasons why this is so range from a depressed market to insufficient income or a poor credit rating.

With so many properties, the land bank has tried to set up partnerships with non-profits, banks and Dan Gilbert's Quicken Loans. The authority has sold homes to investors with the provision that they will rehab the home and if there is an occupant, allow them to rent or buy. Investors promise to abide by the rules, but then proceed to do what they want.

Why Millions for Demolition?

A second task that the land bank has been saddled with, but that will expire at the end of this year, is administering the city's demolitions.

Mayor Mike Duggan's administration had successfully petitioned the Obama administration to divert \$250 million from its Hardest Hit Funds to tearing down blighted structures rather than aid impoverished homeowners facing foreclosure. Since 2014 19,000 structures have been torn down.

Not only did the blight removal

program take money that should have been used to help homeowners, but the land bank lacked the oversight necessary, given the issues of asbestos and lead, to make sure the work was carried out and stored safely. Additionally, with the electoral defeat of a community development resolution in favor of a weaker one, it's hardly surprising that a Detroit Free Press study found only 26% of the contracts were awarded to minority-owned companies.

In at least one case, a home that was not blighted was torn down, yet land bank attorneys continue to fight the family's legal case with the city's tax dollars.

For years mayors have focused on demolition rather than thinking about how to keep people in their homes. Given the small percentage that residential property taxes contribute to the city's budget, and after spending \$250 million of the Hardest Hit Fund demolishing structures, why should Mayor Duggan be proposing a 2020 budget with \$50 million earmarked for demolitions? He is also contemplating a referendum for a \$250 million bond so that he can completely wipe out all blighted properties "an additional 20,000" by 2025. But until October 2019, when asked if he would campaign before the state legislature to make poverty exemptions retroactive, he replied that's not fair to those who have paid their taxes.

Assuming the city is able to demolish a total of 40,000 structures, it still won't have addressed the underlying problem. The 2014 Motor City Mapping survey found 40,000 blighted structures and almost that many more with a high risk of becoming blighted.

Without financial aid in the form of poverty exemptions, stopping the auctions of residential property and grants to maintain and repair homes, the mayor's promise hasn't a chance of becoming a reality.

The "Action before

Auction" Program

Wayne County, which includes Detroit and the near suburbs, established its land bank in 2006 but turned over most of its Detroit properties when the city created its own five years later. Wayne County administers around 1000 properties but its larger responsibility is the annual auction for both city and county.

Three years ago the county launched an "Action before Auction" program to sell properties to cities and a small set of selected investors before the auction. They said this would cut down on speculation.

For its first year of operation, it handpicked nine developers and pulled 141 properties, 64 of which were occupied, out of the 2017 auction. This meant that there was less time for occupants to redeem their homes. And of course these properties, chosen by investors, were the choicest homes.

Developers bought the lot for a total of \$1.5 million. They were to offer the previous owner or renter the right to continue renting and the opportunity to buy the rehabbed home.

The developer was to invest at least \$25,000 but allowed to sell for \$5,000 above cost. The first 44 homes the investors sold brought them \$4.5 million.

In the second year the county instituted an application process for developers. But they allowed even those who were delinquent on the taxes of property purchased the previous year. Two hundred and forty properties were pulled from the auction.

Several occupants were told they were "ineligible" for the program. They questioned the land bank's decision and three have successfully fought to keep their homes.

Given all the criticism and publicity, the Wayne County Land Bank was forced to discontinue Action Before Auction. Yet for some the struggle is not over.

Back in 2013 a Canadian real estate

investor bought 10 homes in Detroit. Mecelle Burrell, an African-American mother in her thirties, rented one. Two years later she signed a rent-to-own contract for \$31,500 and has receipts for her monthly payments. Burrell's copy of the contract is unsigned. It does state she is responsible for the taxes or that they will be paid by the seller and charged to her. However she never received any bill.

Meanwhile the Canadian developer claims he never received any money and assumed the manager died. Efforts to locate that person have failed.

The home went into tax foreclosure for \$2,513; Realty Transition purchased it as part of a bundle of 63 properties under the 2018 Action Before Auction program. No one approached Burrell to ascertain her eligibility; Realty Transition posted an eviction notice on her front door in May 2019.

Burrell is currently suing both the land bank and Realty Transition in an attempt to force them to comply with the terms of their own program and give her a chance to keep her home. They are claiming she is not a party to the program and therefore has no standing.

Although Action before Auction is discontinued, the fate of the 381

properties may remain unsettled for some time to come. The program did not stop speculators or keep people in their homes.

What Could be Done?

Detroit spends money on developers not just on those who buy houses. Dan Gilbert, a developer who also owns Quicken Loans, received \$618 million in tax incentives to renovate four of more than 100 downtown buildings he owns. The city provided parcels of land and \$398 million to the Illitch organization for the construction of the Little Caesars Arena, where the Red Wings play. They gave a \$240 million tax subsidy to Ford to restore the train station and use as a center for developing autonomous vehicles.

Yet there is no dedicated money to keep people in their homes. Simply getting the state legislature to provide retroactive property tax exemptions to poor homeowners, and ending the mandated auction on residential properties, would begin to stabilize neighborhoods.

Given the history of Detroit, it would seem important to provide no-interest loans to homeowners so they could fix up their homes. But what about the

thousands who have been displaced. Where is the program to help them?

Why not rehabilitate some of the beautiful homes and apartment houses throughout the city and turn them over to African-American families under a reparations program. This, rather than throwing money at developers, would genuinely "transform Detroit."

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[Against the Current](#)

Thoughts on Bolivia

2 November 2019, by Bret Gustafson

So spoke Bolivian President Evo Morales on the 7th of November, 2017. It happened to be the 100th anniversary of the Russian Revolution, so his message was fitting. Yet it was also a moment of state ritual during which money generated from natural gas development was transformed into material objects in this case checks delivered to the people.

Since 2006, Bolivia's government has reaped the benefits of natural gas

exports. After the neoliberal regime collapsed in 2003, Evo's election in 2005 led to what Evo's government called the "nationalization" of gas. More accurately, the government renegotiated contracts with foreign gas companies, yielding a much higher percentage of royalty payments, or rents, to the government.

Over the past 13 years of Evo's presidency (he has been re-elected three times), these rents have been

redistributed in many ways, chief among them these direct deliveries from the president to the people.

Opponents refer to much of this expenditure as waste. In some cases, new airports in small towns and outsize stadiums in the high Andean plateau have gone unused. Other money has been spent on grandiose projects, including the aerial cable car system that now criss-crosses the skies of Bolivia's capital city, La Paz.

One of the most significant buildings is the monumental new “Big House of the People” La Casa Grande del Pueblo which evokes China’s Great Hall of the People. The new skyscraper in La Paz will serve as the presidential palace and residence, complete with karaoke bar, a jacuzzi that holds eight, and a helipad on the roof.

One anarcho-feminist critic, MarÃa Galindo, called it a “phallic monument...a fascist vision...[like] a Las Vegas casino... a high-class brothel...or the big house of the master.” As the country geared up for elections in October, 2019, the right-wing opposition held up these projects as evidence of the Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) mismanagement of the bonanza of gas.

Even so, much of this state largesse is well-received. Usually these transfers involve some public works project: a new soccer stadium with artificial turf field for a small rural community, a local hospital, new computers for a school, an electrical transformer station, a new gas-line installation, or a new gasoline filling station.

On the day he spoke of global revolutionary struggle, Evo was in PotosÃ, the famous city whose silver mines enriched the Spanish empire. Of late, PotosÃ had been politically problematic. Civic leaders in the poor department demanded more attention from the government.

PotosÃ was still a mining department, and mining had not yielded the rents that gas had. Meanwhile the gas-rich departments of Santa Cruz and Tarija were reaping so much from the boom that they had trouble spending, or even stealing all of it.

Attempting to show that the state distributed to all equally, Evo’s strategy in PotosÃ was to bypass the opposition leaders and go directly to the local communities.

After his speech, he handed out checks to one hundred or so municipal representatives, monies theoretically destined to fund local projects like bridges and irrigation systems. Evo said once again that day in PotosÃ that he was fulfilling the obligation of

the state to the people and delivered about two million dollars’ worth of checks.

Recalling Revolution

In his speech, Evo repeated what he says often. The conquest of gas “and the goods and resources being delivered to the people” were the result of a longer history of revolutionary struggle against the military dictatorships, U.S. military intervention, and neoliberalism.

As Evo frequently says, he said again, “we have to refresh our memory,” to recognize how we fought oppression in the past, a history that has made us much better off today.

This invocation of memory is important, since the uprising in 2003 that led to neoliberalism’s collapse is now receding into the past, as are the struggles against U.S. militarism dating to the 1960s, and Evo’s own resistance to the U.S.-backed military interventions tied to the so-called “Drug War” in the 1980s and 1990s.

Yet Evo also seeks to produce and enact a kind of revolutionary affect “an emotional invocation of heroic struggle against capitalism and radical change. Evidenced in his own body and history, his words invoke a sense of liberation, and a euphoric embrace of the possibilities of collective struggle. Of course the euphoria is also represented materially in the goods and money that Evo brings to the people, thanks to the conquest of gas.

Furthermore, Evo continues to represent, for many Bolivians, the upheaval of centuries of racial inequality. As the first Indigenous person to occupy the highest seat of power, as many Bolivians will say, “someone like us” now has control of the redistributive levers of the state. This power, by and large, comes from the export of natural gas.

Of course, fossil fuels are a big problem for global warming and other forms of violence that fossil fuel regimes produce, from pollution to

war to militarism. And fossil fuels are also, in a global sense, the fuel of contemporary capitalism.

As Andreas Malm has argued, fossil fuels, which can be taken out of their place of origin and moved according to the demands of capital, are central to the process of accumulation (and to the production of CO2).

For Malm, fossil fuels are the bedrock for the “biospheric universalization of capitalist rule.” Furthermore, because of the interdependence between the capitalist system and fossil fuels, all capital is fossil capital and all fossil capital is inherently capitalistic.

Yet Evo continually speaks of revolution. From the outside, Evo’s MAS government appears to be a radical left alternative to the rightward shift in the region, recently hailed by a writer in *The Nation* as a “socialist success story.” Yet in this deep dependence on fossil fuels “and fossil capital” lies the dilemma of revolutionary Bolivia.

Partnering with Global Capital

The renegotiation of the gas contracts that took place in 2006, Evo likes to say, made Bolivia a “partner” (socio) of the foreign firms. As such, this was an improvement on the contractual order envisioned by the neoliberal regime and the World Bank. Yet as partners of multinational capital, Bolivia necessarily aligns a significant portion of its political and economic policy with the demands of multinational (fossil) capital.

Fossil fuel capital, especially as it faces a rising challenge from those of us concerned about the violence it wreaks on people and the earth, is in a hurry of sorts. Fossil capitalism increasingly seeks contractual or financial acceleration, that is, the removal of barriers to rapid monetization of gas.

For example, Evo’s government has moved to weaken indigenous rights to a process called “prior consultation.” Prior consultation is supposed to allow Indigenous organizations some voice

in the process of gas exploration and extraction. Yet often a timely affair that takes some months, it's seen by the industry as a time-consuming obstacle to exploration or drilling operations.

On the other hand, fossil capital needs a political instrument to justify continued exploration and extraction, like Evo and his checkbook. The gas companies also need a government that will tell a convincing story that responds to a collective demand for change in a country known for powerful social uprisings.

In short, fossil fuel companies want to access the gas and monetize as much as possible as fast as possible. Evo, in many ways, does them a service by suggesting that the current moment is the endpoint of revolutionary struggle, rather than a beginning, and that the extraction and sale of gas is itself, a revolutionary, if not socialist act.

In the United States the fossil fuel companies have distorted the public sense of time and change through other various (and nefarious) forms of climate science denialism or stories. Of late, the story is that we need natural gas as a "bridge" to a renewable future. Of course building gas infrastructures will lock us in to destructive levels of CO2 emissions.

Other mechanisms, such as the Trump regime's regulatory capture of the EPA and other institutions are also prolonging this temporal delay, pushing change further into the future. Rapid monetization and returns for fossil capital and the infrastructures it has built and that it wants to build will lock us further in to dependence while delaying the transition.

Evo Petrolero Emerges

In Bolivia this works through what Evo calls "partnership" with the gas firms, and through Evo's revolutionary affect, or perhaps more accurately, his revolutionary affectation. From the perspective of fossil capital (fossil time, mobility and freedom in space must take priority), or in political

terms something akin to sovereignty, over all other concerns, through any means possible.

In his work delivering public goods to the people, Evo Morales engages in a certain kind of labor for private multinational capital. We might call this figure "Evo Petrolero," or Evo the Gas Man. Evo Petrolero often wears a national oil company helmet when he goes to inspect a gas field or turns on the gas supply in somebody's kitchen.

This is rife with the symbolism of national^{ist} struggle for resource sovereignty against foreign exploitation. In a marginal neighborhood of Oruro, the president posed for a picture beside a gas meter installed in the exterior wall of a humble abode

Then, inside the kitchen, at the stove (and wearing his helmet), like a local utility employee, he turned on the gas while festooned with a traditional wreath of flowers and the ubiquitous confetti that accompanies public ritual in Bolivia.

He lauded the process of nationalization that allowed the government to "attend to the demands of the people" and reduce their gas costs to around \$2 per month. All of this, he argued, was because "thanks to Mother Earth" Bolivia has "cheap gas."

So, against the accelerated temporality of fossil capital that seeks to access space and monetize material things by moving them elsewhere as fast as possible, Evo works to produce a revolutionary temporality in which the current moment of redistributive largesse is said to be the culmination of a long century of revolutionary struggle.

With Evo's daily labor, handing out checks or turning on the gas, he aims to activate an affective response, a simultaneous embrace of himself, of gas, and of the story of popular struggle. This is condensed into a story of revolutionary transformation, moving from inchoate affect to revolutionary affectation.

In invoking rebellion he is not suggesting that people keep rebelling,

but rather that the present moment is the accomplished result of that universal struggle. So, we might say "at the risk of crude functionalism but for the sake of argument" that Evo's revolutionary affectation seeks to reconcile the contradictions created by the temporal disjunctures that fossil capital must bridge, and to give meaning to the abstractions created by ongoing dependence on fossil capital.

As long as Bolivians remain convinced of this, the gas will continue to flow. To my mind this is not socialism, but rather a gas-dependent redistributive politics tied to other less progressive realities, about which more below.

The Balance Sheet

To be sure, Evo Morales has been rightly celebrated for being the first indigenous president in the Americas, and of Bolivia. He has overseen a relatively ambitious program to redistribute public goods. Bolivia's turn to the left is a welcome alternative to those emerging from the right, across Europe and the Americas.

One must acknowledge the economic stability that has been maintained in Bolivia. Foreign reserves are at record high levels. Poverty has decreased. Economic growth has bested most of the rest of Latin America. The currency is stable. Wages are up from around \$50 per month in 1995 to over \$100 per month.

In macro-economic terms, the government of Evo Morales appears "for the moment" to have finally captured the surplus, and used it to capitalize the country.

One taxi driver summed up his support for Evo in acknowledgement of the government's policy to democratize access to credit: "I never set foot in a bank before Evo was elected. Now I have a new house and a new car."

On the surface, the regime has managed a gas boom in relatively good fiscal terms. Yet all of this depends on continued extraction of gas.

It is for these reasons that by late 2018, the Vice-President Alvaro Garc a Linera, though questioned by many on the left in Bolivia, could receive such resounding applause for his participation at Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales' first international forum on critical thought held in neighboring Argentina.

Taking credit, on behalf of the left, for lifting millions of people out of poverty; for women's autonomy over their bodies; for the combination of street democracy and parliamentary democracy, Garc a Linera said that in the next wave of the left in Latin America there must be "ecological socialism." [78]

Like Evo, Alvaro was working at managing time, pushing the ecological crisis of the present onto a future socialism to come later. As with Evo's management of revolutionary time "which pushes resistance into the past" Alvaro's management of revolutionary expectations pushes the possibility of real radical change into the future.

In both cases, willingly or not, these modes of speaking dovetail with the temporal concerns of fossil capital, which is to compress time and accelerate extraction in the present. Even so, the Vice-President reaped great applause and adoring praise from would-be revolutionaries in the land of the YouTube comments section.

If revolutionary affectation is effective at home in Bolivia, it seems equally effective in international forums.

Deep Contradictions, Perverse Outcomes

At least the redistributive state redistributes, something no neoliberal state does well. There are also significant differences from modalities of neoliberal incitements to improve health, to self administer and to aspire to self-improvement. This is the discourse of the right, for example, their feeble alternative to Evo and the

MAS: that the country should become a country of "entrepreneurs."

For the right wing, whether technocratic neoliberal or unabashedly fascist, the natural workings of the market and the rational individual condense into a bourgeois theory of inevitable fossil fuel consumption.

But in the gas-encompassed state, the incitements are to "defend" and to "recover" collective public goods, real and imagined, to demand that the state fulfill its obligation (even when it doesn't), and to embrace the right to "consume" as a pueblo, the collective subject of both nation and struggle.

As such, the inevitability of fossil fuel extraction is achieved through a different means. Nonetheless, the labor of transforming an aspirational revolutionary temporality into consumptive practices dependent on a hegemonic fossil fuel regime has deep contradictions and perverse outcomes.

Far from a socialist success story, Evo and the MAS have overseen a rather conservative and pragmatic det ente with Bolivia's own capitalists, entrenched in the eastern agro-industrial sector. The recent fires in the Amazon have drawn attention to the government-backed expansion of a large-scale soy export economy.

Growing opposition to the extractive economy exists in some parts of the country, even from Indigenous organizations. Another contradiction emerges from the androcentric shape of the industry itself, which transforms the economic boom into the commodification and consumption of everything, deepening existing forms of violence, especially against women.

While femicide "the killing of women" is at alarming levels globally, it is particularly high in Bolivia. Drawing direct linkages between gas and this gendered violence is difficult. However, Evo's government relies on a male-centric form of politics that bridges social organizations, the military and the party "all in turn reproduced through control of the police and the judiciary.

Activists have suggested that this patriarchal political order "again far from any socialist ideal we might imagine" is to blame for the rise in violence against women. In addition, victims' families rarely see justice. To draw attention to this point, Mar a Galindo, the activist quoted above, recently joined her comrades to douse the fa ade of the new "Big House of the People" in red paint, symbolizing the blood of murdered women.

In addition, despite the endless invocation of anti-imperialist struggle, Evo is overseeing the legal and political labor of subordinating sovereignty and reorienting the collective will of the people in favor of fossil fuel infrastructures. This has the perverse outcome of degrading Bolivian nature, and undermining the political foundations of movements by reducing their political horizons to internecine battles over gas rents.

Perhaps the most egregious recent reflection of this is when Evo Petrolero "as Evo the Presidente Indio of Plurinational Bolivia" attended the inauguration of the racist, militarist and fascist Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil. Concerned that Brazil might reduce its purchases of Bolivian gas, Evo found himself referring to Bolsonaro as a "brother" in a "shared struggle."

In Bolivia, where Evo makes much of his revolutionary credentials, this is referred to as "eating toads" (tragando sapos). Such is the sovereignty of gas, that the landlord bows to the customer and tenant.

While Bolivia's management of the gas economy is certainly a success story in some ways, one would be hard-pressed to suggest that gas-based redistribution reflects a serious or ambitious political horizon for socialist thought, given these internal contradictions, let alone what we know about global warming.

Because of Bolivia's deep history of social movement struggle and rebellion, even right-wing economists observe that without a nationalist frame, no oil or gas would be exported from Bolivia. In order to argue that this signifies revolution, enter Evo the gas worker, who also performs as Evo

the revolutionary, to produce, manage and embody revolutionary struggle and revolutionary temporality.

At the end of the day, fossil capital

achieved its goal, the monetization of nature in the service of capital accumulation. Evo's revolutionary affectation in Bolivia achieved what neoliberal orthodoxy could not: the flow of gas. At the time of writing, all

evidence suggests that Evo (and the gas industry) will be re-elected this October.

[Against the Current](#)

Which Green New Deal?

1 November 2019, by Howie Hawkins

The program would create 30.5 million jobs, including 8.7 million jobs in manufacturing. Unlike any of the other Green New Deal proposals, we show our homework — how we got these numbers.

Our ecosocialist Green New Deal also includes an Economic Bill of Rights, which is an ongoing program of public provision to ensure jobs, income, housing, health care, education and retirement. The Economic Bill of Rights will cost \$1.4 trillion per year and create another 7.6 million jobs.

Our whole Green New Deal is a 10-year \$42 trillion program that creates 38 million jobs.

We derive our goal for 2030 from the global carbon budget that climate science indicates is the timeline that rich countries like the United States must meet to get atmospheric carbon dioxide back into the safe zone of below 350 parts per million (ppm) by the end of this century. The Earth reached 415 ppm in May 2019.

The 2020 deadline that we advocated in 2010 was based on this same science. But nearly ten years later, 2030 is now the earliest a crash program could convert the economy to 100% clean energy. Beginning a decade later means that we have to not only eliminate carbon emissions as soon as possible. We also have to invest more in drawing carbon out of the atmosphere and into Earth's soil and crust through forestation, organic agriculture, habitat restoration, and perhaps through industrial acceleration of the natural geological carbon cycle. [79]

Our Signature Issue

The Green New Deal in fact has been the signature issue of the Green Party for a decade. I was the first to run on it in 2010 for governor of New York. It was our program to get us out of the Great Recession. We proposed to revive the economy with public investments in clean energy and in public jobs, education, health care, and other social supports.

We called for public ownership and investment in clean energy to zero out greenhouse gas emissions by 2020. We called for an Economic Bill of Rights for living-wage jobs, an income above poverty, affordable housing, publicly-funded universal health care, lifelong tuition-free public education, and a secure retirement through a supplementary public pension program for all workers in the state.

We called it the Hawkins prosperity plan vs. the Cuomo austerity plan. The Democratic "lesser evil," Andrew Cuomo, touted himself as "the real Tea Party candidate." He blamed teachers and public employees for the state's fiscal crisis, called for cuts in education and public employment, and opposed tax hikes on the rich.

We showed how restoring the more progressive income tax structure and the stock transfer tax of the 1970s would close a \$9 billion fiscal gap and provide an additional \$25 billion the first year for the Green New Deal. [80]

By August 2010, 62 Green candidates

across the country came together to issue a call for a federal Green New Deal that included a 70% cut to military spending to help pay for it. [81] Jill Stein, the Green presidential candidate in 2012 and 2016, ran on the Green New Deal, as did many Green candidates for local, state, and congressional offices over the decade. [82]

One week after November 2018 elections, the national media focused on the Green New Deal thanks to the Sunrise Movement. These youth — joined by newly-elected Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC) — occupied House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's office to demand a Green New Deal. A December public opinion poll showed that more than 80% of registered voters supported it. [83]

Almost every Democrat running for president soon had a Green New Deal. Even Governor Cuomo had his own Green New Deal for New York. Greens were glad that the idea was now at the center of political debate, but the Democrats had taken the brand and watered down the content.

The original demand for a Select Committee for a Green New Deal was soon shot down by Speaker Pelosi. So AOC and Senator Ed Markey came back with a Non-Binding Resolution for a Green New Deal.

The aspirational goals in the non-binding resolution retained the Green Party's link between economic justice and climate action with its call for an Economic Bill of Rights, which Greens believe is essential to counter the jobs-

vs-environment line the energy corporations use to counter proposals for serious climate action.

The non-binding resolution, however, cut out or weakened important pieces of the Green Party's climate action side of the Green New Deal. It extended the goal of zero greenhouse gas emissions from 2030 to 2050, which is too slow to prevent climate catastrophe.

The resolution also dropped the federal ban on fracking and building of all new fossil fuel infrastructure, the indispensable immediate demand of the climate movement. It cut out the rapid phase-out of nuclear power and did not call for a major shift in spending from the military to clean energy.

The Democratic leadership then shot down the non-binding resolution. Speaker Pelosi would not schedule a vote on the non-binding resolution, which she ridiculed as a "green dream."

Senate Leader Mitch McConnell did schedule a vote to force the several Senators running in the Democratic primary to take a position, but the Democratic leadership told their senators not to go on the record by voting "present." The Democratic senators obeyed their leaders, except for the four who joined the Republicans in voting "no."

Despite these maneuvers, the Demo-cratic and Republican leaders have not been able to shut down the movement and popular support for a Green New Deal. It is now the central theme of the whole climate movement. Many of the Democratic presidential candidates have felt compelled to offer their own versions.

An Ecosocialist Budget

Our ecosocialist Green New Deal emphasizes public ownership and planning, instead of relying on the profit motive in markets to effectively and rapidly implement the program. It also emphasizes rebuilding America's hollowed-out manufacturing sector so

that we have the capacity to build the clean energy infrastructure and equipment for a new economy of environmental sustainability and economic security for all.

We propose to do what the federal government did in World War II when it built or took over a quarter of U.S. manufacturing in order to turn industry on a dime into the "Arsenal of Democracy" — it needs to do nothing less today to defeat climate change.

Rebuilding the manufacturing sector on an environmentally sustainable basis (clean power, zero waste, non-toxic materials) is key to the whole program, and unique among all the Green New Deal proposals to date. We will need that manufacturing sector to build the clean energy systems in all sectors.

Elizabeth Warren does have a 10-year \$2 trillion Green Manufacturing Plan as part of her Green New Deal. But relying on federal R&D, procurement, and export subsidies rather than public ownership and planning, Warren's plan will not transform manufacturing with the speed and certainty that is needed.

Public ownership and planning is the only way to rebuild and convert all sectors — manufacturing, agriculture, transportation, buildings as well as electric power — to clean energy and zero emissions. The ecosocialist Green New Deal therefore employs a large sector of public enterprises in green manufacturing — starting with the machine tool industry that is necessary to produce the manufacturing equipment for intermediate and consumer goods manufacturing.

These manufacturing public enterprises will produce the equipment needed for an Interstate Renewable Energy System, an Interstate High-Speed Rail System, and an Interstate High-Speed Internet System.

While public enterprises in some sectors should be publicly-administered services — energy, railroads, internet, health care, public housing — others, such as manufacturing plants, should be

leased out to worker cooperatives where workers would control their labor process and share the full fruits of their labor in proportion to their work contribution.

Our ecosocialist GND budget also shows how we can pay for the gross cost of this 10-year \$42 trillion program. Progressive tax reforms (income, wealth, estates, financial transactions, land value and more) would generate \$22 trillion. Cuts to spending on the military, border enforcement, and the war on drugs would generate nearly \$8 trillion.

That still leaves about \$13 trillion that will need to be borrowed under the current monetary system. We propose public banks and Green Quantitative Easing (Green QE) to finance this additional investment, only this time the Fed would use a Green QE asset purchase program to bail out the people and the planet instead of the banks.

The Green Party has a proposal for raising this money without incurring federal debt. It is a modern version of the greenback demand of the farmer-labor populists of the Greenback-Labor and People's parties of the late 19th century.

Under the Constitution's provision that gives Congress the power to "coin money," the Federal Reserve would be nationalized as a Monetary Authority in the Treasury Department and issue greenbacks (United States Notes as opposed to Federal Reserve Notes in digital and paper form) that the Treasury Department would place into the economy on the Green New Deal without incurring debt by borrowing through the issuance of treasury securities.

The net cost of the Green New Deal may be zero or even positive in the long run. Sales of public goods and services created by Green New Deal industries — green machinery sales, electric power fees, internet fees, public transportation fares, public housing rents — will generate a return on the public investment.

Bernie Sanders says his Green New Deal will pay for itself through the sale of publicly owned and distributed

electric power. We have not calculated revenues from our Ecosocialist Green New Deal, because what those prices should be are policy decisions that will have to balance the need for revenues and the need to provide some goods and services at lower cost, such as clean electricity and public transportation, in order to encourage their use.

Determining those prices should be done by the cabinet-level Office of Climate Mobilization that we call for, which will be charged with planning the implementation of the Green New Deal and coordinating all federal agencies to achieve its goals.

Democratic GND Proposals

We will leave aside the Economic Bill of Rights part of the Green Party's Green New Deal here in comparing the Democratic Green New Deal proposals, because theirs only focus on the climate/clean energy aspect — except for Bernie Sanders who has called for an Economic Bill of Rights as a program separate from his Green New Deal.

All the Democratic candidates' proposals fall far short of what is needed for climate safety, with the exception of Bernie Sanders' proposal. They rely on federal standards, regulations, and tax and subsidy incentives to move the economy to zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

Many of them seek 100% clean electricity by 2030 or 2035, but electric power production accounts for only 28% of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions. They wait until 2050 to eliminate emissions from the transportation, buildings, agriculture, and manufacturing sectors that account for the other 72%.

The public spending levels that the Democrats propose for their Green New Deals are far below what is needed to convert the economy to clean energy.

While we find that a 10-year \$27 trillion public investment in clean

energy is needed, their 10-year budgets are an order of magnitude lower: Joe Biden \$1.7 trillion, Cory Booker \$3 trillion, Pete Buttigieg no budget, Tulsi Gabbard no budget, Kamala Harris no budget, Jay Inslee \$3 trillion, Amy Klobuchar no budget, Beto O'Rourke \$1 trillion, Elizabeth Warren \$4 trillion, Andrew Yang \$2.5 trillion (mostly for adaptation to climate change).

While many of these candidates state that their public investments will generate three to five times more in private investments, Kamala Harris simply calls for \$10 trillion in public and private investment without indicating the public/private leveraging ratio or being specific on any details.

Tulsi Gabbard has not endorsed the Non-Binding Resolution for a Green New Deal and counterposed it to HR 3671, the Off Fossil Fuels Act (OFF Act), of which she is the prime sponsor.

The OFF Act aims to zero out emissions by 2035 through a combination of banning new fossil fuel infrastructure and mandating dates for clean electric power, zero-emissions vehicles, and electrified trains. It relies on private industry to meet the mandates rather than public ownership and planning, a politically dubious assumption.

Exxon and Koch Industries, Duke Energy and National Grid, GM and Ford, and Union Pacific and CSX are not going to simply comply. They need to be socialized to take their enormous private economic power out of the political equation.

Of all the Democrats, only Gabbard and Sanders call for bans on fracking and new fossil fuel infrastructure, a transfer of money from the military to clean energy, or a phase-out of nuclear power. Biden and Yang call for more nuclear power and carbon capture technology to allow continued fossil fuel burning.

Bernie Sanders' Green New Deal is a serious proposal with public investment in the same order of magnitude as our proposal. He calls for a 10-year public investment of

\$16.3 trillion. While his proposal doesn't show how he derived his numbers, the numbers look reasonable to us given his slower timeline for zeroing out emissions across all sectors.

Sanders' proposal seeks zero emissions from electric power by 2030 and from all other sectors by 2050, in contrast to our timeline of all-sectors zero emissions by 2030. Like our proposal, his calls for public ownership of utilities and a large sector of renewable energy. But Sanders doesn't call for public ownership of manufacturing and railroads, which we believe is essential to make the transition rapidly.

International Dimensions

It will take a global commitment to a rapid transition to renewable energy to avert a climate holocaust. China's Belts and Roads Initiative will be powered by 700 coal plants. Russia recently launched the first of seven planned barges with two nuclear reactors into the Arctic Ocean to power oil and gas wells. India's carbon emissions are growing at five percent a year as it rapidly expands its coal plants and oil-fueled vehicle fleet. But most of the world's nations, including most of its poorest nations, have been pushing for stronger climate action.

It will take a sophisticated mix of diplomacy and economic incentives to help the rest of the world jump from the 19th century fossil fuel age into the 21st century solar age. Many of the Democratic candidates talk about providing U.S. "global leadership" on climate, but only Sanders commits money to it. His Green New Deal would invest \$200 billion investment over 10 years in the Green Climate Fund.

The Green Climate Fund was set up at the UN climate conference in Copenhagen in 2009 to help developing nations build clean energy facilities. But thanks to vetoes by China, India and Saudi Arabia, it does not ban investments in fossil fuel projects. Our ecosocialist Green New

Deal calls for a 10-year \$1 trillion investment in a Global Green New Deal to assist developing countries to develop clean energy systems.

A 10-year, \$42 trillion ecosocialist Green New Deal may seem like a lot to ask of a federal government that would spend \$44 trillion over 10 years for all of its programs if the FY 2019 budget level continues. But the costs of not making that investment are greater.

A recent study in Nature [84] found that if the world meets the goal of the

Paris climate agreement of 2°C above the pre-industrial level (we have already reached 1.1°C increase), global GDP will still fall 15% below the 2010 level by 2100. If temperatures rise by 3°C, global GDP will fall 25%. If temperatures rise by 4°C, global GDP will fall by more than 30%, which is more than it collapsed in the 1930s Great Depression.

These losses are permanent due to irreparable damages to services the environment provides to the human economy. Our Ecosocialist Green New Deal aims to limit the rise in

temperature to 1°C or less by the end of the century. [85]

Global GDP in the worst case would be \$10 to \$20 trillion a year below its 2010 level. With almost a quarter of global GDP, U.S. losses would be about \$2.5 to \$5 trillion a year.

By preventing these losses, an investment of \$2.7 trillion a year over the next 10 years in rapidly building a clean energy economy will more than pay for itself.

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