



IV539 - December 2019

Reflection on the “sardines” movement

31 December 2019, by **Franco Turigliatto**

In order to understand what is happening, two elements must be taken into account: on the one hand, the importance and the positive side of these social demonstrations against fascism and racism despite the general nature of the demands, and on the other hand, the aims of the initiators of this movement, linked to the Democratic Party and supported by a newspaper such as the Repubblica, and the way in which they manage it.

Low degree of politicization

It is not by chance that this movement was born in Bologna, in Emilia-Romagna, a region governed since the post-war period by the ICP and then by the various centre-left political combinations. In this region, on 26 January, there will be a vote for the election of the Regional Council and its president and, for the first time, the right-wing parties, led by the Salvini League, may win, which would mean the defeat of the Democratic Party and probably the fall of the Conte 2 government, led by the Democratic Party and the 5-Star Movement. It is clear why the Democratic Party is so interested in the sardine movement.

But the fact remains that in Rome, as in other sardine occupations, we have

seen a massive positive reaction against the rise of racism, reactionary poison and sovereignist nationalism by Salvini and the right, in society and institutions, and young people have been in the front line.

The degree of politicization of this movement is still low, and its organizers deliberately seek to keep it at a level of general and superficial criticism of the hateful and inhuman accents of the reactionary right, of defence of the constitutional democratic framework, that is to say a battle fought at the level of public opinion alone (it is not by chance that these are not marches but only rallies lasting a few hours in the squares, with music and general speeches from stages).

No clear objectives are put forward, nor are they proposed - and even less so - places for discussion and deepening of a platform of demands that could put in difficulty the Conte bis government, which on most issues remains in continuity with the policies of the first Conte government, supported by the Salvini League.

Radicalizing the demands

In fact, the Democratic Party fears a radicalization of the slogans and a criticism of the neo-liberal austerity

policies that it has itself pursued and which have caused the social malaise that has allowed the various right-wing movements to develop. The group of Bolognese organizers is acting consistently in relation to this demand. Its extreme verticality is therefore not an anecdotal element; it responds to a logic and a precise choice: to prevent public, open and democratic places of discussion and debate from favouring confrontation between different ideas and political positions, which also correspond to different social interests.

During those same weeks, the class and anti-capitalist left (Sinistra Anticapitalista played an important role) sought to open a new path to unity of action, starting with a national assembly held on 7 December in Rome (about 400 people) in which seven or eight national organizations and about twenty local collectives participated. It defined a common platform of social struggle, as a working basis for the coming months: against military spending and policies, for employment (reduction of working hours without wage cuts, nationalisation of large companies and factories that lay off and restructure, abolition of security decrees, repeal of the Fornero counter-reform on pensions).

This class-conscious left will have to try to lead both the battle for social and democratic objectives, seeking to relaunch a mobilisation of the working

classes while putting itself in symbiosis with the democratic feelings that massively animated the squares during the sardine rallies; it is a

question of trying to radicalise their demands by favouring the construction of a great social struggle against the rights but also against the

liberal policies of austerity and against all the political forces that, yesterday as today, make themselves the bearers of these demands.

New Prime Minister takes office in Cuba

30 December 2019, by **Fernanda Montany**s

No one expected him in this position. The press release announcing his designation emphasizes that he is a “modest and simple” man, something that does not seem very credible. The new Prime Minister was a hotel manager, then director of the hotel managers of a province, and later Minister of Tourism.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the states that orbited around the Kremlin, Cuba experienced its greatest economic crisis in the 1990s. Until the beginning of that decade, the tourism industry was depressed. The so-called socialist countries of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, which represented almost 85% of the country's trading partners, did not provide profitable tourism and essentially Cuba lived by selling sugar to Moscow.

The aforementioned economic crisis forced the government to fully focus on promoting tourism. Thus, today it is the industry with the highest sustained growth in the country, with almost 5 million foreign visitors per year.

Fifteen years ago, Fidel Castro appointed a new minister to serve the leisure industry: Manuel Marrero Cruz. A short time later, for health reasons, the old leader handed over power to his younger brother, Raul Castro. After two years of provisional status, in February 2008 Raúl Castro was officially proclaimed President of the Council of State and Ministers.

In March 2009 he made a questionable cabinet purge, sacking all the ministers of the Fidel government, arguing that they had developed a dangerous ambition for

power. Only one minister appointed by the old leader survived this change: the Minister of Tourism who had been appointed by Fidel a few years ago.

Manuel Marrero Cruz survived not only this purge, but the entire period of the Raúl government, before being ratified by the new president, Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez, and, in addition, proposed by him, and approved by parliament, as new Prime Minister. Something becomes obvious, when the party newspaper said he was a “modest” companion, they meant that he had never been interested in power.

And it is true, Marrero Cruz is the typical businessman who only works to achieve the success of the company without expecting greater recognition from the boss than a pat on the back. He did not wish to rise in government: just to keep the country's tourism growing. To such an extent, that he ended up being appointed not only tourism minister, but also head of the Gaviota Business Group - property of the armed forces - which controls most of the Cuban tourism sector. While the rest of the political and administrative leadership of the country competed with each other to occupy positions of power, he only dedicated himself to fulfilling his work.

On 10 April 2019, after long citizen debates and a constitutional referendum, Cuba adopted a new constitution. Until this time, Raúl Castro - and before him Fidel - was simultaneously General Secretary of the Communist Party - the only party on the island and therefore the highest political office in the country - President of the Council of Ministers,

effectively Prime Minister, and President of the Council of State, that is, Head of State. At the same time, in due course, both Fidel and Raul, held the highest military rank in the army they had founded. Raul knew that this was an anomalous concentration of power and that someone with such political and administrative strength could take the nation where that person wanted.

Hence, from the new Constitution, there is a General Secretary of the Party - Raúl Castro Ruz, a President of the Republic - Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez, and, since 21 December - coincidentally 140 years after Stalin's birth - the only minister who survived Fidel's departure from power and the arrival of his brother Raul, who also survived the election of a new president and their respective cabinet changes, plus the changes of a new constitution, Manuel Marrero Cruz, on this very day was elected Prime Minister.

But there is something we should not forget. Although the grey character of Marrero - at the same time a successful technocrat - was what guaranteed his remaining as Minister of Tourism while many fell, his long political survival and now his appointment as Prime Minister, also influenced something that many forget.

When the new president Díaz-Canel was nothing more than the head of the party in a remote province in the east of the country, Marrero Cruz was the tourism manager of this entire province. Coincidentally, the current First Lady was also from that province, and that was where Díaz-Canel met her. Also, purely by chance,

the current first lady was appointed under the mandate of Marrero as a director of the tourism agency of the Ministry of Culture. And a detail that should not be forgotten: according to the new Constitution, the Prime Minister is appointed on the proposal of the President of the Republic. That is, Marrero Cruz was appointed by Díaz-Canel Bermúdez.

As a successful director of hotel managers throughout Cuba, Marrero Cruz filled Havana's old town with hotels, oblivious to the sustained crisis of access to water suffered by those who live in that area of the capital. This election made by the president,

ratified by parliament, and also approved by the Political Bureau of the Party, indicates the intentions of the new government that has been formed, while the old leaders of the revolution of January 1959 exit from power.

The former Prime Minister, like the current one, also had a beard, came from a remote province in the east of the country and had a long career of political resistance like the one just appointed. But Fidel Castro - the former Prime Minister - resisted the deadly traps of US imperialism in favour of Cuba and Manuel Marrero Cruz has been dedicated to resisting

the traps of the Cuban bureaucracy in his personal favour. Fidel's relationship with the transnationals was to expropriate them, Marrero's relationship with the transnationals was to attract them. Fidel's relationship with the workers was to lead them to revolution, Marrero's relationship with the workers was to create VIP zones in the new hotels that have been built. In less than three months, defining measures will be taken in terms of the economic direction of the country. A prime minister, that is, a head of government, will have a lot of responsibility in the new direction of the nation.

India and anti-Muslim Citizenship Amendment Act: Modi Might Have Finally Gone Too Far

29 December 2019, by **Achin Vanaik, Thomas Crowley**

Thomas Crowley (TC) To start, can you give a brief overview of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA)?

Achin Vanaik (AV) The act enables fast-track naturalization of certain people, under the guise of their being persecuted minorities from three neighboring states, all Islamic: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. And it very explicitly excludes Muslims. By excluding Muslims, it excludes Hazaras, Baluchis, and Ahmadiyyas - Muslims sects that are also persecuted within Afghanistan and Pakistan. It's notable also that there are a number of persecuted minorities in other neighboring states who do not come under the terms of the act, for example, Rohingyas. So this is clearly, deliberately creating a distinction between Muslim and non-Muslim minorities, and promoting the idea that India is the "natural" home of Hindus.

TC How is this act related to larger debates and developments around citizenship in India?

AV The act is the prelude - and this is very, very clear, it's been announced - to having what is called a National Register of Citizens (NRC) on an all-India level. There's no need for such a thing. Unlike the ten-year census, when they carry out the National Register of Citizens you will have to prove your citizenship according to a very restricted list of documents. Now the burden of proving one is a citizen is not on the accuser, not on the government, it's on the person. What if you are not able to prove it? For example, most births are at home, not in hospitals, and such households have no birth certificates. All those who are not Muslims can opt for being "persecuted" under the new act and can be fast-track naturalized. What will happen to Muslims? They will be sent to detention centers. This is the aim.

Let me point out that the 1935 Reich Citizenship Law first moved citizenship away from German Jews, and then sent them to concentration camps. And it happened in 1982 in Myanmar. Rohingyas were excluded from citizenship. So this is really part of a systematic attempt to exclude Muslims. They are not going to be expelled, because the neighboring states are not going to accept them. So what's going to happen to them? They're going to be in detention centers. And detention centers are already being set up in different parts of the country.

The NRC has already been implemented in one state, in Assam. What they've found is that in a state of thirty-three million, initially four million didn't have the required documentation. Then after a period of time it was reduced, but it was still nearly two million. The people already in detention centers have suffered badly. Some have committed suicide. All kinds of things have taken place.

And given the huge numbers that are likely, with an all-India NRC, what will certainly happen is that a part of them will be in detention centers. But for those not in detention centers, all kinds of rights will be taken away from them: the right to vote, the right to hold land or property. In other words, a systematic effort to reduce them to second-class citizens. This is clearly the plan.

TC How have the protests against the CAA and NRC unfolded?

AV There's been a huge upheaval against them, by three categories. First, there have been many Muslims. Then there are many others, who are very deeply concerned about this violation of the secular principle that rights should not be connected to affiliation with one specific religion. And finally, you also have a large section in the Northeast, in the state of Assam, who are protesting for reasons which have a positive and a negative dimension.

The positive dimension is, insofar as you have a large number of non-Muslims supporting the protest, at least it comes across that it's not just a small minority of so-called secular-minded people and Muslims who are upset about it, but a very large number of Hindus and others. The negative aspect is a regional chauvinism that's also connected to the concerns of the Northeast against migrants from other parts of India, especially from West Bengal.

As for these current demonstrations, they are really being spearheaded by students, up and down the country. And you will notice that there has been very considerable brutality against students in two universities in particular: Jamia Millia Islamia University and Aligarh Muslim University (AMU). Now these are what are called Minority Educational Institutions. These institutions were historically set up to enable religious minorities, primarily Christians and Muslims, to get tertiary degrees and improve their condition. They have a much larger proportion of Muslims and Christians, respectively, but they are, like all the universities, open to all comers.

So for example, at AMU and Jamia, maybe 40 percent of students will be Muslims (whereas Muslims are 14 percent of the overall population) but 60 percent of students are non-Muslims, and the majority of the staff and professors at these universities are also non-Muslims. And you had students "both Muslim and non-Muslim students" at these two universities, as well as other universities, come out in opposition to the act and in opposition to the NRC. But the brutality that has been visited upon these two universities in particular, because they are Muslim-minority education institutes, has been much greater than even the kind of brutality you've seen at other universities up and down the country. So students are protesting against this.

The fact that young people in India, students and others, are erupting in this particular way, gives me some hope, because electorally speaking, unlike in the UK and the United States, people in the eighteen-to-twenty-four age group voted disproportionately more for the BJP.

TC Why have protests exploded now, whereas one didn't see such a response to the ongoing repression in Kashmir?

AV What happened in the case of Kashmir is that the resentment was basically confined to Kashmir. You didn't have anywhere near the level of popular anger that you have now. In fact, for the Congress Party and even the mainstream left parties, their opposition to the annulment of Article 370 was not so much the fact of annulment, as much as the manner in which it was done. The Congress Party, after all, has a whole history, well before the BJP, of unconstitutionally and shamefully eroding the autonomy that was initially given and promised to the Kashmir Valley.

The current protests, on the other hand, have been everywhere. It's not been localized. And it is not an eruption that's been instigated by political parties, but by students in different universities and then joined by different protesters. There is a clear recognition that the government

is really out to attack Muslims.

Now since this government is also determined to eliminate or subordinate all other political parties, the other parties are recognizing that for their own survival they have to oppose the BJP. So their motives are not pure, but they do recognize that for their own sake they have to do that. So interestingly, a number of BJP-allied parties, which supported the CAA, are now saying, do not go in for the NRC.

TC In your earlier work, in the 1990s, you were wary of describing the Hindu nationalism of the BJP as fascism, though you noted it certainly had fascistic tendencies. What has changed since then? Has the BJP gone from a potentially fascist to an actually fascist formation?

AV The Indian left has for a long time debated the fascist or fascistic character of this force, which is clearly a far-right force. There were a number of liberal scholars who said, you know, India is a country that is so diverse, and if you really want to come to power at the center, you have to moderate. So this view is that there is always pressure for far-left forces and far-right forces to moderate, to move toward the center "something I long rejected. I've said that what's actually happened is that the far right has actually pulled the center of gravity of Indian politics to the right.

The theoretical question is: how do you understand fascism? Do you understand fascism as an organism, or do you understand it as a process? I've always taken the view, based on left traditions of understanding, that it's a process, it's something in motion. There's always a fascist potential. And the culmination of the fascist potential would be the fascist state. And the fascist state is one of the most class-autonomous forms. You have an extremely centralized and autonomous state. It's a one-party dictatorship with nothing to do with democracy, an imperial character and so on.

Many people were worried about a fascist state when the BJP first came to power in the 1990s. But I remember saying very clearly that even if it

comes to power, the democratic state will not be lost. Now, most people recognize that there's not going to be a complete elimination of democracy. Instead, there's going to be a dramatic hollowing out of democracy, which means that you will continue to have elections because they provide legitimacy for many far-right forces and so on.

So I think one needn't make too much of the fascist debate. It's enough to recognize that this is a very, very, very dangerous force, with fascist characteristics, and the important thing is to not get too hung up on theoretical differences. Much more important are programmatic differences that may follow from theoretical disagreements. And what I mean by that is: is there a straight line from saying that it's fascist to a kind of programmatic statement of how to fight it? Is there a straight line from saying it's fascism to how to fight it? And you find that there's no straightforward line. So I think one should not get too hung up about this, but should recognize the importance of agreement on the long-term perspective of how to fight, and also understand that compared to any other far-right force, anywhere else in the world, this is the most powerful and most dangerous. Can I just elaborate briefly on why that is the case?

TC Yes, that would be great. How would you position the BJP and other Hindu nationalist organizations – particularly the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) – in terms of other global right-wing forces?

AV First of all, unlike your Marine Le Pens, your Dutertes, your Bolsonaros, this is a force that has a continuous existence for over ninety years. I'm talking here not just about the BJP or the RSS, but the whole association of Hindu nationalist organizations that are part of what is called in India the Sangh Parivar, the family of the Sangh. Which other far-right force anywhere in the world has this?

Number two: it has the widest and deepest implantation in the pores of Indian civil society. It has over eight hundred NGOs doing all sorts of work.

It has thirty-six affiliates and four pan-India bodies: the RSS, BJP, VHP (World Hindu Council), and Bajrang Dal (lumpen attack force). I mean, I can go on and on. There are millions of cadres and activists and so on. It gets its loyalty not just because of people who accept its ideology, but because it does all kinds of other things in terms of meeting the basic needs of people. It's a cadre-based organization that is institutionalized in various ways. It'll help with neighborhood or leisure activities, or help a family get a doctor if their child is not well. It'll help you with education. It has the largest private network of schools at a primary level. So it's all of these things, things that the Left used to be able to do when it was expanding as a cadre force.

The third difference is that unlike Brazil, the Philippines, France, and so on, the opposition here is so much weaker. You have more political competition in other countries, from other political parties, even if they are conservative, so that the far-right election force, which doesn't have a deep implantation, is also countered to a large extent by a number of other political forces which are very substantial electorally. Here you have a much weaker opposition.

And the fourth difference is, since 1947, this is the only major party in India that has never suffered a major split. The Congress Party has had splits, the Left has had splits. And I put this down to the specificity of its ideological foundations, which allows it also to be flexible. That foundation, of course, is its anti-Islamic character and its Hindu nationalism, which means that it can be flexible in rejecting its earlier economic nationalism and becoming gung ho about neoliberal economics. Of course, by doing that they have established a support base among the ruling classes and so on.

TC If this force has been ninety years in the making, what would have to happen to build a broad movement that could counter it?

AV Now here let's be very clear that one of the crucial elements of building an opposition to it would have to be opposition to this capitalist-neoliberal

economic direction, which all the other major parties in one way or the other support. And this of course has created tremendous problems for them. You can't eliminate poverty, you have an increasing problem with joblessness, you have massive inequalities of income and wealth. So where is the force that is going to stand up against that?

Now in the short and middle term you do all kinds of things. You make tactical alliances with other political forces, with other social movements, you fight on specific issues of democracy and so on. But how do we build in the longer term a force that would be seriously committed to overcoming the reality of an expanding Hindutva? Which cannot be separated from a force that will fight to overturn neoliberal capitalism. Which in my view cannot be separated from a force that will be committed to the ultimate overthrow of capitalism itself. And the reason I say that is because I do not see neoliberalism, as a new system of accumulation, ever retreating and becoming an older form of social-democratic capitalism. I think that era is over. I used to think that the struggle to ultimately overthrow capitalism will have to pass through a reestablishment of a more humane capitalism. But I think we have to rule that out. If nothing else, climate change will see to that.

That doesn't mean that we don't fight for reforms that are social democratic, of course we do. But my basic point is that the long-term path to fight against Hindutva is the same as the long-term path to fight against neoliberal capitalism and therefore against capitalism itself, which means that you have to make a new kind of a left.

And how will that look, how will the Left emerge? It will of course come from splits and fusions and all sort of activities, creating activist leaders, ideologically committed cadres. It's long-term. Even as we have to fight at the electoral, political level, we have to fight to build a cadre force that can penetrate into civil society, in the way that even the mainstream left earlier did, at least in a few parts of India.

You can be sure that there are going

to be all kinds of eruptions, from all kinds of problems. The problem of joblessness is very serious. The BJP is not guaranteed to avoid upheavals and disruptions against it. Unfortunately, even as these are going to happen, the direction that Indian politics will take as a result really depends upon living politics. Whether it's going to move in a rightward direction or left direction depends on what happens here, how

we can take advantage of these struggles and upheavals. And that will require a much more organized political force.

TCWhat do you think will be the long-term fallout of the current developments?

AV I would not want to make any

definite predictions. India is a huge country. So one of the most dangerous things to do about India, even as I talk about the hegemonizing drive of the Sangh Parivar, is to see anything in the longer term as inevitable. India constantly surprises us by what happens. Maybe I'm taking a bit of refuge in optimism about the future.

Source: 22 December 2019 [Jacobin](#).

Viewpoint: Defeating Trump

28 December 2019, by **Dave Jette**

Dianne Feeley's VIEWPOINT in *ATC* 202 (September-October 2019) "[What Sanders' Campaign Opens](#)" very well describes the possibilities that Bernie Sanders' pursuit of the Democratic Party's 2020 presidential nomination opens up for socialists. I agree with this presentation, but I think that it incorrectly omits the critical need to defeat Donald Trump next year even if we have to actively support a more mainstream Democrat for this purpose.

There are two basic reasons for what may be for some a shocking proposition: first, Trump is systematically, and with considerable success, bringing about fascism in our country; and second, he is destroying whatever defenses we presently have to help avoid the climate change which will be catastrophic for the whole world.

This suggested course of action would certainly have been shocking to me until very recently, for until then I had been adamant in rejecting any collusion with the Democratic Party, realizing that it like the Republican Party is a creature of the 1% and that its role for countless decades has been to emasculate and absorb any serious challenge to their rule.

Attempts to "capture" and transform the Democratic Party into one serving the needs of the vast majority of our populace have been demonstrated, time and time again, to be a fool's

errand. Nonetheless, the political situation with which we are now faced is so grave that it is imperative to do whatever is possible to deprive Trump of an even more devastating second term of office - we simply cannot avoid to stick our heads in the sand and hope that things work out for the better.

Regarding Dianne Feeley's article, I am less pessimistic than she is about the prospect of Sanders garnering the Democratic Party's nomination - he's running a highly active grassroots-based campaign, and he may be able to pull it off in spite of the Party's leadership.

But more to the point is the refusal of the Democratic Socialists of America, through a resolution passed at DSA's national convention in August, to support any Democratic Party presidential candidate other than Sanders. Her take on that decision seems to be supportive, pointing out that it demonstrates that Sanders' candidacy doesn't trap individuals and organizations inside the Democratic Party.

My own take is rather different, that it is highly dismaying, demonstrating that DSA is not yet able to do that which is absolutely necessary at this time, i.e. to work as hard as possible to prevent Trump's continuation as president. It's fine to have strongly socialist politics, but not if your (well justified) antipathy to the Democratic

Party results in your dropping the ball. What to Do?

I've been highly active in the Green Party for many years, serving as treasurer for its electoral campaigns at all levels including for federal office.

As usual, the Green Party will be running a candidate for president next year, and it was therefore natural for me to come up with a proposed set of objectives for its candidate's campaign, keeping in mind the overriding necessity of defeating Trump while also not watering down its own excellent political stance. I came up with the following four points:

1. The presidential campaign should encourage everyone to defeat Trump by voting for the Democratic Party nominee in any state in which the race is at all close, and to help get out the vote in those states. The Green Party should become clearly identified with the struggle to prevent a second term for Trump and substantially contribute to defeating him.
2. The campaign should support the campaigns of local Green Party candidates, as the necessary first step in building the party. Running presidential and statewide candidates with no chance of winning is basically a waste of time and energy.
3. The campaign should promote the

Green Party as a genuine progressive electoral party, which will occur naturally through promotion of the first two objectives, as well as in campaigning in the absence of local Green Party candidates. On the one hand it will establish the political maturity of the Party through its active and highly public involvement in the effort to dump Trump, and on the other hand it will be advocating a full progressive political platform for serious consideration.

4. The campaign should still seek to get a high vote total for the Green Party presidential candidate. Although

this will be a secondary objective contingent upon satisfying the first three objectives, it is still desirable to demonstrate substantial voter support in states in which it cannot possibly hinder ousting Trump.

The foregoing objectives could of course apply for any progressive third-party presidential campaign, but my intention was to convince the Green Party (at its presidential nominating convention next July) to approve this course of action for its nominee.

But after investigating prospects for such approval, I've been convinced that there is no chance of these

objectives being obtained, and I have accordingly decided to no longer waste my time and to withdraw from active participation in the Green Party, which evidently has no capability of becoming the sort of progressive electoral party which is so needed.

The reader may be interested in my article "Relation of Progressives to the Democratic Party" which was published in the July 2019 issue of Works in Progress of Olympia, Washington; it is available at <https://olywip.org/relation-of-progressives-to-the-democratic-party/>.

Continuous Rebellion in Hong Kong

27 December 2019, by **Au Loong-Yu**

Question : In August, when the Hong Kong upsurge had just begun, you stated in an interview with Jacobin, that "if Beijing's regime remains stable, a Hong Kong people's uprising probably will not end well." [1] Now, in November 2019, the protests are still vibrant and transnationally visible.

How would you characterize the current situation, after six months of marches, occupations, and of violent clashes with the police ?

Au Loong Yu : After the four-day battle between the Chinese University students and the police between 11 and 14 November, big clashes broke out on 17 of November. Hundreds of riot policemen besieged the Polytechnic University, and at this moment of writing, the siege is still going on.

The great Anti-Extradition Bill Movement has evolved into a big battle to defend Hong Kong's autonomy. It has gone through three stages.

First stage (June and July)

The first stage was in June when

millions of people took to the streets. The legislative assembly was besieged and there was violence.

Then Carrie Lam's administration conceded by announcing that the extradition bill would be temporarily suspended. But discontent persisted.

The labour movement should also be mentioned. On 17 June, the pro-democracy Confederation of Trade Unions called for a strike. It was not successful.

It was the radical youth breaking into the legislature building on 1 July, which escalated the movement further. The brief occupation was also possible partly because the legislature was evacuated by the police, which was probably to lure the radicals to break in in the first place and bring on a confrontation. Either way, this action pushed the movement to a higher level.

But what followed was horrible : the police collaborated with the mafia in the Yuen Long region [right near the border with Mainland China] to carry out indiscriminate attacks in the train station to terrify residents and demonstrators.

This antagonized people, and even the most moderate liberals became angry. So, we saw a further radicalization.

There were also 16 or 17 demonstrations in different districts. We saw a broadening of the movement to the community level, which we have never seen before in Hong Kong. This was driven by the attack from the mafia.

The 27 July protest was even more significant. Until then, the demonstrations were legal. But on 27 July, the police refused a licence for the first time.

Hong Kong people are very moderate - or have been for many years.

Ordinarily, they would have accepted this. Instead, hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets in defiance. This was the first time since the current movement started that there has been civil disobedience in such large numbers. This laid the groundwork for August.

Second stage : the climax (August)

August marked the beginning of the second stage, which was the climax.

On 5th August, there was another strike. This time it was successful.

One sector of the Hong Kong economy defined the strike movement : the airport and flight industry employees. It's estimated that 300,000 or 400,000

people took part in the strike.

Later in August, there were victory marches every two or three days. More people marched than in July. So, the mobilizations continued. On 12th August, there were more huge occupations of the airport.

The 2 and 3 September strike call was not that successful however, as working people and the unions feared retaliation from Beijing. The latter had already showed its claws after the 5th August strike by making Cathay Pacific's management fire its employees' union and more than 30 employees. [2]

As both the students and the unions could find no way to protect strikers from dismissal, it should not surprise us that this second strike was not very successful.

But the early September class boycott was very successful. Along with college students now, even high school students got organized and boycotted classes.

Demonstrations became a regular activity in this small city.

There was also a problem in the movement. Since the movement is leaderless and no political party – be they liberals or the nativist parties – has ever been able to play any significant role at all, it tends to be very loose and chaotic.

For instance, on 1 October there were multiple marches in different parts of the city instead of a single big march.

Occupations and Strikes

From October onwards, the movement entered its third stage.

I will describe it as a deadlock situation.

- The movement itself is in a bottleneck as it finds it hard to mobilize a labour strike again or to hold a demonstration of a million in defiance of the ban on marching.

- On the other hand, the government is also unable to suppress the movement.

On 11 November, there was a call for a strike and class boycott.

The fight between the students and the police between 11 and 14 November was impressive. They occupied universities for four days.

It was the occupation at the Chinese University (CUHK), which was the biggest. This was because many students from other universities came to help and made the resistance to the police attack on the night of the 12th possible.

However, the lack of organization and coordinating bodies within the occupation magnified the differences over tactics between CUHK students and those from outside the campus. The former were angry over some outside students' reckless behaviour (destroying facilities). Eventually the management of the university closed the whole campus down, and the occupation was ended.

As for the strike, this was the third strike call but it was not very successful either. It is true that many people could not get to work on that day, not because they took the initiative to strike but because the students, through occupying campuses located close to 30 main roads or railways, practically paralyzed half of Hong Kong's busiest area.

But these are actions which common folks with a job cannot join or are not ready to join. Increasingly there is now a danger of the narrowing of the mass base of radical actions. Meanwhile the number of people who come out to march despite the ban has also declined.

On the other hand, there are also signs that the support for the five demands of the movement is broadening as well. This is a result of the government's hard-line policy. Also, police brutality plays an important role.

Whenever there are clashes, the police chase after protestors into the community and fire tear gas. This practice deeply antagonizes those who at first remained neutral or even supportive of the government's policy. One positive result of this movement is that from September onwards community protests have become even more common.

In addition, there are more and more young activists who realize the importance of labour struggle and now call for joining or forming new unions.

A young public servant's call to form a public employee union has resulted in very good response. News reported that hundreds of public servants have enlisted.

This is also a response to the traditional unions which have been slow in reacting in such a period of turmoil, although credit is due to them for their support for the 5th August strike. Without this strike, it would not have been possible to prove to Hong Kongers the relevance of labour and to attract a new generation of labour supporters.

Asymmetry of Forces

Surely, the escalating violence from certain protestors is sometimes really unjustified and in individual cases should be condemned. The main body of the Yellow Ribbon camp still largely looks to non-violent resistance rather than violence, however.

It is also obvious that most of them do not place too much blame on the protestors as a whole.

This can be verified by a recent poll conducted by the Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute : 83 per cent of the population lay the blame for violence at the government's feet, while only 40 per cent thought it was the protestors' responsibility (the two questions were asked separately and are not exclusive to each other). [3]

What this poll shows also coincides with another poll : 70 to 80 per cent of the population support the five demands of the movement. Although the radical youth still enjoys popular support, most of the Yellow Ribbon people are still reluctant both to go on strike and to fight with the police. As mentioned earlier, there is now a risk that the mobilization is weakening.

The common protestors are not to be blamed for their lack of brave actions because they, as adults, know more about this simple truth : Hong Kong is ruled not only by its "autonomous" government, but first and foremost by Beijing and this absolute asymmetry of forces between the city and the Chinese state makes any sensible person re-think the idea of a revolution within one city. Hong Kong can only win when Mainland China is also ready for a mass upheaval. Yet, this is not in sight.

Furthermore, Hong Kong emerged

from the Umbrella Movement in 2014 as a deeply split city, something that had not been seen since 1949.

The CCP vs. KMT division, although deep, was by then also very much confined to the two camps and had little relevance to local people. [4]

But 2014 ended with a deep division of HK people into the Yellow Ribbon camp who are pro-Umbrella and the Blue Ribbon camp who oppose to it.

According to an opinion poll conducted by the Chinese University, after the end of the Umbrella Movement, 33.9 percent of interviewees supported the occupation. [5]

While the democrats in general received more (55 to 60 percent) of the vote in the legislature election, democratic civil disobedience has never been able to garner anything close to a majority in society.

This only began to change with the out-break of the anti-China Extradition Bill Movement. This movement has actually evolved into the great 2019 Battle to Defend Hong Kong's Autonomy, and has won absolute majority support.

In the 2016 legislature election 1.18 million voters voted for the opposition, including the pan-democratic camp and different shades of "localist" and "self-determination advocates," accounting for 55 percent of the vote. This constitutes the base of the Yellow Ribbon camp. For sure, the China Extradition bill has enlarged the base of the Yellow Ribbon camp. On 16th June, two million marched on Hong Kong island. This more or less gives us a clue as to the rough size of the Yellow Ribbons.

The different components of the movement

The local terms of "light yellow" and "dark yellow" can give us some sense of the different components of the movement as well. The former applies to the broad democratic supporters, while the latter applies to staunch supporters.

If the "light yellows" are moderate, it is reasonable to assume that they may vote and go to peaceful demonstrations, while the "dark yellows" are more ready to participate in banned demonstrations and non-violent civil disobedience.

The largest illegal demonstration broke out in Yuen Long on 27 July, with 280,000 on the streets. The banned march turned into street fighting again after the police attack. From then on this has become the norm.

This incident also allows us to have a glimpse of the size of the "dark yellow" component of the movement.

Another category relates to the means the protestors use : "militant current" versus "non-violent current".

The former consists of those that advocate and make use of force, from throwing rocks to Molotov cocktails. They rely on the support of the "dark yellows," who have now become more tolerant of violence.

How large is the "militant current ?" No one knows, but it is definitely smaller than the "dark yellow" current.

And the "militant current" can further be broken down into :

- those who actually use force in the resistance to police violence
- and those who play a supportive role, from providing materials for weapons to making road blocks (those doing first aid are not included but they could also easily be arrested or get hurt).

The number of those involved in the "militant current" is estimated at ranging from 5,000 to 10,000 or more.

One difficulty in making a correct assessment is the constraint laid down by the nature of the movement itself.

It is, like already mentioned, a leaderless, unorganized movement, to the extent that it is hostile to any idea of "representation."

Even the "militant current" is composed of multiple fragmented groups, each consisting of one or at most two dozen activists, heavily relying on social media to coordinate actions.

The down-side of its worship of spontaneity is that fragmentation sometimes weakens actions. For instance, the online discussions about 1st October actions against the National day failed to reach an agreement at the last minute and resulted in marches in different areas. [6]

On the other hand, the Blue camp has not been strengthened either, rather it has been weakening all the way through, because Beijing has exposed its real intention now.

Even among the "light blue" people many more began to realize that the current protest is really not just about "young people's idealism," or "abuse of violence," or even the China Extradition bill, but about the complete undermining of Hong Kong's autonomy if Hong Kong people do not act against it.

Question : In October 2019, the CCP announced a "strengthening of the law" in Hong Kong. The strong repression is mainly directed against the more militant part of the youth movement. What does this mean in terms of mobilization and the development of the different factions within the movement ?

Au Loong Yu : On 4 October, the government, by invoking the Emergency Act, made an anti-mask law. Immediately, the response to this was radical marches and clashes with the police, and protestors put on masks in defiance of the ban.

The civil disobedience kept on broadening, making the ban not only totally ineffective, but also resulted in the government becoming even more hated and despised than ever. Especially so, when one considers that wearing masks has been quite common in Hong Kong since the 2003 SARS pandemic - people do so even for very mild colds, a practice which Europeans may find odd.

This public anger against the government was definitely bad for the pro-Beijing parties in the lead-up to the scheduled 24th November local election.

Being afraid of this, the pro-Beijing parties started to push for postponing the election - without knowing that this only made them even more hated than ever.

If that was exactly their purpose (it is always understood here that the pro-Beijing camp, under the direct control of the Liaison Office, is always intentionally provocative in order to justify their even more ferocious counter-attack), then they were quite successful : people are so angry that

they are now more prepared to tolerate the use of force within the resistance. The government's blind reliance on violent suppression and unscrupulous political tricks actually played the role of cementing the different currents within the whole opposition camp.

When the High Court ruled that the anti-mask law was unconstitutional, it carried the movement to a higher plane.

Beijing furiously accused the High Court of doing something that it is not entitled to do.

If Beijing continues its hard-lined policy, then it is likely that it is going to make use of its power of interpreting and re-interpreting the Basic Law once again to overthrow the High Court's decision. If it does – and it has done similar things several times already –, this means it will be signing the official death certificate of Hong Kong's rule of law and its autonomy. The result will be catastrophic for foreign capital (which relies on Hong Kong's legal system to operate), for Hong Kong and therefore for Beijing as well.

Surely, there are many ways to solve this crisis without losing too much face for Beijing. But that requires flexibility, wisdom, and at least the ability to tolerate and hear different viewpoints. The top leaders of the CCP are not well known for these skills, however. Hence, we are all standing at the edge of a precipice.

The Geopolitical Situation

The contest between China and the US is very different from, say, between Russia and the US. The former relationship was a very close one until recent years, both economically and politically, while the latter was not.

While the economic side is well known (any talk of immediate delinking between the two sides is quite improbable unless one of them is willing to endure the cost of economic meltdown), there has also been close collaboration on the political side for the past forty years as far as Hong Kong is concerned. The so called 'one country, two systems' is first and foremost a Beijing initiative to

make a historic compromise with the UK, but tacitly also with the US as well, in exchange for not only getting back Hong Kong's sovereignty but also for allowing Beijing to be fully integrated into global capitalism.

And Deng Xiaoping would never have been able to achieve both goals without first making enough concessions to the West. Hence, the Sino-British Joint Declaration in 1984, followed by the promulgation of the Basic Law in 1990, practically recognized the Western interest as one of the stakeholders in Hong Kong, with the UK at its head.

In the current movement in Hong Kong, the British-born Hong Kong Police Force Chief Superintendent Rupert Dover was very well known for being hard-line. If one looks for "foreign intervention" one should look at how Mr. Dover smashed the skulls of Hong Kong Chinese protestors. In fact, there are hundreds of white police officers holding foreign passports in Hong Kong.

This is protected by article 101 of the Basic Law, which guarantees that foreign nationals can be hired as civil servants or government consultants. The Basic Law also guarantees the continued usage of English as an official language, the persistence of the common law system, the appointment of foreign judges to Hong Kong courts, the granting of UK passports to Hongkongers, so on and so forth.

Hence, it is not in the UK, US or the EU's interest to destabilize Hong Kong as long as the Basic Law remains valid until 2047. Rather their interest determines that they should follow a policy of stabilising Hong Kong's political institutions.

This also explains why the UK and the US quietly told the Hong Kong pan-democrats to accept Beijing's political reform package in 2014 prior to the outbreak of the Umbrella Movement.

It is Beijing's unilateral change of its Hong Kong policy and its refusal to honour its promise, which is leading the West to turn against Beijing over Hong Kong.

On top of the issue of Beijing's undermining of Hong Kong autonomy, the US surely has other grievances

regarding for China as well, such as the trade conflict and, more importantly, the contest for global dominance, and none of these require our support.

In general, the big contest for global dominance between China and the US is just a fight to divide up the spoils. This is not our battle.

But Hong Kong is a different issue.

Its laissez-faire capitalism is surely very problematic for the working people here, but the Basic Law also provides protection of basic human rights, which allows the growth of a social movement.

In contrast, China's bureaucratic capitalism is worse as it tolerates no social movement or opposition at all.

One may say that in this juncture there is now a narrowly defined common interest between the West and the Hong Kong people over the defence of Hong Kong's autonomy.

International civil society should be in solidarity with Hong Kong people's defence of this autonomy.

If we are distrustful of the Western great power (and we should be), then we should link this defence to the further broadening of working people's rights at the expense of the interest of foreign or local corporations (for instance, the introduction of collective bargaining to Hong Kong will surely not be welcomed by the latter).

Refusal to support us is not going to harm US imperialism, but it definitely harms the Hong Kong people and their social movement. This leads us to the US "Hong Kong Human Right and Democracy" bill. It is silly to give uncritical support to the bill because it ties Hong Kong human rights to US foreign policy. [7]

Right Wing Localism

Another problem related to international solidarity is the existence of a xenophobic, nationalist wing of the Yellow Ribbons.

A decade ago, a new ideological current of "localists" emerged.

By that time, it was already very mixed, but certain progressive conservatives were among them.

Yet very soon, it was the right wing which dominated localist discourses.

Hong Kong has always been conservative in general, but there was never a localist right wing until then. They were actually more "nativist" than localist.

Soon after the Umbrella Movement began, the xenophobic localists began to put out stickers and banners at all occupation sites which read "Beware of the Left Pricks." This is nonsense as there is no sizable left. This kind of attack mainly targeted the Hong Kong Federation of Students and social organizations and activists who took part in the occupation.

Spokespersons of the localists were Raymond Wong and scholar Chin Wan-kan (or Chin Wan).

Together with Raymond Wong's apprentice Wong Yeung-tat, they constituted a xenophobic trio and were nicknamed as "Two Wong and One Chin."

Each had their own organization, though.

Their actions in the occupation area were :

- 1. to silence the voices of other democrats,
- 2. to incite the masses to achieve their goals,
- 3. to use violence or threaten to use violence,
- 4. to make racist statements about Chinese people, calling them "locusts" which should be ousted,
- 5. to attack Mainland Chinese immigrants in HK as stealing welfare from the government.

What is interesting to note is that they were so discredited that they lost in the 2016 election and hence were marginalised.

There are a few very small nativist organisations founded by young people but they are so small that they do not have any institutional muscle to enforce their agenda within the movement.

If they do have some ideological influence, it is only because,

- firstly, Hong Kong is always conservative within a context of a so-called laissez-faire society ;
- secondly, there already exists a crowd which, maddened by Beijing's repression, mistakenly sees all Chinese people as responsible and

therefore takes an undifferentiated hostility towards Chinese people in general.

But this nativist current is very small.

In general, the self-claimed localists could garner slightly more than ten percent of the vote, but we must bear in mind that not all localists are nativists.

When the current movement began to gather momentum and involve millions of common citizens and hundreds of thousands of young people who are entirely new to politics and have no link at all to any current political party, the nativist discourse is very much diluted, even if young people use some of the nativist language and icons.

A recent survey showed that nearly 40 percent of the students claim to be localist, but this is interpreted differently by the radical youth. The nativists are not actually that visible as a well-defined current, except certain slogans of theirs that have been picked up by young people. There are small community actions, which could potentially be taken advantage of by nativists.

Yet on 7 July, there was a 230,000 march to the high-speed train station to greet mainland visitors and trying to appeal to them to support the movement. The nativists have been saying loudly for years that mainland Chinese people are all "fxcking supporters of despotism." Obviously, many protestors have not listened to their advice.

One may conclude that within the current movement multiple inclinations co-exist. Whenever there is abuse of violence, there are always people who immediately come out to try to stop it. Surely the young radicals, being entirely inexperienced in politics, do make mistakes, for instance believing Trump will save them, or sometimes senselessly picking up some xenophobic slogans. But while the nativist inclination is there, there are also progressive inclinations and actions as well.

The left should not stand on the side-line and just criticise, rather

it should join the struggle and stand on the side of the progressives to fight against any nativist inclination.

Postscript

The landslide victory by the opposition in the current local election could be considered as a referendum on both the Hong Kong government and Beijing.

The people's voice is a clear and loud "No" to the latter's hard-line policy."

In general, the opposition has enjoyed 55 to 60 percent support in the legislative election, but in local elections, this has previously dropped to 40 percent.

The fact that the opposition now garners 57 percent of the votes as opposed to the pro-Beijing parties' 41 percent is surely a big victory.

In terms of seats, it is even a bigger victory. It won 388 seats in total, an increase of 263 seats, while pro-Beijing parties lost 240 seats and were only able to retain 59 seats.

The popularity of the pan-democrat camp could already be seen in the above-mentioned poll before the election.

Still, nobody ever thought the pan-democrats could win such a landslide victory in a local election.

Especially when it occurred in a context where radical actions of the movement are on a decline : the police has been laying siege to the Polytechnic University since last week and, despite several dozens of protestors still refusing to give themselves up, there is little they or their supporters outside can do.

The victory in the election surely boosts the morale of the opposition in general and thus neutralizes the demoralization effect of the defeat at the two universities.

It is also encouraging that more than sixty newly elected district board members went to the gate of the university to express solidarity with the protestors inside. [8]

Source [*Sozial.Geschichte Online*](https://www.sozialgeschichte.de/).

Statement of Radical Socialist on the Citizen Amendment Act (CAA), the Proposed National Register of Citizens (NRC) and the Ongoing Protests Against Them

26 December 2019, by **Radical Socialist**

This agitation really took off when peaceful protestors against these two measures and about other intra-university concerns in Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI) University and Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) were singled out for particularly harsh physical punishment and brutality by the police. Their use of lathis, gas grenades, tear gas, even live ammunition within as well as outside the university campuses caused a couple of hundred or more injuries among students and civilians. The brutality of this assault on these students is not an accident since they are both Muslim minority educational institutions having a higher than average proportion of Muslims students even as the majority of students, faculty and employees are not. Clearly, the Central government in Delhi and the Yogi Adityanath government in UP deliberately gave a long rope to the police for they would not otherwise have dared to behave in this way.

In localities where a significant proportion of Muslims live, there is growing recognition that these measures are seeking to punish Muslims in particular; hence other marches and demonstrations which have led to confrontations with the police. UP in fact has been turned into a war zone with the police firing and killing with intent against residents in predominantly Muslim localities. For the first time since Emergency Section 144 preventing public assembly of more than five people has been imposed on the whole state – a sign of the viciousness and ruthlessness of this Hindutva-wadi government! Nevertheless huge assemblies have

still taken place in Bareilly and Kanpur deserving our admiration for the courage and persistence of the participants, Muslims and Non-Muslims alike even as the former have had to bear the brunt of these attacks.

To be sure there are other protestors. A huge number of non-Muslim students were involved in these demonstrations and protests throughout the country as also a wide cross-section of ordinary citizens from various walks of life. The push given by the students has been caught up by masses all over India. By Christmas, 2019, about 12 to 13 million people have marched across India. In Assam and some states in the northeast, the motivations of most protestors reflected more specific sentiments of regional rather than religious exclusion, i.e., concerns about non-Assamese and non-indigenous peoples whether from other parts of India (many) or from Bangladesh (much fewer) changing local demographic patterns. Such sentiments are to be seen in the context of violation in Assam Accord and make it very difficult for the BJP, the Sangh Parivar and their in-house elite trumpeters to champion their cause. Of course many parties opposed for their own reasons to the BJP have jumped into the fray. But because they are not the initiators nor the dominant presence in these protests, the public credibility of this movement has been higher and public support and sympathy that much greater.

The struggle has led to fissures opening up in the bloc the BJP sought to cement. At the same time, it has shown why inadequate attention to

specific oppressions can lead to sections of the oppressed being co-opted by the Sangh. Thus, on one hand, the NRC in Assam having already declared over 2000 transgenders as non-citizens, members of the transgender community were seen in some places as significant visible protestors. On the other hand, however, a much larger community, the Matuas of (mainly) West Bengal, who are mostly Namasudras (Dalits) forced out from East Pakistan/Bangladesh, have felt aggrieved. Many of them have been deprived of citizenship due to the 2003 amendment. As a result, they are a group who are being targeted by the BJP through the CAA. While the left, including RS and its predecessors, have supported the right of this community, the fact that the BJP is in power, as well as its ability to fan hatred of the Muslims among sections of the Dalits, have meant that they are turning to the Sangh and its politics. Without diluting our hostility to the CAA, we stress that there is a need to ensure the restoration of the rights of this community, which were clipped in 2003.

There are three main reasons why students have come out in this way. First, to show solidarity with fellow students and their rights within and outside university campuses to exercise freedom of speech, assembly and protest without having to face such brutal police assaults resulting in hundreds injured and even a few deaths. Second, what is very welcome is the growing recognition that this attack on secularism automatically means an assault on the principles and practices of democracy itself. Third,

this government since 2014 has systematically sought to severely weaken the independence of thought and behaviour of students and teachers by pursuing policies of (i) privatization hurting the access of poor and not-so-poor students, especially but not only among the lower castes, to cheap and decent education at the tertiary level; (ii) communalization of syllabi and in faculty selection as well as in the appointments of VCs and senior administrative staff; (iii) centralization to weaken the control and influence of non-BJP ruled state governments since most educational institutions come under their authority.

So much has already been written (and very widely) about the contradictions and iniquities of the CAA and of what an all-India NRC would do. There is little point therefore in repeating what has been said. This RS statement will speak about what needs to be said but has hardly been highlighted. Time and again, left and progressive forces have underestimated if not the determination, then the degree of longer term planning behind some of the key policy manoeuvres of this Hindutva government.

Take the CAB, now an Act. It was brought into the public discourse in 2016 and introduced into Parliament only after 2019 when the BJP was confident of it passing both houses. But in 2018 the RBI passes a notification allowing non-Muslim minorities from exactly the same three countries of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh to buy immovable property in India provided they had a long term visa. Furthermore, they could open non-resident bank accounts to stash their earnings in India. To call this geographical parallel a coincidence would stretch even the most credulous of imaginations.

The CAA in itself does not directly affect Indian Muslim citizens but of course we know it is the necessary prelude to the NRC which is aimed at domestically resident Muslims not just in Assam but throughout the country once the NRC goes national. Insofar as current events have pushed the SAD and BJD which supported the CAA to

oppose the NRC extension, expect the BJP to now use stick and carrot to bring them in line. But the CAA on its own sends a very important message--- a strong one to Hindus in the three named countries; a significant message also to Hindus elsewhere in South Asia and the world. It is the first time legislative flesh has been given to a political-symbolic statement that has regularly been repeated from the time of Savarkar and Golwalkar to Mohan Bhagwat today, namely that India is the natural home of Hindus and thus vice versa, Hindus are the 'true' people of India. Hindus in the three neighbouring Muslim majority states are being given an invitation to consider coming in thereby increasing the Hindu population. Other Hindus from Sri Lanka and elsewhere can also become naturalised Indian citizens, albeit for the time being, more slowly. This is the initial step in a longer term process of partially emulating Israel's 'right of return' for Jews, here for Hindus. And like Israel, Hindutva aims to forge a global loyalty among a diaspora of Indians of Hindu descent and 'blood' only. That the CAA and NRC can also promote conversions by Muslims and others to Hinduism has not escaped the minds of Sangh leaders.

As for the NRC, it has not one but two strategic aims. First, to terrorise and inferiorise Muslims by placing as many as possible in various detention camps and to more generally deprive them and others caught in the net such as non-Muslim political 'troublemakers' and many among the poor and lower castes (who can be discarded) of numerous rights including to vote, own land, having job permanency or creating other restrictions to make livelihood insecure and inadequate. In 1935 Hitler took away citizenship from Jews, Gypsies and others not 'German by Aryan descent'. Over the next few years, more laws were put in place to restrict movement, job opportunities, marriages with Germans, and so on till finally, in war-time, these stateless non-citizen Jews were put in concentration camps. Here, the journey time between Muslims and others made non-citizens, and placement in detention camps, will be much quicker.

The second goal encompasses the whole population. Census taking involves enumeration of self-declared responses to a set of questions. The proposed NRC will require much more detailed responses to many more intrusive questions from all households and their members so as to build up the most comprehensive collection of personal data. In effect this is crucial to creating a new and very powerful surveillance state that can carry out micro-level monitoring to better deal with actual and potential opponents in civil society. If this Orwellian vision seems far-fetched one needs only look at what has already been going on since 2014. Look at the efforts to link Aadhar to bank accounts, mobiles and to as much as possible of everyday activity. This has partially been restrained by the courts when it made personal privacy a fundamental right. But the effort to undermine this by creating exceptions in the name of national security and similarly claimed urgencies is an ongoing one. In the next Parliament session, a personal Data Protection Bill will be brought in which has been reworked to maximise exceptions thereby allowing various wings of the government to spy on targeted individuals and groups. This Bill has been sent to a parliamentary committee where the chair and majority membership are either BJP MPs or sympathisers from allied parties, so that the final product will be what this government wants. Given that the NDA holds a majority it will become an Act. As it is, the court of last appeal against violations of privacy will be the Data Protection Authority whose members will not be independent of the government but appointed by it.

Look too at the current efforts to erode RTI's functioning. Here the court of final appeal is supposed to be the Information Commissioners at the level of states and the Centre. They are supposed to help applicants when government departments unjustifiably delay their responses or simply evade matters altogether or give information not asked for or justify evasions on grounds not permitted by the terms of the RTI Act. Not only has the government deliberately not filled in many vacancies among these Commissioners but it has now eroded

their independence by giving itself the power to decide the salaries and tenures of the Commissioners.

Finally, look at the huge hate-and-fake messages manufactured on social media by the Sangh Parivar's army of trolls. And if this social media can also bypass the largely suborned print and electronic media to also serve the mobilising interests and information spreading of progressive forces, as has been the case in the help provided in mobilising these latest protests against the CAA and NRC, there is the government's capacity to haul up internet providers and shut them

down. In 2018 Over 70 percent of all internet shutdowns in the world among democracies was carried out by the Indian government which through its continuing internet lockdown in Kashmir Valley holds the world record for such continuity of internet blackout. After the latest protests began the government has again resorted to shutting down internet in select areas and in UP on a much wider and prolonged basis.

The RS applauds the remarkable struggle of the students and ordinary citizens across religious divides to overturn the CAA and prevent the

NRC from taking place. Given the recent history of how the Supreme Court (SC) has behaved one cannot rely on it to strike down this Act or rule against the NRC.

The RS commits itself to the long term struggle against this fascistic force. The RS seeks to work with all those who have an uncompromising and principled opposition against Hindutva and its politics, economics and ideology.

December 25, 2019

Source [Radical Socialist](#).

The political crisis seen “from below”

25 December 2019, by **Claude Le Guill**

In November 2018, Emilio invited me to his home to drink a *mate*, in the community of Copalca, in North Potosi, in the heart of the Bolivian altiplano, at an altitude of 4,000 meters. [9] Emilio is an evangelist, schoolteacher and local leader of the Indian organization Federation of *Ayllus*, Original and Indigenous Peoples of North Potosi (FAOINP). [10] A few months before the presidential election, he was ready to do anything to bring down Evo Morales. It was difficult to know whether this feeling was widespread in Copalca. The leaders of the peasant union, a competitor of the FAOINP for control of the territory, are the main cadres of the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS - Movement to Socialism) at the local level (with certain leaders of the FAOINP) and they affirmed loud and clear that Evo would triumph 100%, as he has always done in Copalca. In any case, they would not allow other parties to campaign, as did the Federation of Peasant Trade Unions at the regional level of North Potosi. But when I ask my friends how they see the future elections, I realize that there is not the same view. Some prefer to change the subject, others tell me that the MAS is 60% -65% in Copalca, others simply

answer “there is no other candidate”.

Fragmented campaigns

Emilio was ready to vote for the right-wing party Democratas. A doubt remains, however, “How is it a neoliberal government?” he asks me. To justify his choice, he explains to me that the only “organic” political instrument, emerging from the social organizations of North Potosi, is the Movimiento Originario Popular (MOP) and that this party has allied with Democratas in Potosi; so by voting for this party, he would be somehow represented in the elections. I learn that other FAOINP leaders went to a meeting organized by supporters of the candidate Félix Patzi, an Aymara intellectual and former minister of Evo Morales who joined the opposition. According to them, this choice is justified by the fact that Patzi was a professor at Siglo XX University in Llallagua (Emilio was one of his students) and that he is therefore linked to the *ayllus* (Indian territories) of North Potosi. Whether with Patzi or the MOP, it is therefore a question of seeking the candidate who best represents the region and the

communities, to make it legitimate in the name of an alleged “organic” character. Emilio finally voted evangelist, finding in the candidate Chi Hyun Chung a compromise between his opposition to Morales and his religious convictions, revealing a new form of representation - religious - which marked the whole electoral campaign.

While much has been said about the hegemony of Evo Morales' MAS at the national level, it should be noted that this has also been the case at the local level. Little by little, all the social organizations that created their own political instrument (like the MOP) abandoned it in favour of the governing party. This was followed by a struggle between social sectors (between peasant and indigenous organizations, sometimes also miners; between communities, between *ayllus*, between provinces) for control of the MAS. The election of the candidate has even become more important than the general election itself since Evo Morales's party was almost the only legitimate party in the region. When different organizations clashed for control of the MAS, a rotation system (*muyu turno*) could be put in place to relieve tensions. As the vertical

control of the MAS increased and the candidates were chosen not by the bases but by the partisan hierarchy (*a dedo*), new tensions appeared. Parallel instruments (such as the MOP) then served to offer legitimacy to candidates and organizations excluded from the MAS, who could mobilize the “organic” character of their instrument to denounce the verticality of Evo Morales’ party. Thus, the MOP, born from the peasant unions of North Potosi, was controlled sometimes by the Indian organization of the FAOINP, sometimes by the miners, and finally by the right which found a way to penetrate this rebel region. When Evo Morales fell, replaced by a transitional government of the radical right, the latter also offered a leader of the MOP (and former FAOINP authority) the post of deputy minister of decolonization, a way to thank and reward him for the alliance established

Even when they are controlled almost exclusively by the MAS, certain municipalities have become ungovernable, the link uniting elected officials with their organization resulting in clientelism, corruption and incessant clashes between rival groups. To these organizational and territorial tensions, the MAS thus added a new one - partisan - which rests mainly on the first while generating new tensions: to take control of the MAS means to secure a victory in the elections and future profits for one’s group (development projects and so on). These local tensions did not prevent Evo Morales for years obtaining nearly 100% of the votes during national elections in these communities. Evo was seen as above the local divides - he embodied the Indian, the peasant and the miner.

On the side of the peasant union, which is very close to the MAS, I could observe criticisms of the government party during certain regional assemblies, from 2010, notably by the founders of the MOP and their supporters (“the leader must have his bases”) who did not accept that an “outside” party had come to break with the instrument which they had taken years to build, and imposed a verticality contrary to their organic project. However, the MAS had gradually established itself as just as

organic as the MOP and the critics never seemed to rise in the hierarchy. This undoubtedly explains the difficulties of the national leaders of the Unified Trade Union Confederation of Rural Workers of Bolivia (CSUTCB) in mobilizing their bases, during the first phase of the post-electoral political crisis, since few were really aware of what they were saying. [11]

For their part, the FAOINP Indians were the first to distance themselves from the MAS hierarchy. From the constituent assembly, during my first participation in a *cabildo* (assembly) of the FAOINP in 2006, the social bases threatened to *chicotear* the organic assembly members who had submitted to the directives of the MAS and had abandoned the constitutional project worked out at regional level by the communities for several months. [12] The *gasolinazo* (a rise in fuel prices, imposed by the Morales government) of December 2010 marked a new break: for the first time the faults were not imputed to the national leaders of the MAS but to Evo Morales himself. In 2012, the Mallku Khota mining conflict accelerated tensions within the Indian organization, while as at the national level the gradual alienation of the Indianist discourse of Evo Morales, to the point of generating - from the national level to the local - two parallel organizations: a CONAMAQ/FAOINP recognized by the MAS, ironically called CONAMAS by those declaring themselves to be “organic” CONAMAQ / FAOINP which claims to really represent the communities and not the government. [13] It’s difficult to know, however, which has the most weight in the countryside, as both have lost a large part of their power of convocation, with the rank and file tired by the conflicts.

For the 2019 election, “Organic CONAMAQ” called for voting for Democratas, led by Oscar Ortiz. This does not mean that the Indians have become right-wing, this vote is surely very much a minority in the communities, but it shows that the game of alliances and oppositions - local, regional and national - blurs conventional analyses of the political field, and that opposition to Morales was such, in certain areas, that it

brought leaders to associate with the neoliberal and racist right.

The national elections of 2019

Even before the opening of the poll, the 2019 elections once again generated their share of violence, notably in Llallagua, capital of North Potosi, during clashes between the Bustillo and Chayanta provinces, revealing the competition between territories as well as between organizations, the first being almost exclusively under the control of the FAOINP, the second being a historic site of peasant trades unionism (although today divided). In May 2019, the MAS Regional Congress in Llallagua ended in a general clash over the election of the new regional party leader despite the initial presence of Evo Morales, who had insisted on putting aside “personal interests” (a term designating corporate or territorial competitions). He appealed for calm, indicating that today “everyone wants to be a candidate, but we have to be more organic... It is difficult to reach consensus”. The confrontation was later downplayed by the vice-president of the MAS, Gerardo García Mendoza, for whom such a situation “was normal... It always happens, it is not the first time, it is not new, it has always happened in many events, and worse, for us it is not new that this problem has occurred in the Congress of North Potosi.” [14]

Despite these divisions, North Potosi is considered a bastion of the MAS, being at the same time an Indian, poor and mining area. When the offices of the Electoral Court of the Department of Potosi were set on fire by the opposition on the night of October 21-22, after the first accusations of fraud, it is not trivial that the Morales government transferred these offices to Llallagua in order to continue the counting of votes, halted at 75% in this department. This count was then done under the protection of the *ayllus*. Evo announced it the same evening as the election on television, it was the rural inhabitants who got him elected and who must defend democracy. The press therefore

hastened to meet the “ayllus warriors” who played the role expected of them by declaring themselves in a state of emergency to enforce the vote of the indigenous peoples and saying “ask Carlos Mesa [the centre-right candidate who came second in the contested election] not to seek physical violence and aggression, this confrontation, because this will not be allowed in the north of Potosi. We are real *tinkus* (ritual fighters). We are not afraid. We can cope until the end.”. [15] Some leaders even claimed in front of the press, in their best clothes, that they would “dust off their Mauser rifles” in defence of the plurinational state and so that Carlos Mesa would not reproduce the black October of 2003. [16] Road blockades were announced and, on October 26, the FAOINP together with the MAS organized a “*Jach’a Tantachawi* [large assembly] of the Charka Qhara *ayllus*, where they would assess the regional autonomy of the north of Potosí, taking account of the betrayal of departmental interests by the Civic Committee of Potosi (COMCIPO), whose members [including those of the MOP] have become loyal vassals of the neo-conservative and racist neoliberal mixed-race caste, led by Carlos Mesa.”. [17]

This *Jach’a Tantachawi*, however, was far from bringing together as many people as the organization’s annual meetings. For several days, the media nevertheless systematically associated the *ayllus* with the term “warriors”, mentioning their presence in La Paz – recognizable by the wearing of the *montera* (helmet) of the *tinku* – harassing the opponents of Evo in the streets of the capital. According to some indigenous authorities, at the end of October there were 500 members of the North Potosi and South Oruro *ayllus* defending Evo Morales’ victory in La Paz. [18]

On November 7, Evo Morales summoned the FAOINP (pro-MAS) to La Paz, but also the region’s mining cooperatives who, unlike those in Potosi, did not join the opposition. He asked them to “defend the process of change” and not just his election, because the extreme right oppositionist Fernando Camacho had entered the game; the president specified: “we have agreed to work on

the construction of dams and water treatment facilities in Copajira to protect the environment”, which strangely resembled a way of rewarding their mobilizations or buying future ones. [19]

Morales finally resigned on November 10, after a police mutiny two days earlier, and after being abandoned by the COB trade union federation and the army. At the instigation of the far right, a transitional government was “appointed”, the Bible, which had become a symbol of the opposition, entering the presidential palace. On 13 November, the North Potosí Peasant Trade Union Federation – and other peasant organizations in the country – announced “roadblocks and big marches in defence of the *wiphala* [Indian flag] and against the resignation of Evo”. [20] Thus, at the national level, everything suggested that North Potosi was in turmoil, and numerous videos, relayed abundantly in the press, showed peasant-Indian groups from the provinces of La Paz who entered El Alto and the capital with cries of “Now yes, civil war!” (“¡Ahora sí, guerra civil!”).

The 2019 elections seen from the local level

If the warlike rhetoric has been widely exploited – both by Evo Morales to show the combativeness of his rank and file and by the opposition and the press to testify to the violence of these “wild hordes” – it is striking to see that the rural dwellers of the North Potosi were ultimately relatively calm. My last stay in the region in November 2018 indicated to me that if not all of them affirmed an opposition to Morales as deep as that of Emilio, many did not seem at first glance very excited by this ballot, however important it was for the rest of the “process of change”. What is more, whereas in the past the national vote was independent of local conflicts, in 2019 Emilio wanted to vote against Evo to bring down the local *rosca*. To fight against Evo was to fight against “all those who lived from the MAS party in the different structures”.

The monitoring of the Facebook pages of several leaders, as well as collective groups in North Potosi, reveals that it was not until November 9 (one day before the resignation of Evo Morales) that the Jatun Ayllu Qhayana – to which Copalca belongs – “entered a state of emergency” and organized its first blockade. The fall of the Morales government, but especially the breakthrough of the extreme right and the mutiny of the police, seem to mark a turning point: we note on social networks that the rank and file are starting to organize from the bottom, while in the same time, in the media, the speeches of national peasant/indigenous leaders, very active during the first phase of the conflict, became much more rare. Social networks played a central role in these mobilizations, every action being filmed or photographed. The community dynamics that had been the strength of the peasant-Indian movement in the early 2000s seem to be re-emerging, after having been weakened by the co-optation by the MAS.

On November 13, a *cabildo* brought together *comunarios* from the far north of Potosi (municipalities of San Pedro de Buena Vista and Sacaca) in Mallku Khota. Miners from the Bolivian Federation of Mining Workers (FSTMB) organized their own demonstration, while caravans of trucks and minibuses, by the dozen, disturbed the silence of the mountain to attend the *cabildo* and other processions arrived by foot. Although firmly opposed to Evo Morales, Emilio attended so as “not to let the far right take power”. Like him, many did not seem ready to mobilize for Evo Morales, but they would do so to defend the *wiphala*, the Indian flag that the extreme right and the police defiled by burning it and removing it from certain places of power. For Emilio, the objective was to organize “new elections and seek the unity of the indigenous people”. “Personal interests”, however, prevented the adoption of a joint resolution during this *cabildo*. As Emilio indicated, “our ex-president also divided us within social organizations”, the reference to the “ex-president” being crucial here to show that, for him, a page was turned and that this was not about saving Evo’s skin, unlike the local

supporters of the MAS. A break was requested and the *cabildo* was rescheduled to Sunday November 17 with the hypothesis of launching a march to La Paz on Monday.

Elsewhere in North Potosi, things were also accelerating. On November 12, in Uncia, a rally brought together the *ayllus* of the municipality with shouts of “Evo is not alone” and “Mesa, Camacho, Pumari, we want your heads!”. Faced with the violence of the words, the Indian authorities denied rumours of an attack directed against the urban population. Following the Sacaba massacre, the actions aimed at unity. [21] A march was organized by the *ayllus* in Uncia, with *wiphala* and white flags, to demand peace and respect for the *wiphala*. Finally, on November 17, the resolution of the *ayllus* of Uncia stated: “1. We request the resignation of the self-proclaimed president, Mrs. Jeanine Añez; 2. Blockade of main roads in the region; 3. Return of the army to barracks; IF THESE REQUESTS ARE NOT TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT, ON TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 19, WE WILL MOVE TO THE SEAT OF GOVERNMENT BY INCREASING THE MOBILIZATIONS” (in capital letters in the original text). In Llallagua, in the same way, the *ayllus* mobilized for the resignation of the acting president, Jeanine Añez, and the defence of the *wiphala*. The white flags also came out during a peaceful march. Divisions, however, appeared in a *cabildo*, organized on the road during a blockade, because of “personal interests”.

In other provinces of North Potosi (Chayanta), on the evening of the Sacaba massacre, communities were once again showing restraint, in contrast to the warlike image sustained at the national level. After an impressive march to the sound of the *pututu*, “almost 500 peasants linked to the MAS, from the provinces of Chayanta and Frías, entered the town of Potosi last night, in a peaceful march to hoist the *wiphala* on the pediment of the seat of government in Potosi. On entering the city, many people welcomed the march with applause and waving the *wiphala* and, above all, the white flags which constitute a symbol of peace between the countryside and the city... The

peasant leader Ever Rojas [who had wanted to ban the entry of political parties other than the MAS in the region a few months earlier] was the first to speak during this historic act of pacification. [He said:] “We are all *potosino* brothers. Country and town we are brothers. There are people who have led to discrimination and racism with a personal appetite. Here ends discrimination, here ends racism, my brothers’.” [22]

Back in Copalca, finally, on November 17, a new march led the *ayllus* from far North Potosi to Mallku Khota for a new *cabildo*. During this, Jatun Ayllu Qhayana reached an agreement and adopted a simple resolution to conduct “permanent blockades of strategic points [of the region]” by going into “red alert” and declaring “permanent mobilization” in the face of possible political developments. The *ayllus* say in this resolution: “We firmly reject the discrimination and the burning of our *wiphala*, which is the symbol of our ancestors, the Tiwanaku. We do not tolerate these life threatening attitudes”. Among other things, it demanded “the immediate return of the police and the army to their barracks, because we will not let our brothers continue to die in the mobilizations”. Finally, it demanded “respect for the integrity of human life throughout the pluri-national state of Bolivia”.

Following the massacre in Senkata by the army (9 dead), in El Alto, on November 19, Jatun Ayllu Qhayana and other *ayllus* from North Potosi finally decide to join La Paz. A video shows a procession leaving Copalca at night, women at the head with the *wiphala*, in the presence of the Mallku Khota miners, while a voice comments: “the Qhayana district, always standing, never on your knees! On the way to La Paz in support of the *Alteños*”. A text accompanies the video, demanding “the immediate resignation of the self-proclaimed president Añez for having repressed our brothers in the tropics and El Alto; the immediate return of the police and the army to the barracks; respect for the *wiphala*, our millennial symbol of the indigenous peoples.” No reference was made to Evo Morales.

Conclusion

At the time of concluding this brief analysis, it is difficult to imagine the future of Bolivia, the government combining street repression and negotiations with the MAS and social organizations, a form of corporatism which sometimes generates the most improbable agreements. Conversely, the violence of the transitional government can generate new popular solidarity, which can go against national directives. The monitoring of mobilizations in North Potosi nevertheless reveals several dynamics. First, the *ayllus* distanced themselves from the warlike image used both by the Morales government and by the opposition, in an area that was nevertheless used to violence. Second, the fractures of previous years between social organizations remain open, which explains the difficulty in establishing a compromise between the different sectors. Finally, in North Potosi the mobilization is not done in the name of Evo Morales but mainly for the defence of the pluri-national state and the *wiphala*, due to the presence of a sector which was not ready to mobilize to defend Evo Morales but is in favour of the gains of the “process of change” and against the far right.

If each territory has its own dynamics, how, in our case, to explain that the North Potosi did not respond massively to the call launched by Evo Morales to defend his election, and that it took several weeks for the region to really mobilize? The answers are to be found in the past actions of the Morales government itself. The Pact of Unity between social organizations which had favoured the rise of Evo Morales and the establishment of a pluri-national state has been shattered, the “government of social movements” promised by the former president having strengthened the corporatist struggles of each sector. It is this unity that the social organizations first wanted to restore at the local level. This return to the local and to community forms of mobilization also reveals the distances that have been created between the increased verticality of the MAS and grassroots organizations, a distance which may explain the difficulties of

national leaders in massively mobilizing the campaigns. as they attempted at the start of the conflict. Finally, it is Evo Morales' strategy to mobilize these same rural dwellers against the city that raises questions. The development of the country, the construction of hundreds of kilometres of road, but also the failure of aid to traditional peasant agriculture, strengthened the connections (already numerous) between the countryside and the cities. Today, more than before, people no longer live in communities solely of agricultural production, they are also masons or drivers in the city, miners in

cooperatives.

In Copalca, the trucks that loaded residents into their dumpsters twice a week from Llallagua have been replaced by daily buses and minibuses. The probable construction of a new road opens new economic prospects, everyone improvises as a restaurateur, opens a business. While a few years ago the inhabitants reinvented local democracy by introducing Indian "customs", the main objective today is to be recognized as an "urban area" in order to better regulate land ownership and obtain credits to improve housing. Traditional festivals

are becoming heritage, with the help of schools, in the hope of maintaining the local culture but also of generating tourist activity. One of the paradoxes of Evo Morales is that he romanticized an Indianness that he himself dissolved by his actions. It will undoubtedly remain alive, but no longer with the same aspirations and the same representations. An Indianness in any case more ready than in the past to face the "brothers" of the towns.

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Keep the embers of the strike alive to start the flames again

24 December 2019, by **Léon Crémieux**

Demonstrations were massive throughout the country, rarely lower, often higher in number than on 5 December, with the overall number of demonstrations at the national level rising to well over one million (although, without much conviction, the government tried to hammer home the announcement of lower figures on 5 December).

The rallying of the CFDT and UNSA to the demonstrations reflected a growing opposition to Macron's plan, although this did not translate into a notable presence in the marches. National Education employees were in large numbers everywhere, with a real increase in mobilization in primary and secondary schools (50% and 60%). There was a great diversity in the demonstrations, despite the low presence of contingents from private sector employers. But, in most cases, there was dynamism and radical slogans against reform and the display of a clear will to continue.

At the same time, 17 December saw massive turnout figures for the strike and mass meetings at SNCF and RATP

and systematic votes for to continue the strike. SNCF management recognised nearly 80% of striking drivers; the employers' union noted 5 out of 8 oil refineries blocked, and power cuts by EDF agents. But nevertheless, this was not the moment a new sector started an all-out strike nor the starting point for an economic blockage of the country.

The announcement, on 11 December, of the general outline of the project by the Prime Minister, thus had a radical effect of rejection, among the employees and the trade union movement, a tendency reflected by the strength of the 17th. All opinion polls express a majority rejection among the population of the project itself, whereas in the months and weeks preceding the movement, this rejection was in the minority. Similarly, support for the strikes also became stronger around 17 December.

As a collateral victim of this power struggle, Delevoye, who had been the government minister responsible for the pension reform for two years, was

finally forced to resign from his post in the middle of the conflict. He had forgotten, at the time of his appointment, to declare several posts he held in structures linked to insurers. Moreover, since his resignation, new revelations have come to light, notably the generous financing of 1 million euros for an association of which Delevoye is the president: financing by the AG2R La Mondiale group (one of the main managers of complementary insurance), which is very interested in the new law and the prospects of funded pensions.

Within the majority, the cracks began to operate, criticizing Edouard Philippe's rigidity and pushing him to "make a gesture" to try to defuse the CFDT's hostility to its reform.

The debate with the CFDT leadership is essentially centred around a point added to the reform of the pension system: the "pivot age".

Macron wants to completely liquidate the current pension system by moving to a system with guaranteed

contributions based on points. But he also intends to use the opportunity to decide to move from 62 to 64 years of age to obtain a full pension, i.e. without any penalty. In practice, by leaving at 62, an employee would see his or her final pension reduced by 10% and would have to stay at work for two more years for a full pension.

The government considers this extension indispensable to balance the budget in the coming years. However, the reality is that, today, the accounts of the pension funds are balanced and that the deficit forecast for 2027 is due not to an increase in expenditure, but to a significant drop in the financing of pensions: two essential causes for this are the exemptions from social security contributions enjoyed by companies, which are not compensated by the State, and the decline in public employment leading to a drop in contributions by civil servants.

In addition, the forecasts of the COR (Conseil d'orientation des retraites) also predict a decline in pension expenditure as a percentage of GDP over the next 20 years, due to the programmed decline in average pensions as a result of previous reforms by right-wing and Socialist Party governments (Fillon 2003 and Touraine 2014), which have increased the number of trimesters required to obtain a full pension, in both the private and public sectors.

Moreover, it should be stressed that at a time when we are told about the decline in the number of working people and the alleged need to work longer, the NRC and most "experts" endorse maintaining an unemployment rate above 7%.

Thus, this postponement of the pivot age, under the pretext of the new COR report, is mainly pursuing political objectives for Macron.

First of all, it clearly states its intention not to give in to any compromise or negotiation with the unions, even "reformist" ones, and to impose a reduction in social protection systems. It affirms also that what is considered an economic imperative for companies is not debatable. And thus intends to consolidate Macron's

position as a solid manager of capitalist interests. But the aim is also to anticipate what would be the management of pensions with a points-based system. Since it is neither a question of increasing contributions nor (according to a current commitment) of changing the value of the point on purchase or liquidation, the last variable element for the balance of pension funds remains the starting age. By already putting a marker on this issue, the government is therefore insisting that the state, and not the social partners, will be in control of the game. Here too, it is Macron's intention to further reduce the weight of autonomous management of the social protection system between employers and trade unions.

And it is this last point that makes the pivot age a sticking point for the CFDT leadership.

At the beginning of 2019, when the government wanted to impose a reduction of more than 3 billion in the expenditure of UNEDIC (the body that manages unemployment benefits), the MEDEF and the unions in the management of the system (CFDT, CGC, CFTC, CGT, FO) were unable to find a point of agreement to achieve this reduction in rights. It was therefore the government that bypassed the "social dialogue" and imposed a decree attacking the unemployed. But it is this social dialogue, this parity between trade unions and employers, this framework of negotiation, which is the CFDT's calling card. Laurent Berger, the union's first secretary, was rendered extremely indignant by this episode, and he sees a similar situation in which, for another branch of the Social Security system, Macron will close the doors of paritarism, without even leaving an honourable way out. [23]

This explains the virulence of a union leadership, ready to accept a major social setback in the pension system, but on condition that it retains its role as manager, being able to "negotiate the weight of the chains", as it were. For both pensions and UNEDIC, the CFDT does not accept that the government should set the roadmap and conclusions *a priori*, leaving it up

to the unions to choose the colour of the pen to sign the agreement.

On 18 December, Edouard Philippe, the day after the massive mobilization on the 17, therefore engaged in a mock negotiation of a few hours with all the trade union leaderships, wanting to demonstrate to his supporters his willingness to break the deadlock and reopen avenues of negotiation.

There was nothing new, either in terms of the substance of the reform or the pivotal age. Under the surface, however, and without any signage, the management of SNCF and RATP tried to negotiate the transition phases, allowing a few more generations born after 1975 to avoid the regressions of the reform.

The confederal UNSA and CFDT directorates, caught between the government blockade and the strength of the strike movement, have tried to use this staging of negotiations to take a step aside, withdrawing from the movement, by declaring themselves in favour of "a Christmas truce", although the only promise they have is more discussions in January.

The government could obviously be pleased to see the "cracking of the union front", especially as the moment is delicate for it, which bears the responsibility for blocking any agreement, on the eve of the holiday departures disrupted by the lack of trains.

The decision of the UNSA and CFDT leaderships, symbolically important, weighs little on the strikers' front. At the RATP, the CFDT is very weak and the majority UNSA opposed the choice of its leadership to suspend the strike.

At the SNCF, the UNSA, the second union after the CGT and before SUD Rail, is essentially a union of managers and supervisors and represents less than 8% among drivers. Moreover, in most SNCF General Assemblies, the UNSA sections have dissociated themselves from their management and have called for the strike to continue. The CFDT railworkers, the fourth union behind SUD Rail, also called for the strike to continue. CGT and SUD

together represent two-thirds of the drivers.

Despite this determination and the social balance of power in the country, several negative factors weigh on the movement.

Firstly, the weight of almost three weeks of strike action at the SNCF and the RATP. The number of strikers on the 17th also signalled the desire to mark a big blow so as not to have to continue for too long afterwards. In addition, the teachers are on holiday as of 21 December and their mobilization will not have an impact ring the next two weeks. It is unlikely that other sectors that have not been mobilized so far will move into action during the holiday season.

Moreover, the national joint union coordination [intersyndicale] of CGT, FO, FSU, Solidaires, while saying that it refused a truce during the holidays,

did not call for any new day of mobilization, in any form, in any perspective, before 9 January. Thus, it is certainly basing itself on an objective situation in many sectors, but is not playing its role vis-à-vis the most mobilized sectors, first and foremost the SNCF and RATP. Without a new national appeal, the national intersyndicale also appears in practice to be in a state of truce, at a very delicate time. Solidaires also issued a press release calling for action between 20 and 23 December. In addition, beyond the SNCF and RATP where the strike is being renewed, in many towns and departments, the intersyndicale and combative cross-sectoral assemblies called for actions on the weekend of the 21st and at the beginning of the following week. [24]

In conclusion, the government has managed to get through the last few days, without giving up anything, in

increasing political isolation, but avoiding a blockage in economic life that would have brought it to its knees and forced it to back down. Moreover, on the political level, it is consolidating its political weight in its camp, succeeding in totally anaesthetising the LR party.

The social movement increased its support, reinforced popular mistrust of reform and of the government itself, but it did not have the strength to extend the renewable strike and mobilization to other sectors of the civil service, let alone the private sector. The essential task will be to keep the embers of the strike and of the cross-sectoral local mobilizations burning in the coming fortnight, by maintaining the cohesions built in recent weeks at the grassroots level. In any case, it will be a new phase that will begin in a fortnight.

21 December 2019

Argentina: facing another debt crisis

23 December 2019, by **Éric Toussaint**

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Let us remember that when Macri started his mandate in December 2015 he accepted all the injunctions formulated by a New York magistrate, who had ruled in the favor of vulture funds against Argentina. This has made it possible for those investment funds specializing in repurchasing sovereign securities at cut prices to garner \$4.6 billion, a 300% profit ("[The Vulture: How Billionaire Rubio Backer Paul Singer Made Billions off Argentina Debt Crisis](#)"). To compensate these vulture funds, Mauricio Macri borrowed on the financial markets. He claimed that everything would be fine since implementing neoliberal policies would make Argentina more attractive to foreign investors and lenders. International mainstream media supported him. When invited to comment experts in economics presented Macri's Argentina as a

success story. Issuing in 2017 bonds that would come to maturity one hundred years later, (2117) was hailed as the ultimate proof of Macri's pro-market neoliberal success.

In early June 2017, bankers could borrow at 0% from the ECB, the Bank of Japan and the Swiss National Bank, at 0.25% from the Bank of England and at 1.00% from the Federal Reserve in the US, while investment funds had huge amounts of cash and return on public debt securities in the North was very low or even negative, Argentine bonds at 7.25% over one hundred years was a godsend

In fact, the success of those bonds had a completely different explanation: the

interest rate every year for one hundred years is 7.25% (with an actual return on the initial purchase price of 7.917% for the bonds were sold at a cut price to attract investors). At the same time in early June 2017, bankers could borrow at 0% from the ECB, the Bank of Japan and the Swiss National Bank, at 0.25% from the Bank of England and at 1.00% from the Federal Reserve in the US, while investment funds had huge amounts of cash and return on public debt securities in the North was very low or even negative, Argentine bonds at 7.25% over one hundred years was a godsend. Their success was thus in no way evidence of the Argentine economy's good health. There is such a huge amount of capital intended for speculation (and not for productive investment) that any State that issues sovereign securities with a return that is higher than average is likely to find takers.

Here is an example of comments to be found in the press heralding the 100 year bonds: *Argentina sold \$2.75 billion of a hotly demanded 100-year bond in U.S. dollars on Monday, just over a year after emerging from its latest default, according to the government. The South American country received \$9.75 billion in orders for the bond, as investors eyed a yield of 7.9 percent in an otherwise low yielding fixed income market where pension funds need to lock in long-term returns.* This Reuters report clearly celebrates the country's achievement "[Argentina sees strong demand for surprise 100-year bond](#)".

One year earlier, in April 2016, Reuters reported: *Marking a rare bright spot among gloomy emerging markets, Argentina sold \$16.5 billion of sovereign debt on Tuesday in its first international bond issue since its record 2002 default... Investors seemed convinced of [new President Mauricio Macri's] strategy... Argentina received offers worth \$68.6 billion from investors around the world.* [25]

Anybody will understand from such hyperbolic comments that major capitalist corporations all over the world were on the lookout for opportunities to obtain high yield by purchasing high risk securities. It does not tell anything about Argentina's economic health.

Potential lenders such as investment funds or major banks thought that Argentine securities would be guaranteed by the State of Argentina and that if necessary they could seek favorable adjudication in the jurisdiction of New York. They were right since the loan agreements were made in accordance with the law of the State of New York. Anyway, they were also convinced that in case of necessity the IMF would bail-out the government of Argentina so that it may repay its debt to private funds as it had always done. Another argument was the following: Argentina's underground resources are significant and if hard pressed Argentina could increase production in order to meet lenders' expectations.

In short, in 2016-2017, while Argentina's real economy was

collapsing, the government managed to find lenders and its right-wing government was praised in international media as well as by the IMF and by other governments in the hold of big capital.

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But the situation took a turn for the worse in 2018 as a consequence of several negative factors resulting from Macri's policies such as a steep rise in the amount of interests to be paid (which had to be financed by ever new loans), massive flight of capital that was made possible by a most lax policy of complete freedom for capital to leave the country. It showed that Argentine capitalists had limited confidence in Macri's future and preferred shopping elsewhere including buying Argentine external debt securities in US dollars on Wall Street. Currency reserves sharply dropped. Production started to decline and Argentina slipped into recession. Employment plummeted. Most people's purchasing power dropped as a consequence of the government's and bosses' attacks. As a result, domestic consumption, that accounted for 70% of Argentina's GDP, also dropped. The Argentine peso gradually sunk: while 22 pesos bought one euro on 1st January 2018, 32 pesos were needed on 16 June 2018. [26]

In this context, in June 2018, Macri called on the IMF as foreign investors and Argentine capitalists had anticipated ("[The IMF is back in Argentina: an economic and social crisis, even more serious than the present one, looms large on the horizon](#)"). The total credit promised by the IMF rose to \$57 billion (with \$44.1 billion actually paid up to now). As a first step, in June 2018, the amount of \$50 billion had been announced and a few months later, as

the situation had not improved, \$7 more billion were added. This is the highest ever loan granted by the IMF (the IMF's loan to Greece in 2010 was 30 billion). As usual the IMF demanded even stricter austerity policies that were even more unpopular than those already introduced by Macri ("[Argentina in turmoil](#)").

In October 2019, the Argentine people turned away from Macri and elected the Peron political movement back into office after an intermission of four years. Alberto Fernandez became President and Cristina Fernandez, who was President from 2007 to 2015, Vice-President (Alberto and Cristina are not related).

The CADTM's Latin American and Caribbean network, CADTM AYNA, held its 8th annual assembly in preparation of Alberto Fernandez succeeding Mauricio Macri as President (10 December 2019). I participated in the meeting as well as in several talks and debates including one at the parliament of Argentina. I also gave four interviews: fifteen minutes live on a popular private and anti-Macri TV channel (<https://www.cadtm.org/Puede-Arentina-no-pagar-la-deuda-que-tomo-Macri>); a video for an information website (Canal Abierto-><https://canalabierto.com.ar/>) connected with the main civil service trade union, (<https://www.cadtm.org/Eric-Toussaint-La-deuda-con-el-FMI-es-espuria>); one on the main website of the revolutionary left *laizquierdadiario* (the daily paper of the Left) which has an average of two million visits per month <https://www.laizquierdadiario.com/Reperfilando-la-herencia-de-Macri-y-la-deuda-odiosa-en-la-mirada-de-Eric-Toussaint>; and one to the main center left newspaper, *Pagina 12* <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/235397-la-propuesta-de-guzman-le-vendria-bien-a-argentina-y-al-mund>.

The rate of poverty strongly increased over the four years of Macri's mandate, going from 27 to 40% of the population

The rate of poverty strongly increased over the four years of Macri's mandate, going from 27 to 40% of the population. In the days before Macri left the Presidency to the two Fernandezs debt repayment was the most debated issue.

On the other hand, we should emphasize that social and political movements in Argentina are massive and well organized: trade unions are still powerful, the feminist movement is still able to mobilize on a large scale, the unemployed too are well organized, the cooperative movement is strong. The various neoliberal experiments that started with the dictatorship (1976-1983) and that had their latest attempt under Macri have not been able to fracture the Argentine society and, contrary to what is the case in neighboring Chile, education is free including at university level, as indeed is health care.

The questions most often raised in Argentine media during the November-December 2019 period:

- While the previous government had suspended repayment of part of the internal debt, will the new government repay the accumulated debt and implement policies that have been rejected by a majority of the people?
- What should be done with the IMF agreements?
- Since the IMF is expected to pay Argentina \$11 to 13 billion, must the new government demand those payments or withdraw from them?
- Should not Argentina suspend debt repayment for two years so as to make sure that economic activity resumes properly and make later debt

repayment sustainable? This is a suggestion by Martin Guzman, an Argentine economist who teaches in New York and works with Joseph Stiglitz, Nobel laureate for economy. Guzman has just been appointed minister for economy and finance in Alberto Fernandez' new government "[Meet Martín Guzmán, Argentina's next economy minister](#)".

A majority of the people clearly reject the IMF, whose deleterious impact on Argentina is obvious to all and sundry. It has to be remembered that after the second world war, president Juan Domingo Perón had turned down his country's adhesion to the IMF, an institution he exposed as an instrument of imperialism. [27] Argentina only joined the IMF in 1956 during the military dictatorship of General Pedro Eugenio Aramburu Silveti, who overthrew the constitutional president Juan Domingo Perón in 1955. Twenty years later, the IMF actively supported the bloody dictatorship of General Jorge Rafael Videla, who was responsible for the assassination of over 30,000 left-wing opponents. In the 1990s, the IMF put Argentina under pressure to turn it into one of the most active countries in terms of privatizations and structural adjustment. This eventually resulted in the massive upheaval of December 2001, which led to the fall of President Fernando de la Rúa.

During the public lectures organized by ATTAC- CADTM in collaboration with some ten other associations in Buenos Aires from 27 to 29 November 2019, I had the opportunity as international spokesperson for the CADTM to put forward a number of proposals to face the Argentine debt crisis. Those proposals are the result of wide ranging debates within the CADTM network. This was also the case at a hearing held in the Parliament of Argentina on 27 November at the initiative of economist Fernanda Vallejos, an MP

in the new presidential majority (see my contribution in Spanish: "[Deuda externa : Alternativas para una solución soberana](#)").

The following is a summary of my points and proposals.

There should be no hesitation in arguing the doctrine of odious debt because it is particularly applicable to the situation in which Argentina finds itself.

According to this doctrine a debt is deemed odious and nullified if it fulfils two conditions:

1. it was taken on against the interests of the Nation, the People or the State.
2. the creditors are unable to prove that they were unaware that the debt was contrary to the interests of the Nation. It is to be pointed out that the nature of the political regime or the government is not taken into consideration in the doctrine.

The deciding factor is the use that is made of the debt. If a democratically elected government puts its population into debt against their best interest this debt may be deemed odious. It is erroneous to say that only debts taken on by dictatorial regimes may be deemed odious (see "[The Doctrine of Odious Debt: from Alexander Sack to the CADTM](#)"). [28]

There should be no hesitation in arguing the doctrine of odious debt because it is particularly applicable to the situation in which Argentina finds itself

It is fundamental that Argentina unilaterally takes sovereign measures to improve its debt situation.

Five principal examples:

1. pass laws prohibiting vulture funds
2. suspend debt repayments
3. bond holders must be registered with the Buenos Aires authorities
4. setting up a citizens' debt audit
5. repudiation of current agreements with the IMF

1 - Pass laws prohibiting vulture funds

As Belgium showed in 2008 and again in 2015, it is possible to pass laws restricting vulture funds (see Renaud Vivien, "[Analyse de la loi belge du 12 juillet 2015 contre les fonds vautours et de sa conformité au droit de l'UE](#)" (in French)). The act of law is quite simple - an investment fund cannot reclaim sums superior to what it paid to acquire treasury bills. In fact, vulture funds purchase the sovereign debts of countries with repayment difficulties at junk prices and then apply legal pressure on the government concerned to pay in full and so make profits sometimes amounting to several hundred per cent of their initial layout. If Argentina passed a similar law it would have some protection against vulture funds. If many countries did the same vulture funds would be neutralized. The practice of designating foreign jurisdictions (such as New York or London with laws that are favourable to creditors) as competent in the case of sovereign debt litigations must end.

2 - Suspend debt repayments

Suspending debt repayments is one of the possibilities that permit governments to deal with financial and/or humanitarian crises. The country may declare suspension unilaterally, many have done so. It was the case of Argentina between 2001 and 2005 for a total of \$80 billion and the benefits followed.

In a collective book published by OUP in 2010, [29] Stiglitz claims that Russia in 1998 and Argentina in the 2000s are proof that a unilateral suspension of debt repayment can be beneficial for countries that make this decision: "Both theory and evidence

suggest that the threat of a cut-off of credit has probably been exaggerated." (p.48)

When a country succeeds in enforcing debt relief on its creditors and uses funds that were formerly meant for repayment in order to finance an expansionist tax policy, this yields positive results: "Under this scenario the number of the firms that are forced into bankruptcy is lowered, both because of the *lower interest rates* [30] and because of the improved overall economic performance of the economy that follows. As the economy strengthens, government tax revenues increase again improving the fiscal position of the government. [...] All this means that the government's fiscal position is stronger going forward, making it more (not less) likely that creditors will be willing to again provide finance." (p.48) In an article published in *Journal of Development Economics* [31] under the title "The Elusive Costs of Sovereign Defaults", Eduardo Levy Yeyati and Ugo Panizza, two economists who worked for the Inter-American Development Bank, set out the findings of their thorough inquiry into defaulting in some forty countries. One of their main conclusions is that "Default episodes mark the beginning of the economic recovery." It could not be better put.

As was already done in 2001 Argentina should not hesitate to declare a new unlimited suspension of payments. The recuperated amounts could be used to stimulate consumer spending and economic activities favouring the population. Two years would appear to be a minimum period to achieve lasting results with the possibility of prolonging the period.

It is recommended to suspend selectively - small savers and shareholders as well as public pension schemes should be exempted from suspension on the domestic debt. This means that they would continue to be paid. It is quite right to make this discrimination in order to protect the weaker investors and public institutions. It is the big private investors and the IMF who are to be defaulted.

3 - Bond holders must be

registered with the Buenos Aires authorities

Argentine authorities should revive the practice of the first half of the 20th century that established lists of bond holders. In the litigation between Mexico and its creditors in the 1940s the creditors were obliged to make themselves known and have their certificates rubber stamped or be excluded from settlement. This permitted the cancellation of 90% of the Mexican debt (see "[Mexico proved that debt can be repudiated](#)"). Registering bond holders makes it possible to sort big and small, private and public bond holders in order to favour small and public holders.

4 - Setting up a citizens' debt audit

To have a clear idea of the stakes and sums involved and a solid legal arsenal it is essential to conduct an audit of the debt under citizens' control. An audit would show how much of the debt (possibly an overwhelming part) may be deemed illegal or odious and could be the way forward towards debt repudiation and/or a unilateral restructuring.

The real reason the IMF granted such a huge loan was because the US President Donald Trump wanted to help Macri remain in power to implement policies that favoured the US in political, military and economic terms

5 - Repudiation of current agreements with the IMF

As has been shown by many observers and Argentine jurists the agreements made with the IMF by Mauricio Macri are contrary to the country's and the people's interests. When the IMF granted a loan of \$57 billion to the Macri government it transgressed its own rules that state that the IMF can only grant loans if as a consequence the borrowing country's debt becomes sustainable, which is not at all the case as evidenced less than a year later. Macri also transgressed the Argentine constitution that requires that the signature of such an agreement that has the value of an

international treaty must be debated in Parliament and then be ratified by Parliament. The real reason the loan was granted was because the US President Donald Trump wanted to help Macri remain in power in spite of the crisis and win the 2019 elections, to implement policies that favoured the US in political, military and economic terms. As the Argentine electors have disavowed Macri's policies and Macri had transgressed the Argentine constitution, the new government would have the right to refuse to validate the agreement. This is a text-book case of odious debt: when a country sees regime change the new government is not held to

respect the debts of its predecessors if they were taken on against the interest of the Nation or the People and in the former regime's own advantage (in this case to remain in power) and it is clear that the IMF directors were aware of the context.

It is important that Argentina does not make the same errors of debt negotiation as in the 2002-2010 period (see the analysis by Maud Bailly and Eric Toussaint, "[The mixed fortunes of Argentina's 2005 and 2010 debt restructuring](#)").

The above measures should be part and parcel of a larger programme that would include; capital controls,

socialization of the banking sector, tax reforms, measures against the extractivist/exportation market model and ecological policies among others.

In conclusion: a new situation will arise in Argentina as from December 2019, a new government must face up to a serious debt crisis. It is fundamental that a large popular social and political front be created in order, by all necessary means, to promote the solutions that will liberate the Argentine people from the burden of illegitimate and odious debt.

Translated by Mike Krolkowski and Christine Pagnoulle for [CADTM](#).

Unprecedented mobilizations in Haiti

22 December 2019, by **Arthur Mahon**

Despite harsh repression, a large part of the population, in exasperation, rose to demand the departure of President Jovenel Moïse, who since 2017 has been at the head of a mafia government. It is also a general movement of discontent in the face of increasingly unbearable living conditions, glaring inequalities and a corrupt, discredited and repressive political system. In the past year, prices have increased by 20%, mainly due to the fall in the national currency. [32] Beyond the president, a whole system is targeted by the current revolt.

A country at a standstill

Since 1 September, there have been multiple demonstrations, sometimes daily, in Port-au-Prince, as in the provinces, many, but not all, being at the initiative of the political opposition. They have often resulted in strong repression and sometimes destruction and looting. On September 27, a riot police base was assaulted and looted to prevent the demonstration that followed from

being suppressed. In Port-au-Prince, one of the most impressive, if not the most important, events was held on October 13 at the call of popular singers and DJs. On October 20, a man claiming to be a prophet and his many followers came to reinforce a second demonstration by the artists. On October 28, unions joined the demonstration that day, with several hundred textile workers. On October 30, the health sector took to the streets and the next day, moto taxi drivers. Lawyers also demonstrated and police took to the streets twice, even asking to be able to form a union.

For two months, from mid-September, Haiti was a *peyi lā²k*, that is to say, a blocked, padlocked country. Barricades blocked the streets of several cities and roads were cut off. For the most part, it was difficult and often dangerous to get around inside Port-au-Prince. The occupants of the rare vehicles daring to drive around were sometimes attacked by those who manned the barricades. A journalist was seriously injured while trying to cross a roadblock in Jacmel. In the provinces, certain roads were cut. The vast majority of schools were closed. Companies and institutions

have laid off some or all of their staff.

Dangerous liaisons

In Haiti's exceptional situation, a decisive factor is the absence of organized popular movements sufficiently established to be able to stimulate self-organization and self-defence of the mobilization. Otherwise, it remains fragile and open to the manipulations of ambitious politicians, populist forces and certain factions of the wealthy classes, who have their own agenda and often rely on armed gangs.

Gang control over part of the working-class neighbourhoods has become an inescapable fact of the situation. Many have been bought by the government, but some want to overthrow Jovenel Moses. Admittedly, all the grassroots groups that have weapons are not necessarily gangs, and certain gangs themselves, which are the product of unemployment and misery, can to some extent express the anger of poor neighbourhoods while subjecting them to their law. But the fact that part of the political opposition was associated with criminal gangs was a serious

handicap for the mobilization. It is difficult to make common cause for a long time with those who threaten and ransom you. Especially since, according to Haitian sociologist Alain Gilles, the gangs “pass from the government to the opposition, from one day to the next, without positioning themselves by conviction”.

Since mid-November most activities have resumed. In the provinces, certain areas have returned to calm. However, in recent days, in Port-au-Prince and its outskirts, it was sometimes difficult to circulate, roadblocks could be installed or removed at any time and shootings broke out.

Across the country a large number of schools remain closed. It is true that the school year announced for September 8 had barely started, because many parents could not afford to buy school materials. The two months of paralysis further aggravated their economic situation. Often wages have not been paid and many small traders in the informal sector have lost much of their investment. In addition, prices have skyrocketed due to the virtual halt in transport.

Due to the shortage of food, fuel and medicine, the already appalling prison conditions have worsened since September. In the prison of Gonaïves, this resulted in a mutiny. On this occasion, prisoners broke into the cell door where twelve women were detained and almost all of them were raped.

Coldly executed

Repression has increased in recent weeks. It particularly targets activists in lower-income neighbourhoods that the government has failed to bribe, according to Chavanne Jean-Baptiste, one of the figures of the recently created Patriotic Forum. One of the challenges is to remove the barricades still blocking streets and roads. At the beginning of November, in Port-au-Prince, fifteen people were killed, and several others were wounded by bullets during several attacks against the Bel Air neighbourhood perpetrated by a gang supported by the police.

Two weeks later, three other people were killed in the same neighbourhood in identical circumstances.

On June 10, journalist Pétion Rospide was shot and killed in a vehicle bearing the name of his radio station. On 10 October, radio reporter Néhémie Joseph was found dead in his car. On 24 November, a young activist, Sandino Grand Pierre (22), who had participated in all the demonstrations against the squandering of the Petrocaribe fund, was riddled with bullets by men on motorbikes. [33] The repression is the work of the police, which is now very militarized, or of gangs and commandos, which may include the police. Gangs paid for by the government, which has renewed their arsenal, terrorize certain working-class neighbourhoods and prevent them from going to the demonstrations. Commandos have attacked processions with automatic weapons. Presidential security officers, armed with Galil assault rifles, appear to be very active in this area. Finally, foreign mercenaries were seen with guns in hand. One of the key men in the crackdown was himself shot and wounded by one of the gangs he supervised.

Despite the arms embargo, nearly 500,000 illegal firearms are still circulating in Haiti, according to Jean Rebel Dorcena, a member of the Disarmament, Dismantling and Reintegration Commission. That is to say more than double what the National Police estimated four years ago. According to him, there are 96 gangs in Haiti and “these bandits are in the pay of personalities in power, have relations with members of the opposition and receive funds from certain bosses in the private sector”.

How did we get here?

In 2012, after the second presidency of René Préval (2006-2011), Michel Martelly (2011-2016) was imposed as head of the Haitian state by the “international community” after an incredible manipulation operated by an OAS mission, responsible for

verifying the results of the first round of the presidential election. The results of the second round were dictated to the Electoral Council responsible for proclaiming them. Martelly left the presidency in February 2016, after a disastrous term and amid scandals, without the election of his successor having been completed. Massive frauds orchestrated by the authorities aroused indignation. They favoured the candidate Jovenel Moïse, a crooked businessman supported by the presidential party, the PHTK. [34]

Under pressure from the demonstrators, the second round was cancelled in extremis by the Electoral Council, which feared for its safety. When his term ended, Martelly was therefore replaced by a provisional president, Jocelerme Privert (2016-2017), responsible for organizing new elections. After many ups and downs, and a very costly campaign, Jovenel Moïse won the presidential election in the first round, with 56% of the votes, on November 29, 2016. But abstention exceeded 80%, particularly in the districts ravaged by unemployment and poverty, where the Fanmi Lavalas party (created by Jean-Bertrand Aristide in the late 1990s) and its split-off Pitit Dessalines have significant support. Their candidates (respectively Maryse Narcisse and Moïse Jean Charles) obtained between them 20% of the votes, the same percentage being attributed to Jude Célestin, supported by René Préval. The election was held just weeks after Hurricane Matthew hit the southeast of the country. Denouncing fraud, several candidates refused to recognize the election of Jovenel Moïse. In fact, since he was under investigation for money laundering, his candidacy should not even have been accepted. He took office on February 7, 2017 and enjoyed the support of the two legislative chambers, riddled as usual with thieves, renegades and drug traffickers.

Textile workers

Jovenel Moïse was quickly confronted with a long mobilization in assembly factories (textiles and

clothing), which related to wages. It started in May 2017, lasted several weeks and affected the two free trade zones of Codevi (department of North-East) and Caracol (North) and especially the industrial parks of Port-au-Prince. Already in December 2013, thousands of workers in the industrial zone of Port-au-Prince had gathered in front of Parliament to demand an increase in the minimum wage to meet their needs. The Batay Ouvriye organization, which runs several unions, recounted the 2017 struggle in Port-au-Prince, which was harshly suppressed by the police and the bosses: "You had to see! The determination, the commitment, the fury almost, of thousands, thousands and thousands of scorned workers, tired workers, because, very often, they are alone in the single-parent household, a common practice in Haiti. Bravely leaving the factories where they were trying to keep them locked up by obsolete bosses, completely overwhelmed. Day after day. Running, shouting, screaming in the streets, at the microphones of television channels or the country's main radios. Communicating their overwhelming discontent to passers-by, artisans, street vendors, schoolchildren, students, unemployed people they encountered on their way... Flags, banners, signs, distribution of leaflets in these familiar labyrinths bringing guidance, the leadership of the autonomous working class, mobilised." This renewed fighting spirit among workers in the big assembly workshops foreshadowed what would happen a year later, but it was mainly other layers of society that mobilized then.

Riots

It all started with an increase in the price of petroleum products. After the military dictatorship (1991-1994) which was accompanied by an international embargo, a structural adjustment plan, dictated by the IMF and implemented with a certain zeal by presidents Aristide and Préval, completed the bringing to its knees of several sectors of the Haitian economy. In 2011, an IMF expert visiting Haiti was surprised that tariffs

there were so low. It was however under the aegis of the IMF that they had become the lowest in the region. Thus, the tax on imported rice had dropped from 30% to 5%.

After the earthquake of January 12, 2010, the Haitian government decided to freeze prices at the pump, despite price fluctuations on the international market. In July 2010, the IMF signed an agreement with Haiti under the Extended Credit Facility (ECF). At the same time, it cancelled Haiti's debt to it. But in 2014, under pressure from the IMF, the Haitian authorities reduced fuel subsidies, which weighed heavily on the budget. In 2015 the IMF extended a new loan and began to ask not for the "reduction" but for the "abolition" of fuel subsidies. So this was done. On June 21, 2018, after granting new financing, the IMF announced with pleasure that the Haitian government would eliminate these subsidies. Jovenel Moïse waited for the start of the soccer World Cup and announced in early July a rise in the price of petroleum products of up to 51%.

Marc-Arthur Fils-Aimé, director of the Karl-Lévy Institute, says: "The people have not been silent. On July 6, 7 and 8, they almost routed the executive and the repressive forces by barricading the country. They demanded not only the withdrawal of the press release relating to this brutal increase, but also the lowering of the cost of living. As protests swelled across the country, demands became radicalized to the point that they took on the appearance of a class struggle. Crowds attacked banks and large businesses and demanded the departure of the president and his then prime minister." The prime minister resigned and soon after, the increase in petroleum product prices was halted. Mobilization would soon resume because of another problem: the Petrocaribe fund scandal.

Petrochallengers enter the scene

Petrocaribe is a cooperation agreement, initiated in 2005, between Venezuela and eighteen states in the Caribbean and Central America.

Pursuant to the agreement signed when President René Préval took office, Haiti bought its petroleum products at market prices in Venezuela (its main supplier for a long time) but paid only part in cash. The other part (about half) was to be paid (or bartered) within 17 years (if the price was low) or 25 years, with two years of grace and a rate of preferential interest (1%). Deliveries began in March 2008 and ended in April 2018. The state sold the oil to local private companies and the profit fed the Haitian state-run Petrocaribe fund. \$ 2.4 billion has been paid into this fund over 10 years. Something to arouse avarice! In principle, it was mainly to be used for investments in development projects. But few have been done correctly. A large part of the money disbursed for development projects (1.6 billion) was wasted and diverted, and already in 2013 carnival songs targeted the mismanagement of the fund.

In November 2017, a Senate report pointed out that "it has emerged from the investigation that Petrocaribe has been the subject of a large-scale scam". Citizens then filed 62 complaints. In August 2018, a woman explained that she had complained because her father died after an accident, whereas he could have survived if a quality hospital had been built with Petrocaribe money. It is true that under Michel Martelly the share devoted to health in the state budget was very small: 4.4% in its last budget against 16.6% in 2004 (7% in the most recent).

In mid-August, the filmmaker Gibert Mirambeau posted a photo on social networks in which he appears blindfolded, with a sign in his hand: "Kote kob Petrocaribe a?" ("Where did the Petrocaribe money go?") This question went viral on social media and a movement, the "Petrochallengers", started and developed very quickly, especially among youth. In August 2018, demonstrations were organized outside the premises of the Court of Auditors. The Petrocaribe case became a catalyst for protest, bringing together many sectors of society. On October 17, the Petrochallengers organized a huge demonstration in Port-au-Prince. According to the

feminist Pascale Solages, “to be a Petrochallenger is to respect a certain number of ethical principles: not to be corrupt, to believe in social justice, to have a vision of the world and of living together which respects the rights of people, goods and lives... Each group organized independently, in its community and its neighbourhood, with its own signs, slogans and so on. There was no structured organization of these mobilizations. From December 2018, the groups began to coordinate, and a group of young intellectuals formed the Noupapdomi (“We will stay awake”) group, which Pascale Solages coordinates.

The Petrochallengers intended to jealously guard the autonomy of their movement. But it was not to the liking of the heavyweights of Haitian politics who were kept out of it. They would soon take the initiative and ride the wave set in motion by the Petrochallengers. Part of the political opposition therefore took the initiative of a demonstration on November 18 and called on its supporters to paralyze Port-au-Prince for two days. While the Petrochallengers initially concentrated on questions of corruption and justice, this demonstration also demanded the departure of Jovenel Moïse. Among the men who were to take centre stage, we find, for example, Youri Latortue, a former putschist soldier, accused of several political assassinations and a gang sponsor, who chaired the Senate for a year before leaving Jovenel Moïse; Senator Néné Cassi, elected under the banner of Fanmi Lavalas; Assad Volcy, former “popular leader adored by the underprivileged masses”, according to his writings, and former spokesperson for the presidency under René Préval.

The President pinned down

On January 31, 2019, under pressure from the Petrochallengers, the Superior Commission of Accounts and Administrative Litigation (CSCCA) published a first, very partial audit report on the management of the Petrocaribe fund. Page after page we read the description of multiple

deficiencies and irregularities, embezzlement, gross swindles, carried out with the certainly paid complicity of the public authorities. As writer Gary Victor put it, “Of course there was corruption in Haiti. But here we are on an industrial scale”. The icing on the cake, this report revealed that Jovenel Moïse himself had swindled the Petrocaribe fund. “Collusion, favouritism, embezzlement” writes the Court of Auditors about the projects entrusted to the future president.

While the living conditions of the population had suddenly worsened, the report shone the light behind the scenes of certain Haitian companies and multinationals operating in Haiti, and of a political elite and a parasitic higher administration. On February 7, 2019, at the call of leaders of the parliamentary opposition, hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets of the capital and major cities. Slogans denouncing the cost of living were mixed with those demanding the departure of Jovenel Moïse and prosecutions for the dilapidation of the Petrocaribe fund. From February 7 to 18 the first operation took place to block the country (*peyi lā²k*). Port-au-Prince and other cities were paralyzed by barricades. Warehouses and shops were looted. Gas stations were closed due to the tense climate and multiple demonstrations. But, according to the Organisation des travailleurs révolutionnaires (Organization of Revolutionary Workers - OTR), the situation was far from simple because soon, it explained, “under the leadership of opposition politicians”, social demands “gave way to simple calls for the resignation of the Head of State” while the poor were “forcibly prevented from going to work” and no initiative was taken to allow them to refuel. As Frédéric Thomas writes, underlining the role played by armed gangs in the movement, “we must neither demonize nor idealize the movement” but “not recognizing the limits of the social movement of recent months would be a mistake”. [35]

At the end of its second report, submitted to the Senate on May 31, the Court of Auditors had still examined only 75% of the total amounts voted for development projects. But its content was enough to trigger a new wave of mobilizations,

with large demonstrations on June 9 and many actions the following days to demand the departure of Jovenel Moïse and the prosecution of all those involved in the Petrocaribe scandal.

Even though the money from the Petrocaribe fund has been largely squandered, the debt remains. The Haitian state devotes 4.5% of the budget to servicing the external public debt. Venezuela is by far (more than 87%) the main creditor, although it cancelled part of the debt (\$400 million) after the earthquake. However, the Haitian government is having difficulty obtaining dollars, which are also necessary to buy petroleum products on the international market - and these products have had to be paid for in cash since the end of the Petrocaribe program. This results in recurring fuel shortages. A particularly serious shortage in September 2019 re-launched the mobilization again.

An uncertain political outcome

Jovenel Moïse, must go, yes. But who should replace him? And to do what? In February 2019, the Noupapdomi collective put online a questionnaire filled out by more than 6,000 people, including more than 3,000 in the first 24 hours. The result is a desire for a new perspective and a new project associating “all the vibrant forces of the nation”. Requirements to guide the transition are formulated around the “4 Rs”:

1. Rupture (with the social injustice of past regimes subjected to the great national and international political and economic forces),
2. Recovery (of public institutions; participatory democracy),
3. Reorientation (of the economy with a view to promoting the creation and redistribution of wealth, facilitating public and private initiatives, local and foreign investments),
4. Rigor (in the management and expenditure of the state.).

The transitional authority would be accompanied by a structure allowing the people to control it. This summer

two coalitions were set up, whose concerns partially overlap those of the Noupapdomi collective:

- The Consensual Alternative for the Rebuilding of Haiti, built around opposition senators, includes a series of political forces, some linked to members of the oligarchy despite a progressive veneer. Several former supporters of Jovenel Moïse participate.

- The Papaya Patriotic Forum brings together political organizations from the left (or "centre left") and organizations from the social movement, including the four peasant organizations that organized the founding meeting (in the town of Papaya). Like the other coalition, it is looking for a minimal solution to end the crisis without Jovenel Moïse. But it insists that the solution must be "native", that is designed only in Haiti. According to the Haitian agency Alterpresse, it wants to overthrow Jovenel Moïse and his team "while implementing concrete actions for the satisfaction of vital demands for the population and the country".

Thanks to the mediation of a structure ("la Passerelle") supported by 107 civil society organizations (including employers' organizations), these two coalitions, joined by a few other groups, reached an agreement on November 10: the replacement of Jovenel Moïse will be chosen from among the judges of the Court of Cassation; Parliament will be declared obsolete; a commission will define the criteria for the appointment of ministers; a special body will oversee the work of the executive; a national conference will lay the foundation for a new society. However, three weeks later, the commission charged with establishing the criteria for choosing the provisional president and his prime minister had still not released its findings.

It is doubtful that this agreement can satisfy all those in Haiti who dream of a profound upheaval. Those who say "Fâk chodye a capsiz" ("you have to overturn the pot") do not really want what may appear like reheated soup. The deal only deals with institutional matters, and the names of some signatories can only arouse distrust and even repulsion. How can we not

be wary when assassins and members of the oligarchy, having recently broken with Jovenel Moïse (after having financed his election), are parties to the agreement? Accustomed to turning their coats, wouldn't these individuals be working out a solution with the US embassy?

Speaking on June 8 on the program Top Haiti about the situation post-Jovenel Moïse, James Beltis, a member of the secretariat of Noupapdomi, had already declared that "the architects of the chaos of the last ten years, whether Haitians or foreigners, have no place in this project ... We cannot fight such a great combat against impunity and corruption and then put our fate once again in the hands of other corrupt people."

Repression and demagoguery

Jovenel Moïse and his supporters in the PHTK do not intend to let go of power. They would have too much to lose. It is difficult today to quantify the total number of victims of the repression since the movement began in July 2018. In any case, it exceeds 150 dead. In the very poor La Saline district alone, at least 71 people were killed by regime-related gangs on November 13, 2018, just days before a major mobilization. Eleven women were raped, some in the presence of their young children. In July 2019, at least 20 other people were reportedly murdered in the same neighbourhood. The scale of these crimes is reminiscent of another massacre, that perpetrated in July 2006 by UN troops who, to neutralize a gang, attacked a neighbourhood in the big slum of Cité Soleil, firing 22,000 bullets and killing around sixty of its inhabitants.

To improve its image in the United States, the presidency has hired the services of four lobbying companies. It must convince Washington that it has the situation in hand and that there is no alternative. The feeling of insecurity is growing as crime increases. The gangs paid for by the National Palace now believe that they are entirely licensed and go so far as to attack passenger buses in the

middle of Port-au-Prince, which they strip of their possessions. This situation allows the president to explain that, if he leaves office, the country will be delivered to gangs and that the chaos will be total.

After being very discreet for several weeks, he has adopted an anti-system discourse denouncing the "heirs of the system" of predation. It is therefore probably no coincidence that the public prosecutor has launched an action against one of the wealthiest families in Haiti, the Vorbe, who are in opposition. Fifteen years ago, some of its members signed a contract with the state for the management of power plants to partially compensate for the shortages of electricity in Haiti, a public enterprise. They are accused of fraud and being responsible for the shortage of electricity. In fact, Jovenel Moïse is suspected of wanting to occupy the niche of private supply of electricity with a company in which his wife has interests. The latter is already accused of having facilitated the signing of a contract (\$28 million) between the Haitian state and the German company Dermalog for the production of identity cards. And this despite two unfavourable opinions from the Court of Auditors. One of the men involved in this shady affair was recently appointed head of the Haitian Institute for Statistics. But the employees of this institution refuse to work under the orders of someone so corrupt.

Jovenel Moïse juggles repression and demagoguery. But the difficulties are piling up for him. Haiti has been ruled by a shadow government since March because the Prime Minister-designate has not been ratified by Parliament. The budget could not be voted on in 2018 or 2019. The Catholic bishops are pushing Jovenel Moïse towards the exit while calling on all actors to make "painful concessions". And several weeks ago, during a meeting between employers, the majority of them had already decided for his departure. Now the action against the Vorbe family raises the indignation of the employers' unions.

In addition, even if the most recent demonstrations attracted few people in Port-au-Prince, the mobilization can resurge again, or even extend to new

sectors. The press does not talk much about what is happening in rural areas. However, there too, things are moving. Thus, in the northeast, peasants who, in 2002, under the presidency of Aristide, had been dispossessed of their lands to build a textile factory, settled on the 520 hectares which had been promised to them in compensation, but for which they had never before received a legal document.

Hello Washington?

The fate of Jovenel Moïse will largely be decided in Washington. So far, the “international community” has given it its support and has repeatedly said that a dialogue with the opposition is needed. It is a provocation to all those who keep proclaiming that the departure of Jovenel Moïse is a prerequisite for any solution. In Haiti, the “international community” is the CORE Group, made up of representatives of the UN, the OAS and the ambassadors of several powers (Germany, Brazil, Canada, Spain, United States, France, European Union). It’s the same CORE Group that imposed Martelly to succeed René Préval.

In November, after a visit to Haiti, the US ambassador to the UN, Kelly Craft, stressed “the urgent need to supervise the institutions of the Haitian state” and said that “President Moses and other democratically elected leaders have the responsibility to come together, put aside their disagreements and find an inclusive solution for the well-being of the Haitian people”. The European Union has adopted the same course of action. The European Parliament has just adopted a rather hypocritical resolution, apparently the fruit of some compromises. In a long indictment, it deplored poverty, the situation of women, children and LGBT people, corruption, repression, human rights abuses and impunity, even impugning the wife of Jovenel Moïse. But it does not say a word about the Petrocaribe dossier in which the president is directly involved (as well as European companies!). This allows it to recommend “a frank, open and inclusive inter-Haitian dialogue in order to better meet the basic needs and aspirations of the population and find lasting solutions to the political crisis”.

Dissolved in 1995, the Haitian army has been in the process of reconstitution for several years. But these soldiers do not yet represent a great danger. Experience shows that the same is not true for foreign soldiers who could disembark under the pretext, invented or not, of a humanitarian crisis or of generalized chaos. It was after numerous misdeeds, crimes and repeated scandals that the last UN troops finally left Haiti in 2017, after thirteen years of occupation. Several hundred international police officers under Indian command immediately replaced them until October 2019. The United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH), headed by a US diplomat, then set itself up. It should only include a few dozen police officers to “strengthen the capacity of the Haitian National Police”, including training in crowd control. But Florida is very close. And if the situation continues to get tense, it is possible that US troops may be positioned discreetly off the coast of Haiti, ready to intervene. This is what happened less than ten years ago. Because, as the singer and activist Guerchang Bastia, a member of the Collective of Engaged Artists, puts it, “Haiti is US territory, but not officially”. [36].

“There should be agitation such that the ruling class will have to choose”

21 December 2019, by Daniel Tanuro

How do you analyse the COP process as a whole?

Since Rio in 1992, the COPs (“Conference of the Parties” under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) have revolved around three issues: 1) the level of danger not to be exceeded; 2) North-South climate justice; 3) squaring the circle, or avoiding a climatic cataclysm without questioning the accumulation of capital. It was not until COP21 that a level of danger was defined. A sham of

climate justice was staged during COP3 (Kyoto), then COP15 (Copenhagen) turned the page. As for squaring the circle, two figures suffice: annual CO₂ emissions are 60% higher than in 1990, and atmospheric CO₂ concentration has been unprecedented for 1.5 million years. At the time, ocean levels were 20 to 30 meters higher than today.

What is at stake in COP25 which is currently taking place in Madrid?

The climate commitments by the

states mean a warming of 3.3° C by the end of the century, twice as much as the Paris target. Given the maximum urgency, one would think that COP25 would endeavour to bridge this gap, but this is not the case. It is trying to give concrete shape to the market mechanism decided in Paris (Article 6) to allow states to “collaborate” in the fight against global warming.

This new device should take over from the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) created by the Kyoto Protocol.

As a reminder, this CDM allowed companies, states or other Northern entities to replace their emission reductions with purchases of "emission credits" generated by so-called green investments in the countries of the South. In 2016, a scientific study concluded that 73% of credits were largely fictitious, barely 2% having strong probabilities of corresponding to effective emission reductions. In addition, this CDM was supplemented by REDD programs and REDD + thanks to which emission credits can also be generated by planting trees, and also by protecting existing forests.

These "carbon offset" systems are in reality a sleight of hand aimed at replacing emission reductions with false reductions or with uncertain and ephemeral removals. But this is precisely what the capitalists and the governments at their service want: a scam to pretend that they are saving the planet while they continue to destroy it. Therefore, bridging the gap between 3.3°C and 1.5°C is not on the agenda in Madrid. Before tackling it, these ladies and gentlemen want to know the amount of cheating that will be allowed to them in the next round. If this volume is set in Madrid, COP26 in Glasgow may try to create the illusion that the gap is closing. Otherwise, too bad for the emergency: the illusionism session will be postponed to COP27.

The major challenge of COP 25 is therefore whether the rules of the scam can be fixed now. This is not certain because Brazil, in particular, wants its stock of dummy credits from the CDM to be sold under the new mechanism. (being a climate-negationist and profiting from the pseudo climate policy is by no means incompatible!)

Many have understood that the Paris agreement would not change anything because it is too loose. If we add to that the withdrawal of the USA, the picture is bleak. The COP process seems to lose the legitimacy it had with climate movements. Yet the climate strike, Friday for Future and Extinction Rebellion largely continue to demand respect for the Paris agreement. Do you think that is a

problem?

We must demand compliance with the danger threshold decided in Paris, but the agreement itself is not sustainable. In addition to being non-binding, this agreement - without saying so - paved the way for senseless scenarios of "temporarily exceeding" the danger threshold with subsequent cooling of the planet thanks to "negative emission technologies" (and by boosting the nuclear industry!). These are the scenarios that underpin the promises of "carbon neutrality in 2050" made today. Governments are thus trying to fool public opinion when they are not doing the right thing to reduce emissions. As for the danger threshold, it is important not to remain trapped in the ambiguity of Paris (below 2°C or 1.5°C?). The IPCC leaves no doubt: the climate movement must demand to stay below 1.5°C.

Not only is the US withdrawing, but China is also reviving coal. It's obvious: the solution is on the street, not in the COPs. There should be agitation such that the ruling class will have to choose either it begins to act, or it will no longer be able to dominate. By scoring partial points (for example the extension of public transport and making it free, or a proactive and public program of building insulation - it doesn't matter what), the social movement will gain confidence to go further. Thus, the idea will progress that the anti-capitalist policy necessary to stop the disaster is good and desirable for the working classes.

You have highlighted the key role of women in the three sectors at the forefront of the ecological struggle - peasants, indigenous peoples and youth.

I agree with the (eco) feminists: the destruction of nature and the oppression of women are two manifestations of patriarchal-capitalist domination. Women, because they are oppressed, are more impacted. They are specifically so, because patriarchy imposes most of the work of social reproduction on them. This reality tends to make them more aware of the gravity of the situation and the absurdity of the responses of green

capitalism.

How do you see the youth climate movement? What limits does it show? How do you think it can overcome them?

The biggest challenge for young people is to last over time by resisting the sirens of recuperation and the threats of repression. The best way is to develop democratic self-organization on a mass scale, and the Swiss experience is exemplary from this point of view. Radicalism cannot be decreed, it must be built step by step around concrete issues: 1.5°C maximum, no temporary overshoot, no negative emission technologies, no nuclear, no carbon offsetting: stop fossils and fossil investments, the solution is to produce less/transport less/share more, and for those responsible to pay the bill.

In Lausanne, you replied to someone that striking seemed to you a more powerful form of civil disobedience than blocking crossroads. Can you come back on that?

I am obviously not against crossroads blockades, or the Zones to Defend! But I object to the idea that blocking a street on a Saturday would be more radical or more "disobedient" than going on strike on Friday. Going on strike is a very powerful form of disobedience, it creates something collective in the places of life and work, and echoes with the traditions of the popular classes. The active strike increases this subversive potential tenfold.

In Switzerland, the Climate Strike is in the process of turning to society as a whole. How can the movements of young people be linked to workers beyond some episodic convergences?

The bottom line is that the movement is asking workers about the future the system holds for their children. The impact of this inquiry is immense. It can favour the workers' movement breaking with productivism. This is a decisive issue: without this break, there will be no victory in the fight for the climate. Coupling this inquiry with a general discourse in favour of social

justice will open breaches. Once on the move, employees will develop their own class demands for climate rescue - their "Via Obrera". No one can do it for them.

In trade union circles, the idea of a Green New Deal is starting to gain momentum. What do you think of it?

The Green New Deal of Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez is an economic recovery plan that does not integrate the need to drastically reduce production. It is therefore not an adequate alternative. But the GND has two merits: it is a plan, and this plan aims to resolve both the social crisis and the

ecological crisis from the use of neoliberal revenues. Therefore, the European Commission hastened to recuperate the idea, in order to distort it.

*Translated by **International Viewpoint** from **Gauche Anticapitaliste**'s republication from **SolidaritéS**.*

The people do not recognize the election organized by the system, it's time for self-organization

20 December 2019, by Kamel Aïssat

On Thursday 12 December, the people demonstrated that they resisted all the intimidation campaigns, the official propaganda on all the television channels and newspapers which, for two weeks, had campaigned against a so-called European Union foreign intervention, using the scarecrow of the Kabylie autonomy movement, and using other scarecrows to frighten the people and encourage them to vote.

The people voted on the street

There were thousands of us in Constantine, one of the largest marches ever seen in this region. There were hundreds of thousands in Algiers, during the day and until late at night. And everywhere in Algeria. In Kabylia, especially in Bejaïa which experienced a general strike, voting did not take place. No polling centre was opened, except one near a barracks where they were forced to break a wall of the barracks to allow the soldiers to go to vote discreetly.

Yesterday's election was therefore a big step, but it was predictable. Today, the fight continues, posing more than ever the need for our organization. Because yesterday we observed that in

all the regions, all the municipalities, all the places where there were self-organized collectives, popular committees, there was no voting. On the contrary, there was zero voting, without any violence.

Organization is therefore more than ever on the agenda

At the same time that we demand "system out", we must build the alternative to this system. It is unimaginable for everyone to bring down a system without having prepared the alternative system, that is to say a popular power based on self-organization, whether it be factory committees, combative unions and especially popular committees in all regions of Algeria. It is through the dynamic of construction of self-organization that the existing system will be replaced.

They're going to nominate one candidate from among them, from the five candidates, all of whom originate from the same regime, who were prime ministers, ministers, chiefs of staff, or whatever. At first glance, it

will be Madjid Teboune, whose name is intimately linked to the 70 tonnes of cocaine affair.

So, this 43rd Friday, the people will be mobilized to shout "Teboune cocaine" and "peaceful, peaceful continuous revolution". This is what will emerge today. This facelift they want to make by replacing Bensalah has no chance of succeeding. But if it is not to succeed, we will have to affirm our alternative, which is a constituent process, a sovereign constituent assembly based on popular control, on self-organization, on the social needs of the majority of the people. It is this political alternative that we must confront faced with what they are going to offer us, which will only be another facade of continuity of the neoliberal system.

This is what we are going to do: continue the fight, organize ourselves better to face the system and go through with the radical change that is wanted by the majority of the people, the majority of the youth who are the spearhead of this movement.

12 December 2019

*Translated by **International Viewpoint** from **Parti Socialiste des Travailleurs**.*

Climate: the solution lies in struggle, not COPs!

19 December 2019, by **Daniel Tanuro**

In 25 years of existence, the COPs have not provided a single effective and fair means of preventing the “dangerous anthropogenic disturbance” of the Earth’s climate that scientists have been warning us about for decades, as it becomes more and more precise and urgent.

The outcome lies before our eyes: fires, floods, cyclones, droughts... So much time has been wasted since the Rio Earth Summit (1992) that is no longer possible to avert catastrophe. While means of halting it do exist, it is growing swiftly around us and threatens to take the form of a terrible cataclysm. Hundreds of millions of humans and non-humans may lose their lives.

There is no doubt as to the cause of this hallucinating, terrifying and absurd situation: fossil sector firms refuse to leave these fuels in the ground. Banks support them, as do all major economic sectors and governments are behind them because they are at the service of capitalist profit and competitiveness.

Political leaders attempt to reassure us by saying that COP26, set for Glasgow next year will finally adopt the “new market mechanism” decided in principle at Paris in 2015, which negotiators failed to reach agreement on in Madrid. Just be patient, we are told, everything will fall into place then, because States will have a sound basis to exchange “emissions credits” and thus fulfil their national commitments (+3.3°C!) and the goal of 1.5°C maximum at a lower cost.

One must be naïve to believe in such promises! The Kyoto Protocol also created a so-called “robust” market mechanism. But the balance sheet is clear: 73% of the credits exchanged were in large part phony; scarcely 2% really represented effective

reductions. Moreover, many of these credits were acquired at the expense of people in the global South, in particular Indigenous peoples thrown off their lands. The attempts to “correct” the mechanism eliminated the most blatant frauds, but changed nothing in terms of the fundamentals...

Some 4.3 billions in emissions credits generated in the former system remain unexchanged. This amounts to more than the European Union’s annual emissions. China holds 60%, India 10% and Brazil 5%. Although the ease with which these credits are generated through a whole series of magic tricks resulted in price collapses, the stock of unsold ones still amounts to a tidy sum. Those holding it refuse to renounce it.

In Madrid, Brazil, China, India and Australia demanded to be allowed to continue selling their old “Kyoto” emissions credits via the new mechanism. Rejecting this exorbitant demand would be the absolute least, because it is simply a matter of these countries continuing to enrich themselves through fraud, pretending to act on behalf of the environment. But all governments allow for replacing fossil CO₂ emissions reduction by using forests to absorb CO₂. This “carbon compensation” is itself an enormous scam.

In truth, scams are part and parcel of the principle of neoliberal climate policy. Why? Because fraud alone makes it seemingly possible to overcome the irreconcilable antagonism between the Earth’s limits and the unlimited capitalist thirst for profits. Yes, climate policy is more and more clearly and directly controlled by multinationals. The latter have changed their tactics: instead of denying reality, they pretend to

embrace it, proclaim their desire to co-operate decisively, thus taking the reins of decision-making... and play for time to keep on burning coal, petroleum and natural gas, while coming up with new scams.

The very organization of COPs reflects this growing takeover. Even more than the previous ones, the Madrid conference was sponsored by polluters. Thus, two major Spanish energy groups, Iberdrola and Endesa, funded the summit by around 2 million Euros each. However, two hundred NGO activists were expelled from the congress centre and the representatives of poor countries were excluded from some final meetings...

Some place their hope in the summit between the European Union and China, set for September 2020, a few months before Glasgow. One must be utterly outside reality to imagine that an agreement between these two imperialisms (or other bilateral agreements) could lead COP26 on the path to a fair and effective way out of the climate crisis.

The “Green Deal” whose launch was announced during COP25, by the EU, leaves no doubt. “Carp, I christen you rabbit”. As sustainable development is no longer enough as a smokescreen, this “Green Deal” is nothing more than the new mask of green capitalism (adding a touch of “fair transition” to make the unions doze off)... To protect competitiveness, an import tax will be imposed... but the EU can continue exporting its cheap agricultural products to the South, bankrupting local producers.

In Madrid, the Chinese government posed as a defender of the global South. It set as a precondition for its climate goals that the rich countries must honour their pledges of financial aid and compensation for “losses and

damages" incurred by the poor countries. But this is only tactics. Like those of all imperialisms, Peking's concerns are geostrategic: extend its foreign control and strengthen its military potential.

The EU and China have only one thing in mind: take advantage of the US administration's climate denial to win over "green capitalism's" markets ... and global hegemony. The other side of the coin is delocalising dirty production towards peripheral countries, geological storage of CO₂, illogical expansion of nuclear power, not counting grey emissions and those of international transport, and cornering lands and forests' capacities

to absorb CO₂. It is no coincidence that China is relaunching its coal production.

Along with two other activists, Greta Thunberg recently wrote that "the climate crisis is not just about the environment. It is a crisis of human rights, justice and political will". It was fed by colonial, racist and patriarchal systems of oppression. We must all dismantle them". At the COP tribune, the young Swede declared that the solution would come from peoples, not summits. This is the solution that must be reached after a quarter-century of capitalist Climate High Masses: the solution will come from struggle, not COPs!

No market mechanism will halt the climate catastrophe caused by the market. Destruction of society and nature are two sides of the same coin. Repairing society and nature absolutely requires producing less, transporting less and sharing more, to satisfy real social needs, not those of capital accumulation. It is a choice of society and of civilisation, only struggles can put forth or confirm such choices. The enemy must be clearly named. The enemy is the capitalist system; productivist, exploitative, racist, patriarchal and deadly.

16 December 2019

Call for Solidarity with Uprisings in the Middle East & North Africa

18 December 2019, by **Frieda Afary', Joseph Daher**

Authoritarian rulers and systems however, will not be easily pushed back. In Sudan, the army has struck a deal with the opposition coalition for now. Some success has been achieved as Sudanese transitional authorities recently approved a law to dissolve the former ruling party and repealed a public order law used to regulate women's behavior. In Algeria, the army continues to hold on to power despite ongoing mass protests. In Lebanon, despite prime minister Hariri's resignation, the sectarian and neoliberal political parties still oppose any radical change demanded by large sectors of the protest movement. In Iraq, popular protests in Baghdad and the Shi'a south are being brutally attacked by the Iranian-backed Iraqi government with support from Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and the Iranian sponsored Shi'a militia, Hashd al-Sha'bi. Lately, small but increasing expressions of support for the uprising have emerged in majority Sunni and Kurdish areas.

Iranian forces have brutally suppressed the nationwide popular

protests that broke out in Iran on November 15 in opposition to a rise in the price of petroleum. According to Amnesty International, at least 208 people were killed by government forces. The *New York Times* reports of up to 450 or more killed in four days of intense protest, with up to 100 killed by the IRGC forces in the city of Mahshahr in one protest alone. Another unconfirmed report from Iranian activists provides a list of 928 people who have been killed. According to the United Nations, at least 7,000 people have been arrested.

In the face of this reality, how can progressives around the world help the recent popular uprisings reach their potential and not be crushed?

First, we cannot have any illusions about the U.S. government or any other international powers or any regional powers coming to their aid. Imperialist powers prevent radical change from below and seek forms of authoritarian stability.

Secondly, progressives have a special

responsibility to publicize the cases of those killed and arrested in these uprisings as well as other political prisoners who have been languishing in prisons around the MENA region. In Iran in particular, activists fear that the government would impose another internet blockage and commit mass executions of political prisoners soon. They warn of a scenario similar to 1988 when several thousand political prisoners were executed in a few days and buried in mass graves under an order by Ayatollah Khomeini. Bashar al-Assad's mass executions of political prisoners in Syria is a more recent carnage that has been taking place under Iranian and Russian government backing.

Thirdly, we have a responsibility to give voice to the struggles/demands of feminists, labor activists, progressive and democratic intellectuals, and oppressed minority groups such as the Kurds in Syria, Turkey, Iraq, Iran, the Black population of Darfur in Sudan, the Bahais of Iran, and the LGBTQ community in the region.

Publicizing the cases of those who have risen up to take the MENA region out of the hands of authoritarian, religious fundamentalist, exploitative misogynist systems is not only about helping the suffering people in that region. It is a way of participating in an effort to shift the current direction of our world away from hate and toward international humanist solidarity.

Indeed, the current global wave of protests not seen since the 1960s reveals that the global population could be open to a new anti-capitalist direction that is also humanist and affirmative.

At the same time, in the face of these developments, authoritarian rulers and systems are trying to find new

ways to strengthen themselves. The Iranian government counts on a recent agreement made with China which offers Iran a \$400 billion investment in oil, gas and other infrastructure development, and 5,000 Chinese security forces to protect Chinese investments in exchange for Iranian oil, gas and petrochemicals at a 30% discount. [37] This agreement which involves additional Chinese investments every five years, commits both parties for 25 years and offers ways to circumvent the U.S. sanctions.

Other regional powers such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Turkey and Israel are also turning to China and Russia for arms, investments and strategic partnerships.

Given these realities, will the uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa succeed in moving the region in a progressive and revolutionary direction, or will authoritarian regimes simply change face, survive and engage in endless wars?

Which scenario will prevail? Much depends on what progressives around the world do at this critical moment to express their solidarity with these revolts. The current international mobilizations especially of environmental activists and feminists against capitalist exploitation and oppression of humanity and nature are promising. Our destinies are linked.

Source 16 December [New Politics](#). See also [Alliance of Middle Eastern and North African Socialists](#).

Defending Hong Kong's Autonomy: A Partial Victory

17 December 2019, by [Au Loong-Yu](#)

The opposition usually has around 55-60 percent support in the legislative election, and only around 40 percent in the district elections. The fact that the opposition now garnered 57 per cent of the vote compared to the pro-Beijing parties' 41 per cent is surely a big victory.

It is an even bigger victory in terms of actual seats filled. The pan-democrats won 388 seats in total - an increase of 263 seats from the last round of elections - while pro-Beijing parties lost 240 seats, retaining only 59 seats in total.

The popularity of the pan-democrat camp has already been seen in some polls before the election: 83 percent of the population lay the blame for violence at the government's feet, while only 40 percent thought it was also the protestors' responsibility.

Still, nobody ever thought the pan-

democrats could win by such a large margin in the district elections, especially at a point when the radical elements of the movement were beginning to decline.

During the week before the election the police laid siege to the Polytechnic University occupied by the protestors, and despite several dozens of them still refusing to surrender, there was little they or their supporters outside can do. Gradually most of them surrendered and were arrested. Some nevertheless managed to escape.

The electoral victory surely boosts the opposition's morale. It is also encouraging that more than sixty of the newly-elected district council-members went to Polytechnic's entrance today to express solidarity with the protestors still hiding inside and to acknowledge the students' contribution to the movement.

The police finally entered the campus on 28 November but without making any new arrests.

In fact, this is the opposition's second major victory - since the last one that forced Carrie Lam's government to withdraw the anti-extradition bill on 4 September.

With these two major victories, a new kind of activism may emerge in this movement that Hong Kong has not yet seen. By contrast, the Umbrella Movement in 2014 was totally defeated, followed by a long period of demoralisation among the activists. With more than two million people being mobilised, the movement now has an opportunity to learn from its past experiences.

Lastly, there had been at least five attempts to call for a general strike. Only the August 5th general strike was successful, essentially shutting

down half of the city. This is the first general strike in decades and demonstrates to labour's power to the people.

There are now young activists who realize the importance of the labour struggle and are calling for joining or forming new unions.

What is unique about these recent unionizing efforts is that they are radically decentralized, being self-organized by fairly anonymous participants on online platforms like Telegram, rather than face-to-face workplace organizing.

It remains to be seen how

consolidated and effective this unionizing drive could become. A young public servant's call to form a new public employee union elicited a very good response: news reported that hundreds of public servants have enlisted.

30 November 2019

Disastrous election result in Britain

16 December 2019, by **Veronica Fagan**

But Johnson not only won but did so decisively – taking seats in the deindustrialized north of England which had always been Labour. At the beginning of the election the Tories were way ahead in the opinion polls but the gap narrowed significantly in the last weeks of the campaign. The scale of the defeat was thus a real blow because the campaign felt similar to 2017 when Labour took away the Tory majority of 17, forcing it to govern as a minority government and as a result it was unable to implement Brexit. While Corbyn did not win in 2017 the campaign was a triumph for him and he came out of it stronger than he went in.

Johnson's slogan throughout the campaign was "get Brexit done" – an empty slogan which is of course impossible to carry through but whose simplicity made it attractive. Britain opted for a "strong" leader – at least in appearance – in the mould not only of Trump but of Bolsonaro, Modi etc.

The programme of the new Tory government is not much more than this. The left is sure that it intends to further undermine what remains of public services – in particular the NHS, to further attack what remain of very limited trade union rights, and to ally Britain even more closely to the US under Trump, but in fact the Tories consistently deny most of this.

Indeed, since the election itself Johnson has promised more spending on infrastructure in the North – as

well as enshrining increased NHS spending in law. His EU exit deal will be put to Parliament again before Christmas – and will clearly sail through on the basis of newly elected members, so Britain will leave the EU by 31 January 2020.

One major difference with the 2017 campaign was the pernicious role of the media. Normally once an election is called the parties are given equal exposure and treated to the same level of scrutiny. Not this time. Not only did the vilification of Corbyn continue but footage was doctored in Johnson's favour. It should be noted that false accusations of antisemitism – which Corbyn did not deal with well – were a significant part of this attack as they have been throughout his leadership. This level of bias was particularly striking when it came from the supposedly impartial BBC.

The outcome of the election has implications for the stability of the United Kingdom over the years ahead.

In Scotland the Scottish National Party (SNP) got a very good result (48 seats of 59) while the Labour Party had a disastrous result – 1 seat – because they essentially back the Union. A majority in Scotland voted to stay in the EU, the election result expresses a mandate for a new referendum on independence. But it is not clear what SNP leader Nicola Sturgeon will do. Would the SNP do a Catalonia and organize a referendum

without authorization from Westminster? They have always said they will not, but their options are being narrowed. [38]

The North of Ireland also voted to remain in the EU in the 2016 referendum. For the first time this election returned more pro-united Ireland and pro-remain MPs than Unionist pro-Brexiteers. A pact between the nationalist SDLP and republican Sinn Féin in Belfast brought one seat each, in Derry the SDLP won back one seat from Sinn Féin, so the SDLP has 2 seats, and Sinn Féin has seven. The pro-remain Alliance party won 1. The DUP which propped up the previous minority Tory government with 10 MPs is down to 8.

In the opinion of the NI Alliance Party leader: "If Boris Johnson chooses to use his mandate to pursue a no-deal or a hard Brexit then it is inevitable that Scotland will push for a second referendum on independence and it is almost inevitable that there will be a push for an Irish unity referendum."

The perspective for the left must be to redirect the energy poured into the Labour campaign into campaigns to defend public services, to support workers in struggle – such as the railworkers on strike against driver-only trains, in solidarity with migrants, and into building a massive mobilization around COP 26 to be held in Glasgow in November 2020.

14 December 2019

Solidarity Marches in Pakistan: Widespread student mobilization and political repression - A new generation of activists

15 December 2019, by **Pierre Rousset**

On 29 November 2019, at the initiative of the Student Action Committee (SAC), "Solidarity Marches" were organized in more than 50 cities in Pakistan (and the territories it administers) by a young movement in the midst of radicalization, supported in particular by teachers. [39] The SAC brings together many organizations, some of which have been joined by other local movements.

The first aim was to stimulate the rebirth of student unions and to raise specific demands that have remained unresolved for decades, based on 9 main demands:

1. Lifting the ban on Student Union and its immediate election in all educational institutes
2. Overturning of the so-called administrative rule that requires students to sign an affidavit that bars them from any kind of political activity
3. Formation of anti-harassment committees on campus with the representation of women students
4. Allocation of at least 5% of GDP as for education budget
5. End to all kinds of securitization and violence on campus
6. University administrations must provide all students with housing facilities for the period of their study
7. Free education for all.
8. End curfew timings imposed on students in university-administered and private hostels
9. Reasonable employment for graduate students or announced

minimum wage as unemployment allowance.

The law recognizes the right of student unions to exist [40], but they have suffered a form of de facto exclusion for 35 years, which has prevented them from playing their role in the conduct of academic affairs. As a result, the movement does not recognize any legitimacy to decisions taken by academic authorities in their absence.

More deeply, a new militant generation is emerging to take up the torch of the 1960-80s by singing the slogans of the time, such as "Yes, red, Asia is red".

Student mobilization puts on the agenda a generational renewal of the radical left, with the possible creation of a new political formation in perspective. Ammar Ali Jan is considered as one of the main leaders of the "Solidarity Marches". He explains on his Facebook page:

This is only the beginning. A new possibility has emerged in Pakistan. It is the possibility of a people's politics that is not run by feudals, industrialists or the establishment. It is a politics based on grassroots campaigns run by ordinary citizens, in which the voiceless are finally heard.

We will have to do a lot more to deepen our work among the masses. We resolve to continue fighting for social and economic rights to the best of our abilities. With unity, discipline and kindness, I am certain we will win.

He characterizes this mobilization as a "civil rights movement", demanding the implementation of the rights recognized to the people in the

Constitution, clauses introduced thanks to the action of left-wing forces from 1968 onwards. The aspiration to equal rights is indeed very important in this mobilization whose flag is solidarity.

The English-language Pakistani daily newspaper *Dawn* asked about the various political perspectives of the organizers of the student marches. What can be the perspective of the current wave of struggle? While capitalism is proving incapable of social justice, is it necessary to create a new radical left-wing party supported by the current militant generation, in the short or medium term? [41]

Interviewees of *Dawn* argue that this political party will provide representation for all. Thus, they claim "the party would give equal representation to all segments of society and there would be no discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity, religion and social status." "We will demand end to all the discriminatory laws against women, children and the minorities." The party will "focus progress of the marginalized communities and segments of society, including women, transgender persons, labour and the minorities," says one of the organizers.

Repression

On the occasion of the Marches, a gathering of 250-300 people was held in Lahore. The union of bricklayers' workers, subject to feudal working conditions, was present, as well as many progressive organizations [42]. While ministers and members of the government were expressing their sympathy for the movement, the police

have decided to charge, on behalf of the state, a some of the participants in this rally with a series of offences or crimes ranging from the unauthorized use of loudspeakers (a violation of the Punjab Sound Systems (Regulation) Act) to sedition! The choice of the persons targeted is very selective. [43] Those concerned are:

- Ammar Ali Jan, central and very popular figure of the movement.
- Farooq Tariq, leader of the Lahore Left Front and well known for his many left-wing engagements in Pakistan.
- Iqbal Lala, father of Mashal Khan, the student lynched at Wali Khan University, Mardan. Iqbal Lala received a standing ovation when he came to support student mobilization.
- Alamgir Wazir, leader of the Pashto Council of the University of Punjab and nephew of Ali Wazir, a member of the National Assembly who himself suffered very severe repression. [44] Alamgir Wazir is the only one who was immediately jailed.
- Mohammad Shabbir, Secretary General of the Pakistan Bhatta Mazdoor Union (Brick Kiln Worker Union) and
- Kamil Khan, a student activist.

The activists posted preventive bail to avoid being detained, which the court accepted. These non-imprisoned bail

cases have yet to be confirmed. Alamgir Wazir could also be released on bail. The battle is being fought both legally and politically.

These indictments are making a lot of noise in Pakistan and beyond. Support demonstrations are taking place in universities and on the streets. Amnesty International has condemned the "flagrant violation of the right of expression, freedom of association and freedom of peaceful assembly" of students. "The charges against the organizers must be dropped and anyone arrested for peacefully participating in the protests must be released immediately and unconditionally. Amnesty points out that the origin of the criminal code clauses used against activists is part of the British colonial order. [45] The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) was particularly alarmed by the repression of students, as well as by the smear campaign conducted in the media against the Solidarity Marches. "Students have the right to oppose fee hikes and budget cuts to higher education, and to call for an end to unnecessary interference by security forces on campus, for functional anti-harassment committees with student representation, and above all, for the restoration of student unions. HRCP stands in solidarity with all students taking part across the country on Friday. [46]

A student delegation from the Marches was also received by the

Senate Human Rights Committee on the sedition charges. The committee condemned the indictments, in particular the one against Iqbal Lala, as well as the harassment of the March organizers. It also provided support to student unions. The delegation agreed with the Senate Committee's recommendation to work with the administration to create a common framework and for the movement's leaders to continue to speak within the constitutional framework, while hoping that those who have abducted and threatened students will also commit to respecting the law.

The question of respect for constitutional freedoms goes beyond the academic question. The editorial staff of *Dawn* was besieged by demonstrators in Islamabad and received telephone threats following an article on the recent terrorist attack in London, carried out by a British man whose family is from Pakistan. [47] Bloggers, trade unionists, peasant executives, nationalists, human rights or environmental defenders, political activists are often brutally repressed.

The struggle initiated by the new generation of activists that was spectacularly demonstrated during the Solidarity Marches concerns the entire society in Pakistan. It deserves full international support. Much is at stake in the current wave of youth radicalization.

Macron faced with strikes and mass mobilizations

14 December 2019, by **Léon Crémieux**

The dynamic existing from the start around these two sectors has encouraged a strong mobilization by teachers (70% on strike on 5 December), gas-electricians and firefighters, students and high school students and a significant number of

walk-outs in the private sector, on both 5 and 10 December. On 10 December, another day of strikes and demonstrations took place, at the call of CGT, FO, Solidaires, FSU and high school and student unions. Prepared in just 4 days, the demonstrations

were on average one third to half as large as on 5 December, depending on the city. But with the figure of 400,000 demonstrators announced by the police (800,000 according to the CGT), in all cities, demonstrations exceeded the level of those in 2016 against the

Labour Law. All were dynamic and most often reflected interprofessional and interunion unity, with the presence of yellow jackets.

To date, only RATP and SNCF employees are on all-out strike, this has not spread to other sectors, even in the civil service and public sector. It is only in these two sectors that there has been the preparation of employees and their families for a long strike since last September and October, through joint union calls for the mobilization. "It's better to lose a month's salary than to leave this shit to my children," said a railworker from Montparnasse Station in a demonstration. This determination, this willingness to fight to the end to win, and not just a symbolic march, is present among railworkers and RATP employees. It is this determination which, under the pressure of daily mass meetings to vote the continuation of the strike every day, often unanimously, unites all the unions of the SNCF and RATP, including the CFDT. The number of strikers is still very clearly in the majority over the last 10 days. This determination is also based on very strong support from the working classes, even in the Paris region. All the polling firms testify to this, acknowledging the support for the strike of two-thirds of the country's employees, while they spend hours waiting for the few existing trains, suffering traffic jams on the roads or walking long distances to and from work (68% in the Odoxa survey of 12 December). This is the same support that the Yellow Jackets movement has received over the past year, despite media campaigns to discredit and criminalize it.

Beyond the SNCF and RATP, this popular determination is also expressed among the teams of activists who are mobilized every day to extend the strike, organize actions, set up local cross-sectoral assemblies. Even if in other professional sectors 5 December appeared to be mainly a one-off strike day, the need and the possibility to mobilize now and over time is an idea that is gaining ground. Tens of thousands of workers and young people have set to work to build a cross-sectoral movement from below. The experience of the dozens of

days of mobilisations around the Yellow Jackets set the tone for the actions of the past few days and many union activists are also taking stock of the actions of recent years: strikers at RATP and SNCF want to take and keep control directly and, more than ever before, the junction takes place in cross-sectoral committees between activist teams from several different sectors. More than usual, strike committees are being formed locally, at RATP, SNCF or in a cross-sectoral framework to organize and boost actions. It is a new relationship that is beginning to develop in some places between strikers, activists and union leaders. Not an antagonistic relationship, but complementary and often handing over the initiative to the grassroots.

Marginal in the yellow jacket movement, the trade union movement has returned to the heart of the action, with a common approach by the CGT, FO, Solidaires and FSU. The vision of 5 December and its aftermath was very diverse, and the point of agreement that appears today is only "support for sectors and workplace that vote to continue the strike". But the combative sections explicitly calling for all-out strike and generalization are active and set the tone for mobilizations. Some sectors are on a repeatable strike, notably in the National Education, Energy and Chemicals sectors. Not enough to make Macron back off, but enough to worry him and force him to manoeuvre. A new day of strike and demonstration is called by all the unions for 17 December, the date already chosen for national action by all sectors of healthworkers. This day will be decisive in the balance of forces.

Day after day, the political debate around pension reform is changing in nature. The government wanted an obscure technical debate about balancing the books, difficult to understand and allowing it to win popular support using some hollow and demagogic formulas about universality and equality, stigmatizing the "privileged" of special regimes. Today, a social debate is taking over. Because the question of how pensions are calculated highlights all the injustices suffered throughout their

lives by workers, first and foremost women, those who live for decades in precarious conditions or in difficult jobs. The majority of employees are worn out and half of them unemployed at retirement age. These situations are highlighted by the pension reform and the vast majority of workers understand that their situation will worsen if the government achieves its goals. Whether strikers or non-strikers, they also understand that the attack on the employees of the so-called special regimes (1.4% of the working population) will serve as a pretext for a widespread attack. The change from calculating pensions on the best years' salaries to the point system will automatically result in a decrease in the amount of pensions. The climate of permanent discussions on methods of calculation, losses to be feared, recalls the intense debates during the 2005 referendum on the European Constitutional Treaty.

One element in particular is emerging. Behind the reform of collective pension systems, pension funds are waiting in the wings to arrive centre stage. Today, in France, investments in pension funds to prepare for retirement are microscopic: around 15 billion euros (0.63% of GDP). The percentage of pension funds of GDP is 6.76% in Germany, 95% in the United Kingdom (2273 billion), 180% in the Netherlands...

Pension funds are therefore on the lookout for a new market. In 2015, Emmanuel Macron, then Minister of Economy, made several statements wishing the arrival of pension funds in France. Upon his arrival at the Elysée in 2017, he received Larry Fink, CEO of BlackRock, the world's leading pension fund manager. A law, the PACTE law, passed a few months ago by Parliament, facilitates the movement of pension funds and reduces their taxation. Moreover, and above all, the draft law on pensions would no longer require contributions for incomes above 120,000â,¬ per year, compared to 324,000â,¬ today. The highest incomes, both employed and self-employed, in order to maintain a high pension, would therefore automatically slide towards pension funds, providing the beginning of a goldmine that would obviously be likely to grow as pensions

would shrink, like in other European countries. Coincidentally, it has just been revealed that Mr Delevoye, who for two years has been the government minister for the pension bill, has been paid for years by a private insurance company institute.

In the aftermath of 10 December, wrongly believing that the movement was running out of steam, the Prime Minister, Edouard Philippe, finally presented the main lines of the bill.

On the one hand, in an attempt to calm anger and demobilize the movement, he had to step back by postponing the implementation of the reform to generations born after 1975, keeping all others completely within the current system. On the other hand, he maintained, with an ostentatious provocation, all the elements of his plan to change his system, adding a new aggravation by raising the starting age at full rate from 62 to 64 years, by a reduction of 4 months per year applicable from 2022 to all workers (thus, people born in 1960 will have to be 62 years and 4 months to retire at full rate...). His speech did not provide any concrete information to civil servants, and in particular to national education personnel, who would mechanically suffer cuts of several hundred euros per month, nor to transport, RATP and SNCF employees, who were referred to sectoral negotiations to calculate transition periods.

In a demagogic and persistent manner, the government puts forward three fallacious arguments to describe, by antiphrase, its reform as "universal and socially just":

- the promise for 2022 of a minimum pension, for a full career, at 1000 euros net (85% of the minimum wage), announced as a major social advance... It is in fact a recycling of a legal text, which should have been applied in 2008 and represents, in reality, an increase of 30 euros in what is called the "minimum contribution". Macron had already promised the yellow jackets last April that he would apply it on 1 January 2020. So it is in fact a further postponement of the application of this measure.

- the assertion that the most precarious, with interrupted careers, would benefit from the point system, the current system not counting as paid contributions a year with fewer than 150 hours worked. This is demagoguery, casualized workers will not escape miserable pensions, quite the contrary, with the calculation of retirement by points. The difficult years will give very few points, and they will all count. The current system allows, at least, to take into account only the best 25 years of wages.

- the alleged benefit that women, and especially mothers, would derive from the new system. On the contrary, it would eliminate the attribution 8 months of validated terms per child, and women would suffer the full impact of the two-year delay in full retirement, and a system penalizing interrupted careers. In addition, there are less favourable conditions for the payment of the survivor's pension after the death of the spouse..... All this in exchange for a 5% increase per child, which may benefit the father more than the mother.

Nevertheless, while on the one hand, the government is announcing that everyone will be better off with the new system, at the same time, it is undertaking not to apply it immediately to calm the situation. Moreover, it is refusing to set up any simulator by which employees could calculate and compare their calculations with the current system! Proof, if any, of the deception in government announcements.

So the Prime Minister, through his announcements of 12 December, succeeded in alienating all the strikers... and the CFDT, which had been his silent ally since the beginning of the movement. Not only did the CFDT railway workers maintain their participation in the SNCF strike, but the confederation felt betrayed by the government, since it had demanded not to mix "systemic" and "parametric" reform, in short not to mix the change in the pension system with changes in the "parameters": number of years contributed for a full pension, retirement age, etc. And then, *casus belli*, the government announced a two-year extension of the full rate age! Obviously, Edouard

Philippe wants to load the boat, thinking that the balance of forces makes it possible to make the workers bend and align France with a starting age approaching the average of other European countries.

As expected, the entire trade union movement protested against the government project on 12 December and the strikers' determination was strengthened. All the unions (CGT, FO, FSU, Solidaires, but also CFDT, CFTC and UNSA), are today in a call for a strike and demonstrations for 17 December, a day that promises to be at least as massive as 5 December, with the additional presence of the entire hospital sector that has been fighting for months.

In addition, the announcements, in no way responding to the increased pension loss for teachers, to the questions concerning SNCF and RATP, reinforced the determination of the sectors involved in the strike. As a new element of extension, half the fuel refineries are on strike, starting to create a shortage at petrol stations.

Since these reactions to the Prime Minister's announcements, the government has understood that, far from resolving the crisis, it has taken it to the next level.

An operation to pacify and divide is therefore underway over the weekend.

First with the police. Even if the proposed regime is "universal", Philippe and the Minister of the Interior have already committed themselves to maintaining the existing conditions for "internal security forces, firefighters, police, gendarmes, prison guards, soldiers". While the issue seems to have been resolved for the military (full retirement with no age requirement for 17 years of service for soldiers and non-commissioned officers; 27 years for officers...), nothing is clear for the other categories. On Friday, the police obtained the maintenance of their special regime with a retirement age of 57. To put pressure on them, at least 600 CRSs had reported sick earlier this week, before 11 December, and the police began a work to rule, promising further action.

Macron's universal regime therefore suffers from exceptions for the only sector it considers difficult and dangerous, that of the forces of repression and military intervention. On the other hand, the senators will keep their existing system: pensions of more than 2000 euros net after a single 6-year term. As for teachers who would lose hundreds of euros a month, the Minister began to try to renegotiate with them, promising them concrete results... in the coming months! The government has not made any financial commitment to increase their salaries. Worse, hypothetical increases will depend on accepting new responsibilities or an annual increase in working time.

In fact, the government wants to resolve the crisis by engaging union leaders in sectoral discussions in the coming weeks to give them "grain to grind" as one former union leader said

and prevent the continuation of a centralized fightback against the project. Concerning the CFDT, the aim would also be to grant it some concessions, on the criteria of hardship for example, which would allow it to withdraw from the conflict. If the government reached these goals the movement would lose its balance of forces and the reform would be endorsed.

Clearly, the government does not want to reverse its decision to extend working life to at least 64 years of age or to introduce the point system for pensions. Its basic objective is to break the contributions system, to gradually move towards a system of point pensions covering only a smaller part of the previous salary, as is the case in many European countries. The objective is not to exceed 14% of GDP for public pension expenditure and to push for the development of an

individual insurance element through pension funds. Macron made this reform a political objective which, despite the broad popular rejection from which he continues to suffer, paves the way for his re-election in 2022, appearing to be the best ruler for the right, the employers and the bourgeois classes, permanently locking in the traditional right-wing party (Les Républicains) whose space he now occupies.

The pension counter-reform is an immediate frontal attack, which requires an immediate centralized fightback. The challenge for the movement will be to avoid manoeuvres and divisions in the coming days, to succeed on 17 December, and to ensure that this date is an opportunity to maintain and extend mobilization with increased control by strikers over their movement.

13 December 2019

On the Ground: Kshama Sawant Reelection Campaign

13 December 2019, by **Rebecca Green**

Sawant was re-elected on a platform fighting for universal rent control free of corporate loopholes and a Green New Deal, with demands to make Seattle 100% renewable by 2030, taxing big business to fully fund and expand public transit that could be free to everyone, and creating thousands of high-quality union jobs in the green energy sector. And while much can be attributed to Kshama's tenacity and unambiguous representation of working class interests, our victories are not the product of one individual. Behind Kshama is Socialist Alternative, a revolutionary Marxist organization that has robust internal democracy, acts as a decisive unit, and seeks to bring together any and all movements against inequality or oppression. The Battle to Re-Elect Seattle's Socialist

Re-electing Kshama Sawant required an all out battle. Standing up to big business over the last six years to win a \$15 minimum wage and pass the Amazon Tax - which if it hadn't been shamefully repealed would have placed a tax on big businesses in Seattle to fund affordable housing and homelessness services - put a target on Kshama's back. The Seattle Times and other corporate media as well as business-backed politicians have been fomenting an anti-incumbent mood and anti-Kshama attacks since our election, everything from the refrain of Kshama being "divisive" to blatantly dishonest attacks saying she cancelled half her committee meetings. The corporate establishment wanted us out and threw everything they had against our socialist re-election campaign. Just as had been done before, winning our seat was going to take building a powerful movement in

Seattle.

In the final days of the campaign, it was virtually impossible to walk or drive through the district without seeing a poster or yard sign that read "Don't Let Amazon Blow Up This Election," "2 Days Left to Vote for the Socialist," (the posters counted down day-by-day), or "Seattle Needs Rent Control." With four days until the election we set up tables on every major street and intersection of Capitol Hill, a key neighborhood in the district with a high concentration of voters living in apartment buildings paying exorbitant amounts for their rent. In the final three days we mobilized hundreds of people across the district, including members of Socialist Alternative and other volunteers, to get out the vote: setting up tables and talking to people, putting up posters and yard signs, and

going door knocking from the early hours of the morning until dark. On the day of the election, after a final round of doorknocking, we gathered with hundreds of supporters to watch the results come in and celebrate the incredible work of our campaign over the last six months.

The resounding success of the last few days of this historic campaign was the culmination of months of a massive, sophisticated grassroots-organizing effort spearheaded by Socialist Alternative. To win, we knew we had to reach tens of thousands of voters in the district, raise hundreds of thousands of dollars, mobilize hundreds of volunteers, and fight an endless onslaught of attacks from big business and the corporate establishment. With this political objective in mind, we set up a robust campaign apparatus supported by local branches of Socialist Alternative. A small team of dedicated staff was hired by the campaign to work full time, and was organized into a number of teams to coordinate our efforts: the campaign leadership team, finance team, social media team, and field team.

Our campaign leadership was made up of leading members of Socialist Alternative, including Kshama Sawant, who maintained a birds'-eye view of all facets of our work. This team had to keep pace with the political terrain not just in our district, but across the country and world where working class people are moving into action against the billionaires. Our starting point in developing our political program and campaign strategy was an analysis of the central issues facing working people in Seattle alongside the broader political terrain. As we detail in our longer article analyzing the election results, we secured a historic victory by winning the endorsement of the 43rd District Democrats, for whom it was the first time endorsing a non Democrat. This endorsement was not automatic and was the result of hard work of both rank-and-file Democrats and Socialist Alternative members, as well as our campaign's understanding of the Democratic Party's deep divisions — with an insurgent left wing looking for ways to push back against the party's establishment.

Shattering Fundraising Records

Our grassroots campaign did not take a dime of corporate cash because the interests of big business are fundamentally at odds with the needs of working people. This means that our entire campaign was funded exclusively by ordinary working people and young people to whom Kshama Sawant is solely accountable. The hostility from big business towards our movement's victories and demands was on full display in this election, with corporations from Amazon and Vulcan to Puget Sound Energy and Comcast dumping over \$4 million into corporate PACs to elect pro-business candidates across the city. Our opponent in the race, Egan Orion, was one of the biggest recipients of corporate PAC money in Seattle City Council history. However, we broke far more noble records ourselves. We raised \$575,000 — more than any city council campaign in Seattle's history with 7,900 donors and a median donation of just \$20!

Our campaign didn't accept a dime in corporate cash, and our fundraising was rooted in our ability to win ordinary people over to our ideas. With this basis, the campaign finance team trained canvassers in fundraising skills which led us to raising \$56,000 tabling and door knocking and organizing 33 house parties that raised \$71,300 total.

After Amazon dropped a \$1 million money bomb the week that ballots dropped, the finance team pushed hard to raise thousands of dollars to show that ordinary people want to fight back against this blatant attempt to buy city council. Campaign staff and Socialist Alternative branch members took note of the widespread anger that exists towards Jeff Bezos and executives at Amazon. Rather than seeing this \$1 million as a death wish, we recognized that it was an issue we could boldly campaign on. We used it as a rallying cry to our supporters in the district and beyond, reminding people what it will mean for the future of Seattle and other cities

across the country if Amazon was able to successfully buy the election.

Unstoppable Ground Game

We had the strongest ground game of any campaign across the city, which was only made possible due to our dedicated and disciplined base of Socialist Alternative volunteers. Local Socialist Alternative branches made up of union members, college and high school students, retirees, and working people across Seattle discussed the campaign weekly in their regular meetings. In branch meetings members also discussed tactics and slogans that were proving effective for winning votes on the doors and fundraising, along with key political points to strengthen our overall strategy.

While Socialist Alternative volunteers made up a large part of the political core of the campaign, one of the crucial components of our ground game was the base of new volunteers we mobilized. We engaged over 250 new volunteers who completed more than 570 hours of work on the campaign. In the final week of the election alone, these volunteers completed 198 canvassing shifts.

Altogether, over the course of the campaign, we completed more than 8,000 hours of canvassing, knocked on 225,000 doors, spent 2,778 hours phone banking, and assessed the support level of over 23,000 people in the district. Through our canvassing we registered 1,019 people to vote and drove voter turnout to an exceptional level for a non-presidential election year. We led outreach in the Vietnamese and East African immigrant communities. With our partners in the Vietnamese Senior Association we organized a meet-and-greet with over 60 community members that raised \$940. We worked closely with a local leader in the East African community who led the charge on registering and mobilizing hundreds of supporters, and received endorsements from many other community leaders. We also registered hundreds of students with a campus drive at Seattle University.

Towards a Workers' Party

What was possible in Seattle's District 3 city council race is a small scale example of what would be possible if working class and young people had our own political party, free of the corrosive influence of corporations. Such a party would not be based on backdoor political maneuvering and compromise with big business to incrementally win small concessions that are deemed acceptable by the corporate establishment. Instead, demands like a \$15 minimum wage, an Amazon Tax, and rent control could be democratically discussed and working people could fight for what is needed by the vast majority of people in

society. Elected officials would accept the average workers' wage, as Kshama does, and be held democratically accountable to the party and its demands. These elected officials would use their seat to draw working and young people into struggle to get organized and fight for necessary reforms, while continually drawing out the need to fight against the greater system of capitalism in order to end oppression, inequality, and the devastation of the environment.

Socialists are winning elections across the country, which is an exciting development in the growing movement to fight capitalism and win

a world based on human need, not profit. Amazon and the corporate establishment in Seattle revealed in this election how far they will go to get a socialist out of office. Working people across the country should look to this election as an example of what we will continue to come up against as the fight against the billionaire class continues, and what it will take to win.

Updated 12/7/2019. Initially we said there were 4,000 hours of doorknocking and 1,389 of phone banking, in fact that was the number of shifts which were two hours each.

5 December 2019

Source: [Socialist Alternative \(USA\)](#).

Why Leftists Should Support Hong Kong's Fight for Democratic Rights

12 December 2019, by **Ashley Smith**, **Eli Friedman**

Ashley Smith: You were just in Hong Kong during the election, which the candidates supporting democracy won by large numbers. What's the significance of the results? What has been the response by the state in Hong Kong and Beijing?

Eli Friedman: The recent district council elections resulted in a landslide victory for the pro-democracy parties, which is a big setback for the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) government and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). While many in Hong Kong were expecting gains in light of the government's brutal and incompetent response to the past six months of social resistance, they did even better than anticipated. Beijing seems to have been caught particularly flat-footed.

There are a few things worth clarifying about these elections. District councils are the lowest level of government in Hong Kong, and the

only level that is fully democratically elected (only a portion of the legislature is directly elected, and the chief executive is elected by a committee consisting of 1,200 members). The councils maintain little power and are largely responsible for neighborhood upkeep issues.

Nonetheless, the elections are hugely significant for at least two reasons. First, chief executive Carrie Lam and her backers in Beijing have contended that they have the support of a "silent majority" of Hong Kong residents who are angered by the protests. This election irrefutably shows that narrative to be false while there is certainly not yet consensus on what Hong Kong's future should look like, this vote reflects the widespread dissatisfaction with the current regime.

Second, district council members have a say in the election of the chief executive (CE). This has the potential to destabilize the established coalitions that have elected the CE

previously, although there isn't reason yet to believe that this will result in a better outcome.

The reaction from the government has not been heartening. Carrie Lam said she would "seriously reflect," a sentiment that she has expressed earlier, but which has not had any demonstrable impact on her actions. China's foreign minister, Wang Yi, responded to reporters with a boilerplate "Hong Kong is part of China" — indeed, that the CCP equates any opposition to their rule with separatism is telling.

Official media hinted, without evidence, that the United States or other foreign elements had interfered in the elections. It thus seems likely that the CCP either genuinely believes the movement is being organized by hostile foreign forces intent on fomenting independence, or that they are cynically promoting this account to divert from their own failings. Regardless, since they are now boxed in by this narrative, the only political

response they are left with, given the Party's internal political dynamics, is repression without concessions.

For months, people in Hong Kong have protested in mass numbers, AS and now they have swept the elections. What have been the core demands the movement has fought for? And what is the state of the movement now?

Eli Friedman: The five demands of the movement are:

- 1) full withdrawal of the anti-extradition bill;
- 2) withdrawal of the "riot" characterization of a June protest;
- 3) full amnesty for arrested protestors;
- 4) an independent investigation of police conduct;
- 5) real universal suffrage.

The first demand has now been met. This bill would have allowed Hong Kong authorities to extradite people to China, leading many activists and others to fear that they would be subject to non-transparent legal proceedings that characterize the CCP-controlled courts.

Opposition to this bill was the original catalyst for the movement, and many believe that if the bill had been withdrawn in June, the protests would have died down. Unfortunately for the government, their ham-fisted response and brutal repression by the police generated more demands, such that by the time the bill was finally withdrawn in September, people were hardly impressed.

There are many currents and diverse political perspectives within the movement, but the issue of police brutality has become increasingly prominent as months of violent repression have dragged on. "Real universal suffrage," i.e., direct election of freely nominated candidates, is a widely held aspiration, but one that most acknowledge will be a long and hard fight.

It seems unlikely that the high intensity of mobilization and confrontation with the police can persist much longer. Seasoned activists are making plans for a long-term struggle, one that will likely become less spectacular but perhaps

equally important to Hong Kong's future. The fundamental conflict between the CCP's control imperative and Hong Kongers' rejection of full integration into China's legal and political system is not going away, but much more work needs to be accomplished in producing a positive vision of Hong Kong's future.

Recently the struggle has faced violent repression from the state, AS forcing student activists in particular to defend themselves. How has the broader population responded to this state violence? How will it impact popular protest?

Eli Friedman: Many outside Hong Kong fail to grasp how important the issue of police violence is for the movement. Tear gas and rubber bullets rain down on protestors weekly, countless thousands have been indiscriminately clubbed by cops, and numerous women have been sexually assaulted while in detention.

Police even fired tear gas inside a subway station, provoking an extremely dangerous situation. Repression has also been outsourced to organized crime, the most terrifying example being the July 21 incident in suburban Yuen Long in which white-shirted thugs attacked commuters and protestors alike.

In response to heightening repression, as well as the government's complete indifference to mass marches, a not insignificant number of protestors have adopted increasingly militant tactics. This has included a limited number of examples of protestors physically attacking pro-regime counter-protestors. In one horrifying case, protestors doused someone in petrol and set him alight (he survived). One citizen died after getting hit by a brick thrown by a protestor.

But, by and large, people have adopted more militant tactics in self-defense. Perhaps the largest conflagrations of the movement have come at the Chinese University of Hong Kong and Hong Kong Polytechnic University. Both universities saw students and other allied youth building barricades,

hurling Molotov cocktails, and even shooting arrows to prevent police invasions of their campuses.

Much to the surprise of the authorities, there is widespread support or at least tolerance of these increasingly militant tactics. There is a deeply held sense that movement supporters should be tolerant of a diversity of tactics, and most rightly blame deteriorating public order on the police and the government. Direct action and self-defense in response to police violence has certainly been legitimated as the official mechanisms of political representation are viewed with deep suspicion.

One of the key questions that activists in Hong Kong face is whether AS this movement can mobilize the power of the working class. How rooted is it in Hong Kong? Has the movement been able to build links with the workers' struggles in China?

Eli Friedman: Hong Kong's labor movement has historically been weak, and the post-1997 government continued the anti-worker policies inherited from the British. Although Hong Kong does have freedom of association, there are no collective bargaining rights and a woefully inadequate minimum wage was only instituted in the last few years. The dominant union federation, the Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions, is pro-regime and is actively hostile to the movement.

The Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU) is aligned with the opposition and has worked to advance workers' rights in Hong Kong and Mainland China. But the HKCTU and its member unions still do not have the capacity to sustain robust political mobilization among the working class. This relative weakness has been on display amid recent calls for general strikes.

These strikes have been organized in the decentralized networks that characterize the movement more broadly. But unions have by and large been unable or unwilling to mobilize workplace-based support. The result has been a "general strike" without

organizational capacity, which means that disruption has been focused on key nodes in the transportation infrastructure.

These tactics are worth supporting â€” but it would be much more politically potent if done in coordination with workplace-based mobilization. Labor activists in the city are keenly aware of this issue, and are working hard at overcoming this weakness.

There are some encouraging signs that workers are being politicized in the midst of the general social uprising. Following intense pressure from Beijing, Cathay Pacific fired dozens of workers for their expressions of support of the movement, including flight attendant union chair Rebecca Sy. A campaign to get these workers reinstated was ultimately unsuccessful, but it did manage to implant the notion of “white terror” into the movement’s lexicon.

Workers in other industries have expressed interest in organizing â€” as much for political as economic reasons. One surprising example is the Financial Industry Employees General Union which “aims to unite fellow members in the financial- services sector to have a voice in important social topics.”

Major challenges remain for the working class to play a bigger role in shaping the orientation of the movement. Hundreds of thousands of migrant workers remain quite peripheral in the political imagination. Raising economic demands has been complicated by the fact that pro-regime elements have claimed, incorrectly, that the protests are “really” about housing costs and that the political grievances are a distraction.

Hong Kong’s astonishing economic inequality is intrinsically linked to its oligarchic form of government, but lots of work needs to be done for this to become a central issue of the movement. Nostalgia associated with the colonial era is an outgrowth of understandable dissatisfaction with the present, but the territory’s past offers little in terms of a liberatory

politics. Mobilizing around a new vision of a more democratic and equitable Hong Kong will be hard work.

This work is made all the more challenging by the fact that links with worker movements in Mainland China are basically nonexistent. Hong Kong activists have played a critical role in the development of worker organizations and insurgency in China over the past twenty-five years, but these links are badly attenuated today. This is due to the CCP’s unrelenting effort to smash independent forms of worker organization since 2015, including even the tamest NGOs. Receiving money or assistance from Hong Kong is in and of itself risky.

Of course, anti-Chinese sentiment in Hong Kong is a real issue and needs to be confronted, too. Some friends of mine brought posters of imprisoned Chinese labor activists to a protest in Hong Kong and reported receiving lots of inquiries and expressions of support. So, the situation is not totally hopeless for Hong Kong–Mainland solidarity, even if it is basically impossible at the moment.

That Hong Kong as an island of liberalism in a hostile sea of authoritarianism is neither normatively desirable nor practically viable. To put it provocatively, if Hong Kong cannot export “the revolution of our times” to the Mainland, it cannot succeed on its own terms.

There has been a debate on the US left about whether to support the AS uprising in Hong Kong. Some point to conservative elements in the movement that look to the US state for assistance to dismiss the movement as a cat’s-paw for Washington. What’s your view of these arguments, and how should the international left, and particularly the US left, position itself?

Eli Friedman: The diffidence of the US and Western left on the movement is perplexing to many leftists in Hong Kong. Thus far, we’ve ceded terrain to anti-communists like Marco Rubio and Ted Cruz who have spoken forcefully on the issue.

The Hong Kong left, from anarchists and community organizers to social democrats, is deeply involved in the movement. And the reason is simple: the CCP presides over an ethno-nationalist form of dictatorial state capitalism. Following the handover, the CCP decided to ally itself with the city’s tycoons, allowing them to continue to enrich themselves within the territory and giving them special access to the Mainland in exchange for political allegiance.

Within China proper, workers, peasants, and ethnic minorities have been dealt with harshly when they have tried to defend or advance their rights. Marxist students in China are kidnapped, disappeared, and arrested. Practically any leftist in Hong Kong that has tried to work in China has been unable to continue with their work due to state repression.

Thus, the Hong Kong left has been quite actively involved in movements to preserve what remains of the city’s liberal rights since at least 2003, when mass protests beat back the much-hated anti-subversion bill known as Article 23.

If the Hong Kong left is basically unanimous in its support for the movement, why has the US left wavered? It is indeed troubling to see protestors waving the American flag and thanking Marco Rubio on Twitter. Whether they truly believe the United States is a moral exemplar is debatable, but appealing to Donald Trump to support a movement for democracy, even if done totally instrumentally, is bad strategy at best.

But why should we allow the worst elements of a massive and incredibly diverse movement to represent the entirety of that movement? Should we withhold our support of the US labor movement because some union leaders are openly nationalist and xenophobic?

The basic aspirations of the movement in Hong Kong, as clearly articulated in the five demands, are opposition to police violence, preserving the legally mandated autonomy from the PRC legal system, and an expansion of democracy. If similar demands were formulated in the United States, we

would support them.

Some may claim that electoral democracy and a bourgeois legal order will be of little benefit to the working class. That may be. But a capitalism where people are allowed to debate and organize politically is far better than a capitalism where similar activities will get you disappeared.

I think there is an additional unstated factor in US leftists' reluctance to speak forcefully on Hong Kong, which is that it does not fit neatly into inherited narratives. We know at an intuitive level what to feel when there's a military coup in Latin

America. There is no question how the Left will respond to Israeli atrocities the next time they bomb Gaza.

But former British colonial subjects who are on average quite privileged by global standards hurling Molotovs at the representatives of a (nominally) socialist regime? It's confusing. Throw in some videos of black-clad protestors singing the Star-Spangled Banner, and it is understandable why it would lead to a mix of emotions.

China is an emergent empire, one that is fully incorporated into the basic capitalist practices of commodity production and exploitation of labor,

but which is upending the centuries-old Euro-American imperial order. The decline of that old order is not, in and of itself, going to lead to an expansion of human freedom.

The struggle in Hong Kong reflects these massive structural shifts and will have a profound influence on how a rising PRC responds to movements for autonomy and democracy elsewhere on its periphery and beyond. We should be doing everything we can to support and express solidarity with our comrades in Hong Kong, since they are in the fight with or without us.

Source: 5 December 2019 [Jacobin](#).

The conservative offensive and the return of class war in Latin America

11 December 2019, by **Franck Gaudichaud**

Antoine Pelletier: A few months ago, the “end” of the progressive cycle in Latin America was being announced. Now, it seems that a new situation is beginning to emerge. On the one hand, the ruling classes are on the offensive, on the other, resistance to neoliberalism is expressing itself in the streets and at the polls.

Franck Gaudichaud: Indeed, there has been a debate about whether we are witnessing sensu stricto the so-called end of cycle of progressive, national popular or center-left governments: from the wrenching end of the Workers Party (PT) government of Brazil to the endless crisis in the Venezuela of Nicolás Maduro, passing through Argentina, Uruguay, Bolivia, Ecuador.... In reality, more than an “end,” we are witnessing the turbulent reflux of these experiences, and what emerges ever more clearly are the strategic limits and contradictions of these different projects and their political regimes. I wrote about this in a recent essay Jeff Webber and Massimo Modonesi. [48] It is

especially apparent that, with the world economic crisis and the more or less profound exhaustion of the neo-developmental and progressive neo-extractivist projects in some countries, we have entered a chaotic and difficult juncture in which the ruling classes, the conservative sectors, the media elites, the financial bourgeoisie, the evangelical churches, and the militarist extreme right are on the offensive. This is particularly true after the victory of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, a key country in regional geo-strategy. This victory came in the wake of the triumph of the parliamentary coup d'état against Dilma Rousseff and later with the illegal and illegitimate imprisonment of Lula.

At the same time, this conservative and/or reactionary offensive has not stabilized; it seems that the ruling classes have not found the key to settling back in power with the backing of a rough social consensus under a new neoliberal-authoritarian hegemony. In Argentina, the neoliberal Mauricio Macri has been

dislodged by the ballot box and his mandate has been marked by a dramatic economic collapse, despite – or rather we should say because of – the gigantic IMF intervention led by Christine Lagarde. In Mexico, a late progressivism appeared with the victory of López Obrador (center-left), who surely will not be able to carry out the great transformation he has announced, but which, nevertheless, constitutes a relative brake compared with the previous neoliberal presidents. In Venezuela, the offensive by the opposition (which was barely supported by Washington) with Juan Guaidó's self-proclamation and the economic suffocation of the country, failed terribly. However, the Maduro government remains enormously weakened and continues to be marked by authoritarianism, mismanagement, and massive corruption, nor is it capable of overcoming its economic crisis when, at the same time, U.S. sanctions weigh heavily on daily life. But, a fundamental fact for the Venezuelan government is that the Bolivarian Armed Forces have remained loyal to president Maduro.

Another example of the current contradictory situation is Uruguay, where conservatives (with support from the extreme-military right) just put an end to fifteen years of social democratic governments led by the Frente Amplio after a narrow victory in the second round of the elections.

Faced with this non-stabilized conservative offensive, discontented popular forces and collective resistance have recovered, expressing themselves indirectly at the polls with, for example, the Peronist victory in Argentina. But, above all, this resistance is expressed from below, through multiple on-going social struggles. And on top of this, we have the great democratic victory of Lula's release (though legal proceedings continue) in Brazil. In short, there is a very powerful recomposition of the class struggle that sets up a period marked by uncertainty, both from the point of view of the elites and of the popular classes. The latter are trying to reorganize themselves, but with weakened forces and without always taking critical stock of the previous period, that of the progressive "golden age" (2002-2013). Another important fact is the extent of state repression and the criminalization of popular movements marked by dozens of deaths throughout the region (from Chile to Honduras to Bolivia), where torture, rape, and femicides are carried out by a militarized police, along with forced disappearances and illegal detentions. From my point of view, there is a political urgency for us in Europe to think about a broad and united campaign of international solidarity to put an immediate end to these practices of state terrorism. We must figure out how to increase the pressure on our own governments and the European Union, which looks the other way and fully supports the states responsible for these systematic violations of fundamental rights.

A. P.: Chile, Ecuador, Haiti and now Colombia, the list of popular movements is getting longer. What can you tell us about these movements, their roots and perspectives?

F. G.: According to various observers, after the Arab Spring and the movement of the indignados in the

Spanish state, we are in a living in a context of global revolts and the Latin American insurrections are resonating in Lebanon, Iraq, Algeria, Hong Kong, and even the yellow vests of France. Perhaps I'm generalizing too much, but this is a resistance against neoliberalism and against authoritarianism in a context of crisis of legitimacy of the current political systems perceived as dominated by political "castes" where clientelism, arrogance, and corruption reign. If we talk about Chile, Haiti, Ecuador, and Colombia this is very clear. However, these are not generalized struggles, they depend first and foremost on local conditions and relations of national forces (even if there are real mutual influences, especially via social networks and similar political actions). This rejection of the "system" has different dimensions, more or less powerfully, depending on the country. The question of corruption is central in Haiti while that of the economic model and authoritarianism is central in Chile, Ecuador, and Colombia. These crises are born of the generalized precarization of life, nature, and work in the neoliberal era in the global south. We must take the pulse of discontent accumulated over decades, of the daily difficulties for millions of people to live and obtain housing in the big cities, to take the pulse of the rural areas that are polluted and controlled by multinationals, etc. We must also understand the scope of the anger from below when they see that very undemocratic political regimes are unable to respond to their needs and expectations while wealth accumulates at one end of society. In the case of Chile, the movement demands nothing less than an end to Pinochet's Constitution, which is still in force today in 2019.

A. P.: The petty bourgeoisie (the middle classes) plays an important role in popular demonstrations, but with different trajectories.

F. G.: In Chile, we are witnessing first and foremost an explosion of precarious youth, students from middle schools, high schools and colleges, often very young. They jumped the subway turnstiles and refused to pay the thirty cents increase for the most expensive

subway in the world (in relation to purchasing power). Indeed, these are young people from popular sectors or the precarious middle classes. Overall, in the countries of the global south, broad layers of the "petty bourgeoisie" are very precarious, in debt, without stable employment and - in some circumstances - they end up following and accompanying the popular mobilizations. An important element is the level of education. Today, Latin American youth (urban but also rural) are more educated than before, more connected to social networks, less affiliated to political parties and unions than in the seventies, and they enter the struggle in a more or less spontaneous and very explosive way in the face of immediate measures, although obviously at different times in each country.

The anti-neoliberal, anti-authoritarian, democratic content of the current social movements is very clear in Chile, Ecuador, Haiti, and now in Colombia, with a large general strike that had not been seen for decades. At the same time, there are essential local ingredients. For example, the question of the peace process in Colombia that the Duque government and former president Uribe have tried to undermine by all means. In Chile, Piñera's elitist arrogance and the presence of the army in the streets have accelerated mobilizations (reactivating the traumatic memory of Pinochet's dictatorship). In Ecuador, the Moreno government (originating in the center-left Alianza Pa'As) aligned itself with neoliberalism, the IMF, the United States, and the bosses of the Guayaquil region. In Haiti, the driving factor is a rejection of the corrupt political ruling caste and president Jovenel, but the consequences of fifteen years of occupation by United Nations troops, particularly Brazilian soldiers plays a role as well.

Bolivia took a different path. There is also a real accumulated social discontent there, not in the face of neoliberalism, but rather in the face of the caudillismo of Evo Morales, who ran for a fourth term thanks to a somewhat controversial decision by the constitutional court and despite the result of the 2016 referendum [in which his proposal to do so was

defeated]. During fourteen years of Evismo, poverty has decreased very significantly and a more social and plurinational state has been built, yet there is also criticism of the extractivist development model followed by Morales and a growing separation between government management and part of the popular movement. However, the fundamental fact that explains the coup d'état against Evo is the far right's success – led by the civic committee of Santa Cruz and reactionary evangelical currents – in capitalizing on popular discontent. Luis Fernando Camacho, the neo-fascist leader of the eastern plains, took advantage of MAS's (Movement Towards Socialism) weakness after it partially lost its capacity to mobilize its historic base. Camacho led a heterogeneous movement that included popular sectors, latifundistas, indigenous organizations, and employers. So this is a different balance of forces. One that includes a turn by part of the new middle classes to support the coup because, after taking advantage of MAS's effective economic management, of a threefold increase in GDP, the middle classes adopted expectations that the MAS could not meet. At the same time, the profoundly clientelistic management of the relations between the popular organizations and the MAS (which more than a party is a kind of federation of social organizations) did not help protect the government against this type of destabilization. Finally, it is necessary to develop and understand in detail the role of imperialism in the coup, which appears more decisive every day, not only through the OAS (Organization of American States) in denouncing electoral fraud, but also through active support, since 2005, for right-wing sectors and the separatists of the eastern part of Bolivia who had sought to overthrow Morales.

A. P.: The feminist movement seems especially powerful in Latin America. Can you talk about a new “feminist wave” that is sweeping the whole continent?

F. G.: Women's struggles and the feminist movement are key factors in the recomposition of the class struggle and the antagonistic popular

movements in the region. They are strongly anchored in the youth, and not just with students. They have managed to establish links with a part of the trade union movement and the peasant movement. This can be seen, for example, in the importance of the women's and feminist movement in the popular struggles of Brazil and the Landless Workers Movement (MST).

At the same time, it is a broad, continental, transnational movement with local specificities. The Argentine dynamic had an influence in Chile, especially with the powerful “Ni una menos” movement and with the struggle for abortion rights, with the symbol of the green scarf that became an international emblem. This movement spilled over national borders and inspired the Chilean feminist struggles on the other side of the Cordillera. Women in Chile have their own demands and dynamics, especially after the university movement in 2018 with the massive occupation of universities against sexual abuse and sexist education. The movement in Chile was triggered by the great strike of March 2019 and the prior creation of the Coordinadora del 8 de Marzo that brings together dozens of organizations. The Latin American feminist movement of the last epoch demonstrated that it is possible to articulate a united and radical approach, becoming a mass and popular movement. In my opinion, it embodies a great hope for any profound democratic transformation, not only anti-patriarchal but also decolonial and anti-capitalist. It is a movement that defines itself against the precariousness of life and integrates workers, migrants, indigenous demands, LGBTQI+ struggles, etc.

In Mexico, the struggle against neoliberal violence and the large number of femicides (and not only in Ciudad Juárez) constituted a central axis of this movement that has, up until now, not transformed itself into a massive national movement. There were also advances in the decriminalization of abortion (in the state of Oaxaca and in Mexico City). In Brazil, the feminist struggles emerged with the “Ele Não” campaign (Not Him) against the rise of Bolsonaro, continuing with the great march of the

daisies by hundreds of thousands of rural women in August 2019. The latter was a enormous march, born out of peasant community feminism. It is broadly connected with the role played by militants of the more urban, radical left, such as Marielle Franco, who was murdered by the henchmen of Bolsonaro.

There is a new feminist wave but not in the European or American sense. Rather, it is a very important historical moment for the struggles of women and feminisms (which are pluralist), with some influences coming from the north, from the Spanish state, and the feminist strike that unites theorists like Silvia Federici, Cinzia Arruzza and others, but which starts from and, above all, is anchored in the specificities of Indo-Afro-Latin America.

A. P.: Other especially important actors in Latin America are the peasant and indigenous movements. How can one understand the progressive role of these forces and in particular their relationship to the workers movement?

F. G.: Today we are commemorating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the emergence of the indigenous, peasant, anti-neoliberal, and anti-capitalist neo-Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas. I believe that it would be of great merit to draw lessons from this crucial experiment and also reactivate solidarity networks with the Zapatista process, one that has lasted a quarter of a century in a territory as large as Belgium, one that undertook the construction of an important alternative experience and constructed alternative livelihoods in a world on the verge of collapse. The Zapatista movement has managed to resist the Mexican military forces and to construct, in a positive way, a new account of how to try, not without difficulty, to forge a post-capitalist perspective, being open to all internationalist struggles, connected with the Kurdish people and with many other struggles, setting in motion the question of communalism, but from the coordinates of the Mayan peoples of Chiapas, elaborating the confluence between the indigenous territories and the construction of an

innovative democratic political power, etc. This experience is fundamental for thinking about alternatives for the twenty-first century. Of course, there are limits and many unresolved problems (especially in the economic plane), as has been recognized by the Zapatistas. The relationship with other Mexican leftists is also often difficult. But when we review the collapse of Chavismo in Venezuela, the absence of structural transformations in Argentina, the trajectory of the PT in Brazil or of the Frente Amplio in Uruguay, we must recognize that the balance of fifteen years of progressivism is quite limited and contradictory. So, in my opinion, we have to return to the Zapatista experience and its conception of power from below without falling into the strategic siren song of “changing the world without taking power.” Instead, let’s change the world by transforming power, as Zapatismo seems to tell us.

In relation to the actors mobilized across the rest of the subcontinent, one could venture that we are witnessing the return of a plebeian emergence, similar to the late 1990s or early 2000s, during the great confrontations with neoliberalism, for example, with the CONAIE in Ecuador, the dynamics of the Landless Workers Movement in Brazil, the water war and the gas war in Bolivia, the call for elites to step down (qué se vayan todos) in 2001 in Argentina and similar urban revolts like the Caracazo in Venezuela. [49] These are different actors, arising from social formations in which “the people” includes a great multiplicity of class fractions. In the last few weeks, we once again saw mobilized – depending on the country

– indigenous and working-class movements, the homeless, unemployed people (the piqueteros), young people, the same ones who initiated the post-neoliberal political cycle at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Today we are witnessing a new plebeian explosion in which indigenous people, as we have seen in Ecuador, play a central role where they have shaken Lenín Moreno’s neoconservative government. In Brazil, we will have to see how the MST is going to position itself because its ties with the PT have been very strong for a long time, yet overall, these ties have paralyzed it. Nevertheless, with the movement against the dams (MBA), the movement of the daisies, the eco-territorial struggles around the Amazon and the offensive of the extreme right, there is a re-activation of resistance. The peasant and indigenous sectors are at the center of neoliberal attacks, they are also among those disappointed by the progressive governments and, therefore, they constitute a very important actor. While Evo Morales and García Linera are in exile in Mexico, it is the Red Ponchos who are on the offensive in response to the ultra-violent dimension of the coup d’état in Bolivian. [50]

None of this should discount worker and urban resistance, these are critical because they are the heart of the capital-labor relationship. In Ecuador, it has been the unity of urban and indigenous movements that has nationalized the dynamics of the revolt against Lenín Moreno. In Chile, the movement emerged, above all,

from the urban populations, from the urbanized and educated youth, from a part of the petty bourgeoisie, but also from unions: the Unión Portuaria de Chile (port workers union) is at the center of the current revolt and of the national strikes and is part of the union organizations in the Social Unity Roundtable which feeds this rebellion. In my opinion, this is where we are going to find a way out of the Chilean crisis: the capacity of the working class to mobilize nationally and to bring the economy to a standstill will be decisive in the battle against Piñera and against state repression, which is at an unprecedented level since 1990.

But there are also contradictions. For instance, in Bolivia, a part of the leadership of the Central Obrera (COB) called for Morales’ resignation to “pacify the country,” in fact, siding with the military and, therefore, supporting the coup d’état! The workers’ movement is not always ready for the struggle, far from it. The big union federations, the Chilean CUT, the Brazilian CUT, are having major difficulties when it comes to articulating plans for a resistance movement against extreme right-wing or neoliberal governments because, for some time, they have served as conveyor belts for various “progressive” parties in office. And one of the challenges of this period will be precisely to rebuild a combative unionism independent of institutions, rooted in workplaces and localities.

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Making Care Work Green

10 December 2019, by **Eileen Boris**

Such scenes have become more salient in recent years. Similarly, in 2018, amid a massive mudslide that stranded hundreds of people and

killed over twenty, home aides in affluent Montecito, CA, sheltered in place to care for the elderly. Domestic workers remained behind to clean and

tend to the grounds. Some were directed to guard property while everyone who could escaped. For all the reporting on structures destroyed

and neighborhoods uprooted, few have questioned what happens to household workers when their workplaces are in the middle of disaster zones. Most only get paid when they show up. Many lack health insurance. Those who are undocumented may be afraid to enter evacuation centers. Some cannot access or understand emergency alerts, since governments have failed to address linguistic and cultural gaps in their response systems. [51] Those who are live-in employees depend on their jobs for shelter.

While care workersâ€”predominantly immigrants and women of colorâ€”play a critical role in the economy by enabling their employers' own economic participation, their low wages compel them to labor even amid grave danger. Thus, domestic workers themselves have built a movement to improve health and safety protections in their workplaces, and disseminate information to workers. While some narrowly associate the "Green New Deal" with clean manufacturing and environmentally friendly infrastructure, domestic and care workers draw important links between environmental and economic justice. They bring sustainability into the homeâ€”both figuratively by maintaining daily life and aiding elders, and materially by doing so healthfully. Their efforts to eliminate toxic household cleaning products and improve fire safety communicate a message at the heart of the Green New Deal: that better working conditions and environmental protection are intertwined.

In the 2000s, domestic workers organized into associations, unions, cooperatives, and worker centers throughout the United States. Under the leadership of the umbrella National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA), they lobbied for various Domestic Workers Bills of Rights, seeking overtime pay, paid sick days, meal and rest breaks, written contracts, fair scheduling, and basic protections against sexual harassment and gender and racial discrimination, among other measures. [52] As of Fall 2019, nine states and two

municipalities have passed various versions, with ongoing campaigns elsewhere. Senator Kamala Harris and Representative Pramila Jayapal (D-Washington) have also introduced federal legislation. [53] More recent bills compare favorably with Convention #189, "Decent Work for Domestic Workers," which U.S. workers and their counterparts from over forty nations won at the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 2011. Two years later, delegates from the NDWA helped transform the International Domestic Worker Networkâ€”the formation assembled to push for the ILO conventionâ€”into the International Domestic Worker Federation (IDWF), the first woman-led global trade union federation.

The ILO convention specifies that "every domestic worker has the right to a safe and healthy working environment." Drawing upon this provision, its accompanying advisory recommendation, and national and local laws, organized domestic workers have worked to expand protections against both daily environmental challenges and disasters. [54] At its second Congress in November 2018, the IDWF identified environmental sustainability as a workers' rights issue. The delegates understood that climate change affects their work. For example, water shortages can render domestic workers unable to wash clothes. On the other hand, they know that how they clean and cook impacts the larger environment and their own health. Their work, after all, exposes them to health and safety risks, including illnesses among those they care for, toxic chemicals in cleaning agents, and environmental hazards like the Getty fire.

Thus, domestic worker activists have offered a broad vision of clean communities, pure air and water, healthy children, and "respect for all living things." [55] To this end, the Instituto de Educaci3n Popular del Sur de California, an immigrant rights NGO, established an environmental justice committee that connects decent working conditions to sustainability. It aims to educate the larger Latina community about the

toxicity of commercial cleaning supplies, healthful alternatives, and the need for political action to force companies to list the ingredients in their products. Further, the California Domestic Workers Coalitionâ€”in conjunction with the Center for Environmental Health and other advocatesâ€”successfully lobbied for passage of the Cleaning Product Right to Know Act in 2017. [56] And the proposal for a national bill of rights would "make[] cleaning supply safety information more transparent and provide[] safety and health education grants for domestic workers to community-based organizations."

Domestic workers have successfully engaged feminist, worker, and immigrant rights allies to transform the legacies of sexual and racial oppression that have historically stripped them of critical labor protections. [57] These allies now turn to countering the aftermath of wild fires. After brutal 2017 conflagrations, the Graton Day Labor Center and North Bay Jobs with Justice in Sonoma County, and Central Coast United for A Sustainable Economy in Ventura and Santa Barbara Counties, spearheaded undocufunds to aid immigrant families who did not qualify for government disaster relief. [58] In addition, Hand in Hand, a domestic employer organization, partnered with the California Domestic Worker Coalition to issue, "In the Age of Climate Change, Fires & Post-Fire Cleaning Tips for Housecleaner Employers & All of Us." Calling on readers to "put health first," this guide offers best practices for domestic employers and others to support workers during and after climate-related natural disasters. [59] It advises employers on compensating employees who miss workdays due to environmental risks, on the proper tools to provide workers for safe clean-ups, and on preparing for future disasters.

In seeking to revalue the care work economy, we should consider how it is embedded not only in the state, family, and market, but also the ecosystem writ large. In caring for planet earth, we can create the conditions for sustaining a more caring society.

A coagulation of anger

9 December 2019, by **Léon Crémieux**

A year ago, in November 2018, it was the Yellow Jacket movement that broke out on roundabouts and city streets across the country. Provoked by the government's decision to introduce a new fuel tax, the movement very quickly highlighted the need for an increase in buying power, particularly the minimum wage, the rejection of a society managed by and for the richest, the restoration of the wealth tax on the richest, the need for a democracy in which the working classes could be heard. The Macron government was facing the social exasperation created by the austerity policies suffered since the 1980s.

This exasperation had led to the corrosion and collapse in the 2017 presidential election of the two parties managing the system since the 1960s, the Gaullist (LR - Les Républicains) and Socialist (PS - Parti Socialiste) party. Taking over the reins of capitalist management, Macron thought he had his hands free to show arrogance and class insolence and undertake systemic capitalist counter-reforms: to accentuate the intervention of a strong state and a liberal economic policy for the benefit of the large capitalist groups. He also thought he had his hands free to make reforms "Thatcher-style", where all previous governments had failed, without fear of social confrontation, in order to bring France into unison with its neighbours in terms of regressing labour law and social protection.

In the aftermath of his election in the fall of 2017, with too weak a response from the unions, five ordinances were issued. One of them broke the system of employee representation in companies, in particular by dividing the number of representatives in half. Another definitively broke the rule of priority to be given to branch agreements in companies, favouring social dumping. Another facilitated the use of dismissals by making it more

difficult for employees to bring cases to the industrial courts.

A few months later, in the spring of 2018, it was the status of the SNCF and that of the railway workers that was broken by the National Assembly. In 2020, SNCF was split into several public limited companies, the rail network opened to competition with the planned elimination of thousands of kilometres of lines. The status of railway workers dating back more than a century was abolished for new hires on 1 January 2020. This status, giving in particular the guarantee of employment, and a recognition of hard and difficult nature of railway work by a retirement age of 52 for mobile workers and 57 for sedentary workers. The 2/5 tactic imposed by the interunion (CGT, FO, UNSA), 18 strikes of 2 consecutive days over 3 months wore out a strong combativity without creating a balance of power against Macron. On the strength of its successes, it was unemployment insurance that was attacked in autumn 2019, making it more difficult to obtain the right to access unemployment benefits. In addition, there has been a major attack on the national education system, reforming the last two years of secondary education and increasing social selection at the entrance to higher education.

Moreover, the French trade union movement essentially refused to recognize the yellow vest movement in autumn 2018 as an important step for the working classes and was therefore unable to seek, from the outset, to make a joint effort to organize a powerful movement against social injustice and austerity. This separation, even if it was then corrected by the most combative parts of the trade union movement, could also lead the government to believe that social oppositions would not be able to unite to block its offensives any more than political oppositions.

Macron and his government also considered that he could open work on a project still postponed by the French capitalists: the questioning of the pension system built in 1945.

The balance of power established by the working classes in France over decades of social struggle means public spending still represented 56% of GDP in 2018. In France, public social expenditure represents 31.2% of GDP, the highest figure in the OECD (the average is 20.1%), even if it has fallen by almost 1% since 2016. This concerns mainly pensions (13.9%) and health (8.7%), for which France is among the leaders in Europe, despite numerous attacks on these two systems. The OECD average for public pension expenditure is 7.5% of GDP, with the Spanish government spending 11%, Germany 10.1%, the United Kingdom and Switzerland 6.5% and the Netherlands 5.4%. In the latter countries, only employees who have had the means (through their companies or their own savings) to subscribe to private pension funds maintain a decent standard of living.

This level of public spending makes France, together with the Spanish State and Italy, one of the three countries with the highest life expectancy in Europe (82.7%).

In France, according to Eurostat, even if one million pensioners live below the poverty line, only 7% of pensioners are in danger of poverty (i.e. an income below 60% of the median wage) compared to 19% in Germany and the United Kingdom.

Thus, France is still out of step with the level of social regression achieved in the main European countries.

It is a new aspect of this social model that Macron wants to attack head-on, where all his predecessors failed.

The recipe is simple: keep the share of

pensions in public spending at the current level, at less than 14% of GDP, while the number of pensioners will increase by 1.5% by 2050. Mathematically, this would result, at constant euro, in the distribution of the same money supply among a growing number of pensioners, thus reducing pensions and impoverishing pensioners.

To achieve this goal, the government has put forward a project that destroys all current pension systems, denounced as unfair, unequal, with "special schemes" that cost billions.

Today, more than 84% of the working population belongs roughly to two pension schemes:

- The private sector employees (19 million employees) who today receive 50% of their average reference salary as a pension from a public pay-as-you-go pension fund, calculated in annual instalments, and around 20% from a national supplementary pension system (ARRCO-AGIRC) in a points system. [60]

- The civil servants of the State and local authorities (4 million employees) paid directly by the State and by a local authorities' pension fund.

In these two schemes the calculation of the reference salary is not the same, but have similar replacement rates of 72 to 74 %.

In addition, around 500,000 employees belong to a dozen "special regimes", inherited from very specific professions and conventions often predating the Second World War (railway workers, gas electricians, notaries' clerks, Parisian transport workers, Paris Opera workers, etc.).

All these distribution plans have guaranteed benefits: an employee knows as his or her career progresses how much his or her pension will be. This is in contrast to point systems, with guaranteed contributions, where all you know is how much you contribute, not how much your pension will be!

In addition, 3.4 million working people are self-employed, with or without fully autonomous systems to prepare for retirement.

The project is therefore that of a single, point-by-point pension scheme replacing all pension systems, both salaried and non-salaried, basic and supplementary schemes. With the argument that "one euro contributed must give everyone the same right to a pension". A system in which no one knows what their point will be worth in retirement, or even what it will be worth from one year to the next.

Sweden implemented such a "defined contribution" system in the 1990s to reduce the share of pensions in GDP. Macron refers to it as the example to follow. Year after year, Swedish pensioners are seeing their replacement rate decrease and women are suffering from increased inequalities.

To justify the urgency of its project, the government had to dramatize the situation

The Macron government launched a major propaganda battle with the support of all the major media to denounce "the profiteers of a retirement system on the brink".

This meant wiping out what Macron himself had said on his campaign site in 2017:

"After more than twenty years of successive reforms, the pension problem is no longer a financial problem... For the first time in decades, the financial perspectives allow us to look to the future with reasonable serenity".

To create a climate of tension and urgency, the government therefore expressly commissioned a new report from the official joint pension structure, the Pension Orientation Council (COR). This organization had issued a report last June that was not alarmist and recorded (like candidate Macron) that, unfortunately, by 2017, the level of pensions paid would fall as a result of the attacks already made

since 1993 on pensions, and that the system was in no way in danger.

The new COR report, published in November, having been forced to incorporate assumptions of large reductions in government payments by 2025, introduces a possible deficit of 17 billion (out of a budget of over 300 billion). The government and the media seized this hypothetical deficit as if it reflected an explosion in spending!

The problem is that Macron's project quickly generated growing hostility among employed workers...and non-employed!

Because, to prepare its draft law, after having discussed it with wary trade union and professional interlocutors, a report was issued in July by J.P. Delevoye, High Commissioner for Pensions.

When reading this report, week after week, lawyers, flight attendants, railway workers, gas electricians and teachers understood that they had everything to lose. In addition, many studies have very quickly undermined government propaganda, praising the merits of this new system, particularly for small pensions and women. On the contrary, the points system further widens the wage and career gaps experienced by women and precarious workers.

The trades benefiting from special provisions (railway workers, firefighters) quickly understood that the proposed system would destroy all the advantages obtained with regard to their working conditions. Even the police threatened the government with a strike

The organization of the mobilization of railway workers

Eager not to suffer yet another defeat and learning from the failure of 2018, as early as September 2019 SUD Rail and UNSA Rail launched a call for a renewable strike from 5 December against the Delevoye project, followed by FO and the CGT. Even the CFDT railway workers called for a strike on

5 December. In parallel with the calls in the energy sector, in all sectors of the civil service, lawyers' unions and youth organizations launched calls for strikes and demonstrations. Even police unions announced "a symbolic closure of police stations". A national inter-professional call for 5 December was launched by all trade union confederations (except CFDT and CFTC).

The government, on the strength of its previous successes, hoped that 5 December would be a kind of "stormy passage", inevitable, but without a follow up, a day of strikes by the "special regimes", SNCF and RATP.

He was quickly disappointed. With 800,000 demonstrators according to the police and 1.5 million according to the CGT, the strength of the demonstrators and strikes reminded us of the strongest days of strikes and demonstrations in all sectors, especially 1995... But on 5 December 2019, there were more demonstrators in the streets than on the first day of demonstrations on 24 November 1995.

An impressive strike rate at the SNCF, 90% of the trains cancelled, only the automatic metro lines operating in Paris, an equally impressive rate among teachers (70% strikers in the first and second levels) who quickly understood that they would be the main losers of this reform.

But above all, the government did not expect railway workers everywhere to vote to extend the strike until Monday, 9 December inclusive, breaking with previous union tactics.

To put out the fire, the Prime Minister tried to advance several counter-shots on Friday:

- Convince current employees of "special schemes" that they would not be "immediately" affected by the reform;
- Assure police officers that their benefits would not be touched because they "risk their lives every day";
- Ensure that teachers are assured that they will (...in 2021!) have salary increases so that there will be no reduction in pensions.

The problem is that the government has still not released a bill. It wanted to wait until Thursday, 5 December to see if it could not budge by a millimetre, letting a storm blow over. It now wants to wait until Wednesday to release his bill, hoping to see a lull in teachers' strikes on Tuesday, signs of recovery in transport and no extension in other sectors.

In all sectors, militant activists have understood that it is necessary to build a real balance of power now, not to let go of what it has for promises, and to extend the strike beyond the transport sectors. The objective in the coming days is of course a convergence of sectors around the same demand, the withdrawal of the Macron project against our pensions. The pressure organized by the grassroots forced the confederal leadership of CGT and FO to call together, with Solidaires and the FSU, for a new day of strike and demonstrations on Tuesday 10 December. The rate at which RATP and SNCF workers have voted to continue the strike, the cross-sectoral dates, should encourage the continuation of the strike in the civil service sectors and the extension to the private sector, which was very present in the streets on 5 December.

Whatever the extension in the coming days, this movement benefits from the gains in fighting spirit achieved in recent months. Over the past year, yellow jackets have boosted the entire social movement with dozens of dynamic, combative demonstrations, breaking with the routine nature of many previous marches. Moreover, this movement has been the only one in recent times to quickly obtain concessions from the government. By announcing, barely a month after the start of the movement, 10 billion following spontaneous demonstrations and the offensive demonstrations of 1 December 2018, a breath of fresh air has blown through the social movement. [61] A social movement that does not feel that it has reached the end of its demands. All categories of hospital workers, particularly in emergency services, have also mobilized massively and over the past year, without the government being able to extinguish a movement that is still present today, with numerous

demonstrations on 14 November, with 10,000 people in Paris. In recent weeks, in many high schools and faculties, students have also mobilized against the precariousness of their situation - dramatically manifested in the attempt of immolation by fire of a student from Lyon, Anas K. on 8 November.

On several occasions, the convergence of climate mobilizations and those against violence against women has also been expressed. On 23 November, demonstrations against gender violence brought together more than 100,000 people. Over the months, new generations have mobilized, crossed paths, with many young people and especially young women. Thus, over the past year, the protean social movement has shown a political dynamism that can also remind the elders of the 1990s, when struggles for women's rights, against racism, for the right to housing and the rights of the unemployed coexisted. It was at the dawn of the anti-globalization movement.

The notable difference today, not only in France, is the great difficulty of bringing these social movements together with common and offensive political perspectives.

The SP and the Republicans react with maximum silence to the current movement. They hope will Macron would fail, but at the same time, his project obviously meets with their approval. The National Rally (RN - Rassemblement National, formerly FN - Front National) proceeds with the same attempt to ride two horses as during the yellow jacket movement: wanting to garner popular discontent while trying to hide that their programme is in accord with Macron's.

To the left of the SP, forces have gathered several times in recent months in calls against security policies to denounce Islamophobia and support the movement against pension reform. The NPA has been at the heart of all these unitary initiatives.

But we are still far from a common anti-capitalist response that is forged in the heat of social movements and is not the reconstruction of an electoral

mechanic. There may be an opportunity to move forward in this direction in many local initiatives within the current social movement, which is at the heart of the

mobilization. The pension movement directly raises the question of the society in which we want to live, free from exploitation and oppression, democratically organized to meet social needs. Advancing this

perspective will depend in the coming days on the strength of the social movement.

7 December 2019

What's at stake in the British general election?

8 December 2019, by Fred Leplat

Blairism was a continuation of neoliberalism with its privatisations, public-private partnerships, and its deep alliance with the USA leading Britain to join in the disastrous and deeply unpopular invasion of Iraq in 2003.

The shock-waves of the 2008 economic crisis and its austerity followed by those of the unexpected victory for Brexit in the 2016 referendum are now throwing up in the air all the usual political certainties.

The consequence of the shock-waves of the 2008 economic crisis was the collapse of Blairism and the deep-centre of politics and the election as Labour Party leader of Jeremy Corbyn in 2015. This was a return to a left reformist programme, which in the present conjuncture is a radical break from neoliberalism. His election led to a massive influx of members, bringing the Labour Party to over 500,000 members, two-thirds of whom twice elected Corbyn as leader. These new members are young, and support Jeremy Corbyn and his policies summed up in the title of the 2017 general election manifesto "For the Many - Not the Few".

The 2016 referendum opened up the gates to racism and nationalism. Those who campaigned for Brexit, such as the Boris Johnson and Michael Gove of the Tory party and Nigel Farage of the UKIP/Brexit party, put forward themes similar to those of Trump: taking back "control" from

Brussels, closing the borders, making Great Britain great again. Furthermore, the Brexit on offer was a deepening of neoliberalism with greater loosening of labour and environmental regulations. That's why sections of the radical left, including Socialist Resistance, argued for opposition to Brexit in that referendum without any illusions in the EU. The Labour Party's position was for "Remain and Reform". However, most of the radical left coming from a Marxist tradition, such as the Communist Party, the Socialist Workers Party and the Socialist Party (ex-Militant) argued for a left exit (Lexit). The mainstream campaign for Remain was complacent, promoted the idea that the EU was progressive and played down its neoliberal aspects. It did not see the threat. The narrow victory of 52% for Brexit reflected the deep divisions in the country, with all but three of the major cities voting Remain, along with Northern Ireland and Scotland. It was also the young and the black and minority population who voted overwhelmingly against Brexit.

Since the 2016 referendum, the rise of the hard right in the Tory party and far right Brexit party (previously UKIP) led by Nigel Farage has been relentless. The Brexit party came first with 30.5% of the vote in the European Parliament elections in 2019, ahead of the Liberal Democrats, Labour, the Greens, and pushing the Tories into fifth place with just under 9% of the vote.

Corbyn's radical manifesto, along with his pledge never to launch a nuclear strike, have provoked rage the ruling class and the right wing, including in the Labour Party. Nevertheless, these radical policies have proved to be popular and saw the Labour Party increase its share of the vote in the 2017 general election, and be in a position with other opposition parties to block the Tory government from pursuing a hard or no deal Brexit. This led to Theresa May resigning as Prime Minister in July 2019 and Boris Johnson becoming leader of the Tory Party and Prime Minister.

Boris Johnson, who campaigned for Brexit in the 2016 referendum, is on the right of the Tory party and is prone to making racist comments. He opposed Theresa May's deals for a Brexit, arguing they were making too many concessions to the European Union. He has dragged the Tory party further to the right, by making concessions to the far right Brexit party with policies regarding migrants and security, and entertaining the possibility of a no-deal Brexit. He expelled from the party Tory members of Parliament who voted against the hard-Brexit deal he negotiated after becoming Prime Minister. Michael Heseltine, a former minister under Margaret Thatcher, accurately described the Tory party as having been taken over by English nationalists who in turn have taken over the government. Many of those expelled from the Tory party, as well as the former Prime Minister John Major, are now arguing to vote

tactically to prevent a Tory majority delivering a hard or no-deal Brexit.

Brexit and austerity are the deep dividing lines in this general election, which is the most polarised for over a generation. Boris Johnson argues that he wants to “get Brexit done”, without ruling out a no-deal Brexit at the end of 2020 transition period, keep taxes low, introduce tougher immigration controls, and maintain a neoliberal course. He has had to make a concession to Labour in declaring that he would protect the National Health Service. The Tories’ campaign has been noticeable for its lack of policy announcements and has concentrated on attacking Labour and Corbyn in particular. They have portrayed themselves as those who stand by the people against Parliament and the London elites who are frustrating the decision of the 2016 referendum.

The Labour Party has now come to the decision at its September national conference to hold another referendum on the EU, with an option to Remain, if it forms a government. This is the only democratic manner in which to resolve this crisis now that the implications of a Tory Brexit are

clear. But Labour’s election campaign is about much more than just resolving Brexit. This year’s manifesto, “It’s Time for Real Change”, is more radical than that for the 2017 general election. It offers a vision of a different type of society after 10 years of Tory austerity: increasing taxes on corporations, wealth and the rich to pay for rebuilding public services, in particular education, health and housing, bringing back into public ownership the railways, water and other services, a Green New Deal, raising the minimum wage, getting rid of zero-hours contracts and restoring trade-union rights.

No one seriously believes that the next Labour government is planning a major assault on British capitalism. In fact, much of the time John McDonnell, the Labour Finance spokesperson, frames the arguments for infrastructure and research spending as being good for business and restoring public services to the level of France or Sweden. The proposed tax rises on the richest are very modest and lower than they were for many in the Thatcher years. Labour is instead aiming to win the

support of the public sector workers who have had a decade of pay cuts, workers in private sector who are on zero-hours contracts or forced to be self-employed, the parents who see that their children’s schools are short staffed and crumbling, everyone who has to use a hospital or has an elderly relative in need of care. This is a programme which offers a radical break from austerity and gives hope for major improvements in the lives of the many and opens the possibility to push for more.

Whatever the outcome of the election on 12 December, Labour’s new manifesto has radicalised and mobilised a large number of people, in particular under the age of 35, who are actively helping the election campaign. A left social movement has been created which will not disappear. The recent large demonstrations and the school students strikes against climate change will intensify as the next COP climate summit will be in Glasgow in December 2020. And the campaign for independence for Scotland will continue as the Scottish National Party is on course to win a big majority of seats north of the border with England.

From COP to COP, the cataclysm draws closer

7 December 2019, by **Daniel Tanuro**

To remind our readers, the United Nations Framework Convention was adopted during the Rio Earth Summit in 1992. [62] It set the objective for states to prevent “dangerous anthropogenic interference with the Earth’s climate. Follow-up on this commitment was supposed to be ensured by the Conferences of the Parties (COP) which have met yearly since 1995. Thus Madrid will be the 25th.

A negative balance

sheet from A to Z

The balance sheet of this process has been negative from A to Z. From COP1 to COP24, governments have above all striven to find ways not to reduce their emissions, or to have others reduce them, or to pretend to reduce them by delocalising them, or to obtain new markets to compensate their pledge to reduce them to a homeopathic dose, or to get the absurd idea that not felling a tree is equivalent to not burning fossil fuels.

The outcome of this posturing is that the annual release of the main greenhouse gas, CO₂ is more than

60% greater than its 1990 level and increasing even more rapidly now than in the 20th century. In consequence, the atmospheric concentration of CO₂, which was 350 ppm in 1990, is 415 ppm now. [63] This level is unprecedented since the Pliocene, 1.8 million years ago. During that era, the sea level was 20 to 30 meters higher than nowadays...

Crime against humankind and

nature

The text adopted at Rio failed to define the level of “dangerous anthropogenic interference”. This major shortcoming derived from pressure by petroleum, coal and gas multinationals, as well as the many sectors of the capitalist economy that are directly dependent on these sources of fossil fuel (automotive, petrochemical, naval and aeronautic construction, etc.) Faithfully relayed by the states in their service, the major petroleum and coal groups also paid millions of dollars to pseudo-scientists spreading gross climate denial myths among the public.

Since 1992, everything has been implemented, with no holds barred, to exploit fossil reserves for as long as possible and thus avoid bursting the “carbon bubble”. Those responsible for such manoeuvres, and their political accomplices, must be taken to court and sentenced for crimes against humankind and against nature.

Maximum 2°C or 1.5°C?

Not until COP21, a quarter-century after Rio, was a decision taken in terms of the heating level that should not be exceeded. The agreement adopted in Paris does stipulate that climate policy has the goal of “maintaining the temperature increase well below 2°C while continuing efforts to not exceed 1.5°C”. But this ambiguous text (which is the goal; 2°C or 1.5°C?) cites no course of action and prescribes no sanction against countries that don’t play their part in that effort. It does not even mention fossil fuels, yet these are the main cause of the increase in the greenhouse effect!

The October 2018 IPCC special report leaves no doubt, contrary to what major media and politicians have been claiming for over 20 years now, 2°C of heating would be far too dangerous for non-humans and humans. [64] One example among others: the Greenland ice sheet contains enough ice to raise the sea level by 7 meters. Yet,

specialists estimate that the point of no return for its breakup is located somewhere between 1.5°C and 2°C of heating...

The spectre of a “hothouse planet”

There is no freezer where we can put the globe to cool it down. In other words, once triggered, the breakup of Greenland (or of any other ice cap or sheet) will be impossible to stop until a new energy equilibrium of the Earth system is reached. In the meantime, this breakup risks bringing about a sequence of “positive feedbacks” turning Amazonia into a savannah, breaking up the Antarctic’s giant glaciers, irreversible permafrost thaw... [65] A gigantic climate domino effect could rapidly lead to a 4 to 5°C increase in the average temperature of the Earth’s surface.

Specialists fear that this runaway global heating will push the earth outside the relatively stable system in which it has been oscillating for 1.5 million years (alternating glacial and interglacial periods). The earth would then enter a new system, analogous to the Pliocene: the “hothouse planet”. It is impossible to imagine such a momentous change, but one thing is absolutely certain; if our species survives, it will not be with a population of seven or eight billion people, and the poor will certainly be the main victims of the cataclysm – the main “adjustment variable” (the usual refrain). The ghastly inhuman policies towards refugees provide a glimpse of the coming barbarism.

Can we still remain below 1.5°C?

At present, global heating stands at approximately 1.1°C with respect to the pre-industrial era. At the current rate of emissions, the 1.5°C point will be crossed around 2040. Everything must be done to prevent this from happening. But is it still possible? Alas, this is far from certain!

The IPCC 1.C special report proposes four illustrative stabilisation scenarios, under the dangerous threshold (with only one chance for success out of two!) [66] Three of these four scenarios must be rejected. These are based on the absurd concept of a “temporary overshoot of 1.5°C” followed by cooling afterwards by using certain technologies.

These so-called “negative emissions” technologies are supposed to remove carbon from the atmosphere. However, if they function (and on an adequate scale!) and also supposing that the carbon withdrawn from the atmosphere can be safely stored where it will not leak out, the situation is so critical that there is a real risk of seeing “temporary overshoot” provoke irreversible accidents. For example, if Greenland’s ice cap starts breaking down... leading to a domino effect winding up with a “hothouse planet”. [67]

The fourth scenario would make it possible without “temporary excesses”, thus without negative emissions technologies. It implies a drastic reduction in net world emissions of CO₂: -58% by 2030, -100% by 2050, negative emissions from 2050 to 2100 [68]. This scenario can’t be accepted as it is, because, like the others, it implies a strong development of the nuclear energy share (+50% in 2030, + 150% in 2050, that is around 200 more plants, also entailing a significant increase in the risk of nuclear war). However, we can deduct that the required emissions decline cannot be achieved without a strong decrease in global energy consumption (around 20% by 2030 and 40% in 2050, if not more) and that this decrease is inaccessible without a significant decrease in production and transport. [69].

An emergency plan is urgent

It is too late to avert the catastrophe: it looms before us. The evidence is more intense heat waves, more violent cyclones and typhoons, faster-melting glaciers in Greenland and Antarctica, sea levels rising faster than predicted,

more violent storms and precipitation, disturbance of monsoons, murderous forest fires and many other phenomena depicted by the media. To say nothing of the very rapid destruction of biodiversity (caused in part by climate change), nor overlook the other aspects of the “ecological crisis” (such as pollution by synthetic chemical products and radioactive nucleotides).

The most elementary common sense – or, survival instinct ! – would call for the development of a global emergency plan to save the climate and biodiversity in social and climatic justice, as quickly and democratically as possible, thus radically reducing the scandalous social inequalities created by neo-liberalism. Such a plan must socialise the energy and finance sectors (without compensation or buyouts) because it is the only means of unlocking the climate future. It must eliminate all useless or harmful production (weapons, for example!) and all useless transport, as these are the simplest means of drastically and very quickly reducing emissions. This would provide some elbow room to invest in energy efficiency (in particular through building renovation and insulation) and to build a new energy system 100% based on renewable sources.

Paradigm shift: care vs. production, real needs vs. profit

Within the plan, agribusiness, the meat industry, industrial fishery and industrial forestry would be replaced respectively by agro-ecology, small-scale fishing, livestock reared in meadows and ecological forestry. These deep changes, as part of a prospect of food and energy sovereignty, would make it possible to simultaneously reduce emissions substantially, protect biodiversity, improve health and create hundreds of millions of useful, meaningful jobs.

The plan implies a total paradigm shift. Profit must make way for real needs, productivism must give way to

care provided to humans and non-humans. This means repairing the damage caused by capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy. This entails providing the Global South the resources for carbon-free development, to provide all humans social security worthy of this name, to guarantee women equal rights and control over their reproductive systems, and to greatly extend the public, para-public and non-market sectors.

Ensured by the creation of new activities and a very radical reduction in labour time to 15 hours weekly (with no loss in salary and reduction in work rhythms and paces), full employment would become an ecological and social demand. [70] Sharing necessary work is also indispensable so everyone democratically takes part in drawing up and carrying out the plan, as well as domestic tasks.

There is no way out of the system-wide crisis without an anticapitalist alternative. To halt the catastrophe and prevent the cataclysm, we absolutely must produce less (produce for real needs), transport less (most transport only aim to maximise profits for multinationals) and share more (as a priority, share the wealth and better distribute necessary labour). This ecosocialist perspective is also necessary to emerge from the crisis of civilisation created by capital, as there is no possible freedom in the delusional pursuit of unlimited consumption, based on unlimited exploitation of the Earth and of humans. Consumerism is merely a miserable compensation for a miserable existence.

Nothing to expect from COPs

It goes without saying that this alternative can't emerge from COPs. During these summits, at the very best, governments try to square the circle: avert the cataclysm while ensuring continued capital accumulation and maintaining neoliberal systems (in other words, the system needed for accumulation in a context of declining profit rate and

generalised overproduction). This is why, despite protocols, carbon taxes, exchangeable emissions quotas, “clean development”, “climate finance”, annual COPs and all that song and dance, capitalist accumulation, like a robot, keeps on unperturbed, dragging humankind towards the “hothouse planet.”

COP 25 won't turn the trend around. One of the main points under debate concerns the new “market mechanism” foreseen in the Paris agreement (article 6). This mechanism should encompass and extend the – generally bogus – provisions for “carbon compensation” in effect since the Kyoto protocol (“Clean development mechanism” and “Joint implementation”, adding the REDD and REDD+ programmes). The unfinished debates about concretising the Paris article 6, at COP24 (Katowice), showed that the stakes are always the same: in practice, one hand cancelling the agreements in principle signed by the other.

Failure of green capitalism, dead end for the system

The media saluted the success of COP21. In truth, the governments failed in terms of the key question that conditions the response to the climate challenge in the market framework: setting a global carbon price. Recovering from this failure won't be easy. Four years after Paris, an IMF publication speaks of this dead end. “. [71] The authors write that climate change could cause “in the extreme, human extinction”. “. [IMF WP/19/185, Sept 2019 p11.]]. Unfortunately, they continue, “the important gap between private and social returns on low carbon emissions investments will probably persist in future, as the future paths of carbon taxation and tariffication are very uncertain, in large part for political economy reasons” (sic). This means that not only a market for current climate mitigation is missing because carbon emissions aren't subject to tariffs, but also markets for future mitigation. This is important for the performance of private investments in climate

attenuation technologies, infrastructures and capital. Finally, five years after Paris, the crisis of bourgeois democracy based on electoralist demagoguery makes it impossible to look beyond a three-year period.

Here's a translation of this technocratic gibberish: We must act to avert humankind's destruction but it isn't profitable. The gap between the survival of the 99% and the profits of the 1% will "probably persist" because there is no world power capable of imposing a carbon price placing all capitalists on an equal footing in the race for profit. So nothing gets done. We can't imagine a starker illustration of the fact that capitalism has nothing more to offer except destruction and death.

All of this is the outcome of the capitalist system in its terminal phase, which, as Marx said, "exhausts the only two sources of all wealth: the Earth and the worker".

Governments' failure in the face of the ecological crisis, and particularly the climate crisis, is not the outcome of a mysterious fate or the perversity of human nature, but the outcome of five structural factors. Capital's congenital productivism prevents it from

producing less; the neoliberal accumulation system prevents creation of a public plan; the contradiction between the internationalisation of capital and the national character of states prevents it from dealing with the overall challenge; the crisis of imperialist leadership prevents ensuring even a modicum of order within capitalist disorder (a factor further aggravated by Donald Trump's climate denial). Finally, the crisis of bourgeois democracy based on electoralist demagoguery makes it impossible to look beyond a three-year period.

End of the world, end of the month, a single ecosocialist struggle

Thinking that a society based on labour exploitation, racism, patriarchy, homophobia, colonial arrogance, violence, abuse of power and growing inequalities can carry on respectful, careful, co-operative, peaceful and prudent relations with (the rest of) nature is absurd. How

can we believe that we can avoid inflicting on other living beings what we put up with ourselves? How can we imagine a system that exploits labour power every day would refrain from pillaging other natural resources? How can we expect a society could respect the "services" nature provides it when that society holds the services provided free of charge by the female half of humankind in contempt, within the framework of social reproduction?

We won't fundamentally change relations between humankind and nature without fundamental change in relationships between humans. Taking care of ourselves in a manner worthy of our humanity is a *sine qua non* condition to take care of the world we are a part of.

"End of the world, end of the month: same enemy, same struggle" resounded in rallies that brought together Yellow Vests and climate marchers in France. This slogan expresses the underlying issue: struggles against social and ecological destruction are two aspects of the same ecosocialist struggle. The solution is not putting pressure on the COPs. It means the convergence of the struggles of the exploited and the oppressed for another necessary, possible and desirable world.

Sardines against Salvini

6 December 2019, by Dave Kellaway

Put simply, it was to fill the squares of Italy with people against the Lega. The reference to the sea was twofold. Firstly, small fish group together in massive shoals to defend themselves against predators and secondly Salvini was the notorious interior minister who was happy to let migrants die in the Mediterranean by closing the ports.

As sometimes happens, the whole idea exploded on social media and the squares of Bologna and other places across the region were successfully taken over by huge crowds. A majority

were young but people of all ages came too.

On 3 December there were 25,000 in Milan and tens of thousands in Florence and Naples. The weather has been as bad in Italy recently as it has been here. Given that the merest hint of rain on an Italian beach sees them emptied very quickly, this showed the strength of this movement as a sea of umbrellas covered the squares.

Taranto and Padova followed and there are plans all this week for demonstrations in Savona, Ancona,

Ravenna, Lecco, Trento, Siena, Siracusa, Vercelli, Catania, Pescara, Foggia, Vicenza, Cagliari, Bari and Latina. This is now a national movement and they want to bring 100,000 to Rome on December 14. Then on December 15 there will be a national meeting to discuss next steps.

This has an impact outside Italy. The other day Salvini was speaking in Antwerp in Belgium and he found Sardines in the streets. Contacts are being developed to plan international mobilisations on December 14.

The formula in Italy itself is very simple. People are mobilised through the local and national coordinators on social media. They come with cut-outs of Sardines in cardboard and other materials. Sometimes slogans or phrases are written on the Sardines placards against the politics of hatred. The central catchy slogan is that the relevant local area isolates the Lega for example "Napoli sLega la Lega"(untie us from, dump the League - rhymes in Italian)

No political parties or banners are invited or tolerated. No political representatives speak from the platform. The four founders do intervene as do well-known anti-Lega independents like the Gommorah author, Roberto Saviano. Sometimes the first articles of the Italian constitution are read out; probably one of the more progressive constitutions on paper, being the fruit of the successful resistance to fascism. The national anthem and (always) the famous anti-fascist song, Bella Ciao, are sung. Some concrete assistance is also organised for migrants or poor people through these mobilisations.

Salvini tried initially not to be too hostile, even proposing to meet the leaders. The latter to their credit have said there is no point to such a meeting. Salvini's has also joked a bit about the movement, saying the protesters are doing him a favour by publicising his message and increasing his chances of winning the big prize of Emilia Romagna in January.

This would thereby weaken the recently formed coalition between the Five Star Movement (M5S) and the Democratic Party (PD). At the same time he and right wing parties have suggested the whole sardine thing is a left front, proved by the fact that they sing Bella Ciao each time.

The polls have shown a small decline in Salvini's popularity, although his party is still riding higher in the polls than the two ruling parties. In the summer Salvini gambled that by

breaking the M5S/Lega government there would be elections and he would be the big winner. Things did not turn out that way because of the way Conte, the prime minister, played his hand and the willingness of both the new (Zingaretti) and previous leader (Renzi) of the PD to work with the M5S.

In some ways, there are similarities between the success of the Anti-Nazi League in Britain at the end of the 70s and the Sardines. Both were open movements not aligned to any one party and focused on mobilising in the streets. New symbols are used - a red arrow by the ANL, sardines by the new movement. Positive cultural values - often expressed in popular culture - played a prominent role in the ANL and we see glimpses of this in Italy today. Of course the Sardines are fighting a party that is much bigger and more implanted in the institutions than any of the neo-fascist groups in Britain in the 70s.

The emergence of the Sardines in Italy today represents a crisis of political representation in general - just like distrust of all politicians we see here - and in particular of the left as a whole. There would be no political space for such a movement if the left was doing its job effectively.

The main responsibility for this lies with the PD who has failed to challenge the Salvini discourse that migrants are a threat. Under the last Renzi government, the Minniti law set up the appalling migrant camps in Libya and blocked migrants from arriving in Italy. By leading austerity governments, they have facilitated Salvini's ability to draw support from demoralised sectors of the working class. They failed to offer any convincing alternative vision of a fairer, better society, whereas Salvini plays on fear of the migrant, worries about crime and sovereignty against Europe. While it is odious, its dog whistle politics are winning support.

We should, to be fair, include most of

the left of the PD in this failure to provide an alternative. Despite a more favourable electoral system than the British first past the post one, the alternative left have repeatedly spent a lot of time haggling over electoral pacts prioritising the stability of their mini-apparatuses rather than developing a united, fighting opposition to austerity and racism. In some places the left of the Catholic Church has been more prominent in facing up to Salvini's politics.

Hopefully some small steps may be taken at a unitary left meeting being held in Rome this coming Saturday. A fair number of left voters and even activists were so relieved to see Salvini dumped from the government that they have developed illusions that the new PD M5S coalition will really build some sort of alternative to austerity or fortress Europe. You just have to read Il Manifesto, a left wing daily, to see this confusion. Indeed some commentators in this milieu see the Sardines as a means for the PD to renew itself to the left, particularly since Renzi has split off to form Italia Viva.

Some on the radical left in the Facebook posts have taken rather a sectarian view of the Sardines. This is wrong. The radical left needs to join in and build the movement. There will be plenty of opportunities to develop a political dialogue and discuss a more worked out alternative both to Salvini and to the current government.

Italy remains a country with one of the biggest public debts and slowest growth rates with millions living in poverty and working in precarious conditions. The upcoming budget deliberations will not provide any real solutions. The mobilisation of the Sardines movement, if it does not fade away as quickly as it started, as social media led campaigns can sometimes do, is something that could contribute to a solution.

5 December 2019

Source **Socialist Resistance**.

Student anger on the brink of exploding

5 December 2019, by **Andreas Sartzekis**

Waves of anti-social attacks

This year, student mobilizations began very early. As soon as it came to power in early July, the right wing Mitsotakis government announced cuts in public education and a green light for privatisation, all against a backdrop of a hysterical campaign of repression of rights, against refugees, against workers, against the left in general, relying on its fascist wing (right-wing cadres from former fascist groups) with the media almost entirely under orders.

In the education sector, the nomination of a fundamentalist bigot, Niki Kerameos, as minister was followed by more anti-social and anti-democratic measures: closure of the law school in Patras, opened by the Syriza government, and 37 other university sections, limitation of the right to studies (dismissal after two failures), plans to break the public monopoly of the university, the recent appointment as president of the Educational Policy Institute of a reactionary provocateur and so on. And the right voted through this summer a highly disturbing repressive measure, which for many clearly shows the link between this "Orbanized" right and the military junta of 1967-73: the suppression of university asylum, together with a jumble of accusations about terrorists taking refuge in the faculties, these terrorists being mostly anarchists, the extreme left and Syriza!

Student mobilizations

The student movement was not mistaken about the seriousness of this measure and its unspoken consequences for the right to study: at the end of July, a first demonstration saw 5,000 students in Athens. And since the start of the academic year, many mobilizations have taken place on this issue, with recent weeks of big demonstrations and a growing mobilization with the prospect of celebrating the 46th anniversary of the Polytechnic uprising, whose importance was understood by many this year. Suddenly, the university authorities stood to attention: a conference of university presidents denounced "episodes" of student violence and, above all, the management of ASOEE, the economics faculty in Athens, took the unprecedented decision to close the college in the week of November 17th, preventing its academic community from organizing at an important moment in academic life and politicization. Students from this and other schools organized a response to this lockout, entering their college to claim their rights. The result: a violent police intervention against students, but also against passers-by and journalists, Mitsotakis thus showing to all those who doubted his true face.

"Law and order"

Because the slogan of the period for the regime is "law and order", which is not unlike slogans of darker times in Greece. This is evidently illustrated by the expulsions from occupied buildings, particularly in the Exarcheia district, which continue without a sufficiently massive protest against. This is also true of the new rights conferred on the police force

strongly influenced by the Nazi ideas of Chryssi Avgi (Golden Dawn): arbitrary arrests, beatings, various humiliations, threats, and provocative statements by cops rejoicing that the spirit of the junta has returned.

So many provocations and so much impunity make some think that the government is trying to open another front to divert attention from the financial scandal in which some of its members, including the extreme right minister Georgiadis, are involved. That this aspect exists is possible. But it is obvious that basically, this revanchist government without much experience has only one goal: fundamentalist neoliberalism, in the manner of Pinochet, especially in the educational field, with the project of drastically reducing rights to study.

The student movement has rejected these attacks increasingly strongly in recent days: on Thursday, 14 November a very big demonstration took place in the centre of Athens, and many faculties are occupied across the country, in view of a November 17th which the youth intend to have a much more massive character than in previous years. All the reasons why the link with the labour movement will be decisive ... as well as international solidarity, especially against repression!

PS (18 November): The commemoration on 17 November was rather a good and encouraging surprise: tens of thousands of protesters (the police speak of 20,000), with combative contingents. The presence of students and youth more broadly confirms that a reconstruction of resistance against the brutal attacks of the right is taking place ...

Rebellion and Reaction - Worldwide anti-austerity upsurge met with brutal repression

4 December 2019, by **Phil Hearse**

Last Thursday (28 November) 40 more people were killed by security forces across Iraq during rioting against corruption and austerity. Just another episode of brutal repression against rebel movements in many parts of the world in the last two months. In this period, we have seen the most widespread mobilisations against economic, political and climate injustice since the wave of struggles that followed the financial crash in 2008. Hundreds have been killed and thousands wounded or arrested. The international movement against climate extinction has been massive, but not (yet) met with the same level of brutal repression. [72]

In Chile, Ecuador, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon and Egypt, young people have been to the fore – people who were children or young teenagers at the time of the Arab Spring and Occupy! movements in 2010-12. While repression has been harsh, it has not in most places defeated the protest movements, even if it has succeeded in pushing them back for a while.

In Iran, as in Ecuador and Chile, the movement started as a protest against price increases – in this case a sharp increase in the price of fuel. As Borgou Daragahi explained:

“A sharp spike in fuel prices has ignited days of anti-government protests across Iran... potentially plunging the country into a new political crisis.

“Thousands of demonstrators defied freezing temperatures to take to the streets of the capital Tehran and other towns and cites including Isfahan, Shiraz and Tabriz. ...

“In one widespread gesture of defiance, drivers in numerous cities simply abandoned their vehicles, leading to major traffic jams.

“Security forces have responded with characteristic harshness, shooting teargas and possibly live fire to disperse crowds amid dire warnings by top government authorities.” [73]

It is now known that more than around 250 have been killed by security forces and seven thousand arrested in 165 cities. Declining living standards are linked to harsh sanctions imposed by the United States and its allies. But Iranians know that those in power in the Islamic Republic are corrupt, and the lifestyles of the rich are untouched by sanctions.

The situation for ordinary people in Iraq is even worse than in Iran. The country's infrastructure remains in ruins, never having been rebuilt after the 2003 war. Hundreds of thousands have died in sectarian conflict, victims especially of Isis, al Qaeda and pro-Iranian Shia militias.

Patrick Cockburn, reporting from Baghdad, puts it the following way:

“All Iraqis know that the country possesses vast oil wealth, bringing in \$6.5bn a month, but they live with widescale unemployment, lack of electricity, pervasive corruption and a poor quality health and education system. They know that vast fortunes have been made by government officials siphoning off money for projects that are never completed and, frequently, are never even begun.”

One of the very positive characteristics of the current movement is that it is not based on sectarian Shia/Sunni lines, but has united people from all communities.

In the past few years the political tide in Latin America has been running sharply against the Left. The defeat of left-wing reformist governments in

Brazil, Ecuador and now the coup against the Evo Morales government in Bolivia, has not prevented the re-emergence of mass rebellion, notably in Chile and Ecuador – but now (late November) joined by another outburst of mass protest in Colombia, in a movement whose demands are typical of Latin America's anti-neoliberal revolt. [74]

The huge mass rebellion in Chile has been detailed by a previous article on this site. [75] The country has a notional GNP of \$19,000 per capita, but the icy grip of privatisation of pensions and health care has plunged much of the country into poverty. The movement started as a protest against a price rise on the Santiago metro, decreed as part of an austerity package by neoliberal president Sebastián Piñera.

The deployment of troops on the streets of Santiago and other major cities, an eerie throwback to the Pinochet coup in 1973, has resulted in more than 30 dead, 80+ suffering grave injuries and thousands arrested – many reporting being brutalised or raped. On November 21 it was reported that many people had been blinded by rubber bullets.

Piñera has responded by sacking half his cabinet and apologising for “not having understood” the demands of the protestors. Few are deceived by these manoeuvres. Piñera understood the meaning of the movement only too well. And the mass movement refuses to go away.

In Ecuador the announcement by the government of the inaptly named Lenín Moreno of a US\$2.2bn package of austerity measures led to a huge protest movement. The government responded with brutal police repression and on 3 October, declared a state of emergency for 60 days.

Lenín Moreno's package includes lifting subsidies on fuel prices, cuts in public spending, an assault on the acquired rights of civil servants and public sector workers (reduction of paid holidays from 30 to 15 days a year, a one-day-of-wages special contribution, and the renewal of temporary contracts with a 20 percent loss in pay), a plan for mass lay-offs in the public sector, an across-the-board assault on employment rights. These measures aimed at unravelling the left-wing legacy of former president Rafael Correa.

Here the movement was led not just by youth but especially by indigenous people, who make up 25% of the population and have been at the forefront of social struggles in the last decade. So huge and militant was the movement that Moreno and his cabinet left the capital Quito, and eventually withdrew the austerity package. Direct negotiations with indigenous leaders produced a compromise whereby the rebels will form a joint committee with the government to discuss economic reform. We'll see what comes of that, but for the moment Moreno's austerity moves have been pushed back.

The rebellions referred to above are not a complete picture of global insurgency. Earlier in the year an anti-austerity, anti-corruption movement shook Algeria. In Sudan the democracy movement that started in December 2018 overthrew President Omar al-Bashir in April, although it is still held back by the power of the corrupt military. In September an absolutely remarkable rebellion took place in Egypt against the corrupt and sadistic al-Sisi regime, with its predictable result in hundreds killed and more than seven thousand arrested. [76]

How should we understand this wave of protests movements? What can they achieve and what obstacles do they face? The following are essential factors that must be integrated into an analysis of these events.

The themes of being anti-austerity, anti-corruption and pro-democracy in different combinations unite all these movements. These themes are no accident, they reflect the

consequences of the catastrophic response of capitalist governments worldwide to the economic crash of 2007-8 – a crash which dramatically exposed the way that neoliberalism has worsened inequality, impoverished many millions, and enabled corrupt elites to fill their pockets through control of the state apparatus.

From the advent of neoliberalism in the 1980s, until the 2008 crash, huge fortunes were made by financial elites, but the system also encouraged state corruption and the vast accumulation of wealth by a tiny elites. [77]

Massive amounts of money were hidden in tax havens and fortunes were made by the banks' connivance at so-called illegal activities like drug dealing, pilfering stature assets and the trading of blood diamonds and minerals.

When this system came crashing down in 2007-8, a radical anti-austerity, pro-democracy movement emerged in many countries. Its most dramatic forms were the Arab Spring and the Occupy! movement, but it also involved repeated huge anti-austerity mobilisations like the Indignados in Spain and numerous general strikes in Greece.

Capitalist governments did not respond to the 2008 crisis by reverting to a more regulated form of capitalism like Keynesianism, which would have involved a more equitable distribution of wealth, the prevention of debt bubbles, and limits to tax evasion – in other words some limits on the ultra-rich.

Instead the response has been to double down on neoliberal economics and confront anti-system movements in two ways – brutal repression and the building of far right and fascist movements to head off popular rebellion. [78]

While the level of repression in the Middle East is astonishing, elsewhere repression – bad enough in Chile and Ecuador – has gone alongside political manoeuvres designed to head off or placate the movement.

In the United States and Europe, with strong traditions of capitalist

democracy, massive repression is, for the moment, not acceptable, although ultra-violent police tactics have been used against the Yellow Vest rebellion in France, and the Catalan independence movement.

While anti-austerity movements have remained buoyant in Latin America, the right continues to make gains at the level of government. In November, Bolivia's radical president Evo Morales was ousted in a de facto military coup; in Uruguay the right-wing National Party won the presidential election against the centre-left Broad Front. Brazil, Chile, Bolivia and Colombia have also moved rightward to varying degrees, though Argentina recently elected a centre-left president. Venezuela's leftist government is hanging on despite political and economic turmoil.

If in Iraq, Iran and Egypt corrupt and dictatorial governments rely on vast quantities of brutality to stay in power, elsewhere radical and socialist movements that try to give political expression to the mass protests face a strong political counter-attack.

Reactionary anti-government movements in Venezuela and Peru have been strongly financed and advised from outside, principally from the United States. Egypt's bloody military regime gets military aid and political support from the West, as do other reactionary regimes. *But a key plank in the global system of neoliberal reaction is to prevent, delegitimise and of at all possible smash up left-wing movements that might challenge for governmental power in advanced capitalist countries.* The slanders heaped on Jeremy Corbyn are an obvious example of this, as was the EU's treatment of the Syriza government in Greece. [79]

This prolonged campaign has different wings. Hard right American billionaires have poured millions of dollars into reactionary think tanks, as revealed in the recent book *Billionaires and Stealth Politics* by Matthew Lacombe et al. [80] *The Guardian* recently showed how influential right-wing think tanks can be in reshaping pro-capitalist politics in the long term, by reference to Britain. [81]

But the campaign against any form of radicalism in the West depends not just on pushing the intelligentsia to the right, but of intervening in mass politics on key themes that can harden out a reactionary core of millions of middle class voters, but also of demoralised older working class voters, in ‘left behind’ areas like the smaller towns in northern England, French former industrial towns in the Pas-de-Calais and the American rustbelt.

The key political themes for this operation are xenophobia, nationalism and racism. The key instruments are the right-dominated mass media, whose scope and power is much more expansive than in the pre-second world war period and is frequently under-emphasised on the Left. We are seeing this process in spades in the current British general election through the media blitz to discredit and demonise Jeremy Corbyn.

In terms of political organisation this process can take the form of the hard-right capturing mainstream right-wing parties (as has happened in the United States and Britain) or support given to extreme right and fascist parties, as is happening with the Alternative for Germany, Vox in Spain and the Lega in Italy. As far as these countries are concerned, the term Creeping Fascism may be an underestimate of the speed of what is going on. [82]

American and British liberals tend to present phenomena like Donald Trump as distasteful ‘populist’ aberrations, based on the unfortunate and excluded ultra-poor. This is wrong on every count. In most places the ultra-right mass movements have their core in the comfortable (and generally older) middle classes, however much working class support they eventually garner. What is happening goes way beyond ‘populism’.

Trotsky said that the situation in each country is a unique crystallisation of the elements of the world process. [83]

The attempt to crush anti-austerity, anti-corruption protest and movements is indeed part of a world process. Brutal repression, far right movements and demonisation of the Left are part of a single process. Dictatorships and the reactionary right everywhere are politically buoyed and financially aided by the power of ultra-reaction in the United States and Europe.

After the general election in Britain there must be a thoroughgoing discussion and re-assessment of how socialists and radicals confront and defeat the power of the right. At the core of that must be the struggle against racism and for internationalism.

[Public Reading Rooms](#)

Democracy in the home and the bed - Chile's day of women

3 December 2019, by **Franck Gaudichaud**

The women's demonstration and strike this March in Chile was the country's biggest protest since the early 1990s, organised from scratch and as inclusive as possible. They had much to protest about: life, death and income.

More than 350,000 people marched through central Santiago on 8 March to celebrate International Women's Day and Chile's first ever feminist strike. Most were young women; some had brought their partners and children. Under the watchful eyes of the Carabineros, Chile's national police, they sang, danced and shouted. Stray dogs followed the joyful yet angry demonstration.

There were human rights activists and women who had survived the military

dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet, 1973-89. Many, like Alicia Lira, head of the Association of Relatives of Political Executives (AFEP), carried photographs of missing female relatives: ‘The reasons why the dictatorship murdered them are exactly the same as the reasons we are marching today. They wanted to build a free and equal society.’

There were slogans about violence towards women, discrimination against lesbians and transgender people, poor conditions for female migrants and equal pay. Alongside NGOs, civil associations and trade unions were Mapuche women in tribal costume, protesting against oppression of their people. A student carried a placard that read

‘Liberate my ovaries: make abortion a right, safe and free of charge!’ Women from working-class neighbourhoods, organised through the Ukamau network, demanded a right to housing. The Bread and Roses movement, with close ties to the small Revolutionary Workers' Party had turned out, as had a few leftwing members of the national congress. At the head of the march was a huge banner protesting against the increasing precarity of life.

‘It was a gut reaction’

Conservative activist Javiera Rodríguez said, ‘It's typical of leftwing groups and Marxists. They say they

want to bring people together, but in the end they just muddle everything up. They started out calling for a demonstration on International Women's Day. Then it became a demonstration for "oppressed" women, for "working" women and so on. The people who turned out found themselves marching for pensions reform, and against pension funds, for the right to abortion or gay marriage.'

Rodríguez came to notice in 2018 during the feminist occupation of her university, when she took down a banner that read 'No to harassment at the Catholic University' (in Santiago): 'I couldn't accept the image this slogan was giving our university. It was a gut reaction. I tore it down, and I confronted the occupiers. And I told them what I thought in front of the TV cameras. I did it out of respect for order and for our institutions. Some people will say I'm a fascist, but I don't care.'

But the organisers of the 8 March demonstration felt the success was historic, if unexpected. It was one of the biggest demonstrations since 1990, when Chile began its transition to democracy; 800,000 marched in more than 60 towns and cities across the country, including small provincial towns that had seen nothing like it in 30 years.

The success was all the more surprising since Chile is a conservative country with a civil code that dates back to 1855. Divorce was only legalised in 2004 and abortion (partially) decriminalised in 2017, after decades of obstruction by the major political parties and the Catholic Church. [84]

A few days before the march, there was already a response from the higher levels of government. President Sebastián Piñera (a multimillionaire businessman re-elected in 2017 having previously served 2010-14) appeared on one of the many private television channels that support him, calling for calm: 'It's wrong to hijack the noble cause of full equality of rights and duties between men and women. I believe a strike is unnecessary, because our government has adopted the feminist cause as its own.'

His nervousness may have stemmed from memories of the student demonstrations in 2018, against sexual harassment and for non-sexist education. Universities were occupied and reluctantly forced to acknowledge problems that went back many years. High-profile faculty members were targeted and some were suspended, including the former president of the Constitutional Tribunal. Even the venerable Pontifical Catholic University of Chile in Santiago (home of the 'Chicago boys' who advised Pinochet during the military dictatorship) was occupied, angering Rodríguez. That hadn't happened since 1986.

Women's demands have old roots

This year's feminist mobilisation was much smaller than the huge student demonstrations of 2011, during Piñera's first term of office. [85] Those who took to the streets then, and those who answered the call for a feminist strike on 8 March, wanted Chile to break with the terrible heritage of the military dictatorship. Successive Concertación governments (a centre-left coalition including the Socialists (PS), Party for Democracy (PDD) and Christian Democrats (PDC)) had failed to do this during two decades in power (1990-2010).

But the demands of today's feminists have older roots. Historian Luna Follegati said, 'The feminist movement has never disappeared, despite ups and down in its visibility. Rather than "waves", there have been three major periods. From the early 20th century to the 1950s it focused on political and civic demands (notably the right to vote, won in 1949). In the 1980s, working-class women fiercely resisted the dictatorship. In recent years the struggle has focused on issues of sexual diversity, queer theory and so on.'

The feminist

movement has never disappeared, despite ups and down in its visibility

The powerful Pro-Emancipation Movement of Chilean Women (MEMCH), originally active from 1935 to 1953, used strikes to demand the right to contraception and abortion, the legalisation of divorce and equal pay. MEMCH's founders, including Elena Caffarena and Olga Poblete, helped to re-establish the organisation in 1983 to fight the military regime. With them were political scientist Julieta Kirkwood and architect Margarita Pisano, who came up with the slogan 'Democracy in the country, in the house and in the bed'.

The democratic transition of 1989-90 preserved the dictatorship's economic model and Pinochet's constitution. The demobilisation of critical voices also allowed the emergence of the 'consensus democracy' much praised by Chilean employers. The feminist movement, gradually losing its focus, drifted into gender policy, limiting itself to reforms compatible with the ideology of the supremacy of the market, to which many progressives converted. Some women managed to make the highest levels of the state as long as they did not upset the status quo; at the bottom, women from the working class and indigenous peoples saw no improvement in their situation.

'Mother of all Chileans'

Socialist Michelle Bachelet, a victim of the dictatorship, agnostic and single, became a government minister in the 2000s, became South America's first popularly elected female president in 2006, and was re-elected in 2014, playing on her image as 'mother of all Chileans'. But she did no more to advance the feminist cause than she did to break with the social liberalism of her political clan. 'She achieved

almost nothing during her first term,' said Gael Yeomans in her constituency office in the working-class municipality of San Miguel.

Yeomans is a member of the left wing of the Frente Amplio (Broad Front) coalition, formed in 2017, which brings together political movements from centre to far left, including some that emerged from the student movement of 2011. 'During Bachelet's second term,' she said, 'one positive measure was the creation "finally!" of a ministry for Women's Affairs and Gender Equality. But it got neither the budget nor the political attention it needed to be properly effective in every area of society. Even the law on violence against women was neglected, and eventually the right appropriated the initiative.'

The Women's Agenda, a package of legislation launched by Piñera in May 2018, combined a conservative vision (in which women were mostly reduced to the role of mothers) and economic neoliberalism. It called for parity of numbers on corporate boards of directors and a universal right to childcare for women with a stable employment contract (which restricted its scope in a country where precarious employment is widespread, especially for women). Fewer than half of Chilean women are in paid work, and 31% have no contract or social or health insurance, or the right to unionise. [86] The president frequently says he supports the 'rights of woman' (a singular that tends to reduce women to a mere idea), but fools no one: he is known for his misogynistic jibes, reported in the media throughout his career. He is also under pressure from his partners in the coalition government, now a minority in parliament, who include members of Opus Dei, anti-abortion activists and former supporters of Pinochet.

Rightwing members of the national congress have persuaded the Constitutional Tribunal to accept the idea that institutions as well as individuals can be conscientious objectors to abortion. Healthcare in Chile is mainly private and provided by religious organisations, and a clinic can now declare that no abortions will

be carried out on its premises, thereby excusing itself from complying with both domestic and international law.

'Not one less!'

Chile's feminist movement is not concerned only by the domestic situation. It is a bottom-up movement, driven by street demonstrations, and recognises itself in the calls for a women's strike in Poland in October 2016, in the mass demonstrations in Madrid after men convicted of rape were released in 2018, and in the writings of Silvia Federici, Cinzia Arruzza, Nancy Fraser and Tithi Bhattacharya. But its main concern is Latin America: green scarves, representing the struggle for the right to abortion in Argentina, have crossed the Andes, as has the slogan 'Ni una menos!' (Not one less), denouncing the murder of women. This southern feminism draws on experience of conferences in South America since the 1980s, although these have been marked by growing divisions. There is a common desire to protest against the murders of women in Ciudad Juárez (Mexico), San Salvador and Guatemala.

The coordinating committee for the 8 March demonstration was formed in early 2018 in Santiago, and later established links with other organisations in the provinces. Local women's assemblies drew up mobilisation programmes. A year on, the committee still has no offices but has been joined by more than 60 organisations.

It's a case of showing that feminism is a real solution, especially at a time when the far right and reactionary movements are gaining strength throughout our region

Alondra Carillo

Working committees for social coordination, communication and logistics were set up, and spokeswomen elected on a rotating basis to vary the age, sexual orientation, social background and viewpoint of those in charge. 'We wanted to break away from the male, patriarchal model of organisation, which you find in politics, even on the left,' said an activist. Neighbourhood

strike committees, posts on social networks and street canvassing by feminist brigades all helped to ensure the success of the 8 March demonstration.

Alondra Carillo, a spokeswoman for the movement, told me that the idea of a feminist strike emerged 'precisely because the right to strike is guaranteed for no one. Our aim was to rehabilitate strikes as a political tool.' Under labour laws adopted by the dictatorship in 1979, the right to stop work was reduced to a minimum for all workers, as was the freedom to unionise. This restrictive legislation means that most strikes by those workers who still dare to mobilise are declared illegal, and public sector employees are totally deprived of this fundamental right. Carillo said, 'The idea of a strike also implied the involvement of both women and men, even if women would play the leading role ... and men would provide support, by organising food and drink and child-minding.'

Hundreds of women became involved despite their differences. Some wanted to work in exclusively single-sex environments (with no men present); others opposed this. Some wanted to establish contact with political parties, the state and the media; others felt this was too risky.

'Legal, safe and free of charge'

The Women in Struggle Conference in December 2018 brought together 1,200 women from across Chile, who formulated the call for a strike. According to Carrillo, the programme the conference drew up aims to bring feminism into every aspect of the social movement with demands for 'de-commercialised, non-sexist, anti-colonial and secular education'; for recognition of the right to self-determination of indigenous peoples; for abortion to be 'legal, safe and free of charge'; and for 'an end to political, sexual and economic violence against women'.

According to official figures, nearly a third of Chilean women are sexually assaulted at least once in their

lifetime. The Chilean Network Against Violence Towards Women has for several years condemned the fact that, on average, one woman is killed by a man every week in Chile (and that is not necessarily considered femicide by the law). Activists equate this with the violence of the neoliberal capitalist economic model. Carrillo and her comrades take the opposite view to the government and policies currently in force, pointing out the intersections between gender, race and class domination.

Women are among the biggest losers in Chile's ultra-capitalist economic model: Chile has a 45-hour working week, 70% of employees earn less than \$825 a month, and women are paid 30% less than men. They are discriminated against by health insurance schemes because of the possibility that they will become pregnant. Chile has entrusted pensions entirely to pension funds since the 1980s, at the instigation of José Piñera, brother of the current president and labour minister under the dictatorship.

The idea of a strike implied involvement of both women and men, even if women would play the leading role and men would provide support, by organising food, drink and child-minding

Alondra Carrillo

The coordinating committee faces criticism from within Chile and outside that threatens its desire for unity. Mapuche poet Daniela Catrileo, a member of the decolonial collective Rangiñtulewfü, said, 'The dominant feminist movement today is closely linked to the student movement and the struggle against sexual harassment in universities ... The racialisation of women, the demands of the Mapuche people, and internal colonialism were not sufficiently visible or taken into account. We were also critical of the call for a "feminist strike" because this

term, which comes mainly from the North and from European movements, tends to exclude many migrants and women in precarious jobs.' Carrillo responded, 'We suggested four modes of action: a strike at the workplace, if the workers' situation allows it; stopping care and unpaid work in the home; suspending consumption; and public demonstrations.'

Demonstration was the core mode for 8 March. The Central Unitaria de Trabajadores de Chile (CUT), the biggest trade union organisation, did not support the call for a strike, which did not help the movement. The CUT has a female president, the communist Bárbara Figueroa, but its leadership has always been reluctant to support movements it doesn't control. Nevertheless, in some towns, including the port of Valparaíso, militant trade unions turned out, and were repressed by police. Other public sector workers' organisations (the College of Teachers of Chile and the National Confederation of Municipal Health Workers) were also committed.

'We have made progress'

Karina Nohales, an expert on employment law, was happy at the progress made in just a few months, though there were still problems, especially in reaching Santiago's many deprived neighbourhoods (poblaciones), female migrants and low-paid workers. The prevailing image of feminists as mainly white and middle-class makes people reluctant to get involved. 'However,' she said, 'the feminist struggle is now better represented in the poblaciones and some trade unions, especially in sectors [education, healthcare, government] where there is a significant proportion of women. The coordinating committee's goal is to

find an approach that appeals to all women and addresses the expectations both of working class women and migrants, and also of women who are often regarded as "middle-class", though in neoliberal Chile they are in reality' especially the young 'up to their necks in debt, despite their university degrees.'

The strike was seen as a huge step forward. The committee plans to build on it, completing the founding programme by opening it up to discussion and strengthening cooperation throughout Chile and internationally. The aim is to strengthen bridges to female migrants, older women and minors, and build them to female prison inmates. Carrillo said, 'It's a case of showing that feminism is a real solution, especially at a time when the far right and reactionary movements are gaining strength throughout our region.'

Surveys show the Catholic Church is steadily losing ground in Chile, and paedophile scandals covered up by the church hierarchy have made matters worse. Meanwhile, evangelical sects are gaining ground in working-class neighbourhoods, and not all are fundamentalist (two female pastors have taken part in feminist gatherings). Some small groups with fascist leanings regularly 'and violently' attack feminists, lesbians and transgender people. And reconfigurations of political movements have allowed far-right politicians to come to the fore in the media and at elections, including lower house member José Antonio Kast (Republican Action party), a critic of 'gender ideology'. Kast fiercely opposes abortion and those he refers to as 'cardboard feminists', and praises the 'real Chilean woman', who is, he says, a Catholic, a nationalist 'and a housewife.

Source: May 2019, English edition **Le Monde Diplomatique**.

A country is in the making - Report from Baghdad's occupied Tahrir square

2 December 2019, by **Ansar Jasim, Schluwa Sama**

To reach Tahrir square, the main protest area in Baghdad, we get off at the end of Sa'adoun Street. There, the government has blocked the roads with concrete walls, not a strange sight in Baghdad. We slide through the interstices of the wall where we meet unarmed policemen. A few meters forward, we find the self-organized security of protesters. They search our bags for knives or other weapons. This is the first type of self-organization we encounter on Tahrir. They belong to the "committee for security" and are women and men who are dispersed over the whole occupied Tahrir (liberation) square. Despite the revolutionary atmosphere, troublemakers try to intermix with the protesters.

The female activists who are searching us, have taken up the shift for the last three days and are happy to be the first ones to welcome protesters and supporters. Walking out of the security tent, we go through a tunnel, built in the 70s as under Tahrir square, somewhat deforming the square. Nowadays, the tunnel has been turned into an art gallery by artists taking part in the revolution. Every day new art is made on the 100-meter-long tunnel, giving expression to the revolution and its demands: The role of women, of Tuktuk drivers as symbols of the working class, in addition to paintings depicting Iraq's Sumerian and Assyrian history as a unifying element. Represented on the tunnel walls is also the occupied 14-floor "Turkish restaurant" building, which come to represent the high degree of self-organization of protesters. There is also Nasb Al-Hurriya, "the freedom monument", which tells the story of Iraqi people's oppression during feudal and colonial times until the liberation of 1958. The tunnel, like all occupied places is decorated with flowers. At night,

candles are lit for those fallen during the revolution.

Self-organization is crucial. Protestors have organized traffic on the streets: There are two streets for Tuktuk drivers and a pedestrian street. At the liberation square itself, dozens of tents are visible, where people from different neighborhoods, leftist activists, delegations from various cities and regions, unions of teachers, doctors and lawyers all have space for self-organizing. Political parties are not visible. In the tents, there is medical equipment, helmets, and water. Here, people cook together, discussing and spreading the news from the local radio station. In the tents behind the park of the monument, there are very different exhibitions. An exhibition by a comic artist is next to an exhibition of a mosque although there is almost no presence of religious institution on Tahrir square.

Under the monument, there is a park. Here, shops had been closed for years and garbage was everywhere. Protestors fixed the power supply lines and water pipelines and painted political art on the walls. Here, we meet people who are not from Baghdad but from other cities, coming in solidarity with the protesters, sleeping in the shops for now. They do not have much, they are living here from the Takatuf of the square, a term used frequently and meaning solidarity at an equal level, shoulder to shoulder.

The "Turkish restaurant" building opposite to the freedom monument is abandoned, as we are told, after its bombardment in 2003. It is close to one of the three occupied bridges, Al-Jumhuriyah-Bridge, which directly leads to the green zone. The occupation of the Turkish restaurant is

representative of the failed policy of the post 2003 US invasion, and the corruption of a sectarian political class, that hides in the green zone. This is the understanding of the protesters themselves, that Iqbal, one of the activists, calls mass consciousness (wa' i jamahiri). In the beginning of the protests in October, snipers were hiding in the building, shooting protesters. The building was then occupied to prevent the military or militias from using it again. The occupation of the building embodies the whole protest movement: the building is now being cleaned, electricity and internet are connected. On the outside it is full of political slogans, demands from protesters and a call to the UN.

On all floors, there are spaces for sleeping, toilets being built and shifts for security and cleaning to guarantee a permanent presence in the building. For the protesters, these are not the main issues. Activists explain: "We have achieved, what the government has not achieved in the last 15 years".

In its third publication, the local Tahrir square newspaper, Tuktuk, writes: "It is this generation, that builds the home country". All activists we talk to are convinced that this is a social revolution: "We are breaking with many social norms, reinventing them", one protestor explains.

Units that fight the people

State violence has taken various forms: snipers who voluntarily shoot at protesters, tear gas attacks that target people's backs and heads, and anti-riot forces, who leave protesters in doubt about who exactly is behind them. "This is not military, nor police.

You can see that even police is on the square, however, unarmed. But we do not know who is behind the bridge. We do not even know if these are state forces or paramilitary forces. Maybe Iran is backing them", says Maha, a 26-year old student of dentistry. She supports the protests through her medical knowledge in whatever way she can, and by being active in the medical tents. Taking pictures in the tents and the Turkish restaurant is not allowed as many people anticipate, that in case of a crack-down of their movement, they will be prosecuted.

From time to time, there are infiltrators, who appear at the square, taking pictures of protestors, and threatening them. For Haider, this is one reason not to leave Tahrir square since mid-October. For other activists, it means that they cannot return to Tahrir square. Saba Al Mahdawi, who was active in the medical team and Mari Mohammed, who raised money for the Tuk Tuk drivers, had been missing after they left Tahrir square. Saba was recently released again, however circumstances of her kidnapping remain unknown.

Security in Tahrir is ambivalent and contingent. Theft or harassment are not a concern for protestors. Sudden shootings are. Therefore, security assessments change from one moment to the other. What can be said is that the more people are on the square, the more secure everyone feels as became clear on Tuesday, the 12th of November. A group of female students, skipping school, was demonstrating on the square, which reduced the tension of the previous evening when several demonstrators were shot. This ambivalence and juxtaposition of scenes on Tahrir square is continuous. At noon, protestors would be carrying a coffin through the masses, and 10 minutes later people would be dancing, and celebrating their revolution.

"Irhal - Bro - Out!"

At the entrance of the square Tuktuks greet people with the Arabic slogan "Irhal" and the Kurdish slogan "Bro", meaning "Out". These slogans in

both languages are all over the place. A Kurdish-Arabic tent invites protestors for some free tea. Again, and again protestors recount the major solidarity of the Yezidi community, who sends money, but also brings food and water to the square. Even if they have no direct, visible presence on the square, they express their support for change that could lead to a new Iraqi identity.

"This is a movement of us all, your origin does not play a role here, we are all oppressed by one political class", an activist explains. Posters banning any sectarian language in the name of the people are everywhere. Instead people are building references to uniting elements in history or in religious circles, the juxtaposition of Christian and Muslim symbols.

What is also dominant in the occupied square, is cuneiform script and figures from the Mesopotamian heritage of the region. Protestors do not embrace, as previously, an exclusive Arabic-Islamic identity but rather, redefine an identity that celebrates the diversity of the country. Over and over again, we are told of all the diverse social identities of people who are present on the square.

For a few days now, clans and tribes are also taking part in the protests. A Sunni tribe from Fallujah, the western territories of Iraq, has hung a poster, with a picture of Hussein, a religious figure important to Shiites, explaining: We will come to Baghdad, supporting the revolutionaries. Protestors here take this as a symbolic expression against sectarianism rather than any sign of the actual power and relevance of tribes.

Celebrating the 'worn-out class'

"The worn-out class", is how Ahmed, a Tuk Tuk driver, who founded the union of Tuk Tuk drivers, calls himself and his colleagues. The Tuk Tuk is a vehicle on three wheels. This worn-out class, became the symbol of the revolution itself. Not only are they represented on the walls, in different paintings as heroic figures, songs are also written and produced explaining the story of

the Tuk Tuk. In the area occupied by demonstrators, Tuktuks drive around, greeted warmly by the people. Even the revolution's newspaper, that now reports on all activities on the square is called Tuk Tuk.

Tuk Tuk drivers were socially marginalized and discriminated against before the revolution. For Ahmed, this is partly due to the fact that it is mainly young, underage drivers, whose driving style also led to many accidents. At the same time, they did not have any other choice than driving Tuktuks, given high unemployment rates and widespread poverty. Ahmed worked in the construction sector. After that, he needed a new job but there were none. He could not count on state employment. He borrowed money and bought a Tuk Tuk: "I am working 8 hours a day, mainly in Sadr City. I earn 15 USD per day to support my wife, my two children and myself. I pay 5 USD daily for petrol. So, we barely make ends meet." Given any other form of generating income, Ahmed would stop driving the Tuk Tuk.

However, for now, his position as Tuk Tuk driver has become important to the revolution, making him proud of his work. "When the protests started, we as Tuk Tuk drivers came and supported the protests. Mainly, we transported wounded protestors. People started respecting and loving us". This elevated social recognition also materialized in more and more donations from other protestors, mainly from other social classes. "There is real solidarity: The doctor takes a Tuk Tuk and the Tuk Tuk driver transports him. It would have been unthinkable that a doctor takes a Tuk Tuk driver before." However, it is not a one-way solidarity from higher social classes to Tuk Tuk drivers. "There are people who just do not have the money to come here from their quarters. We take them for free to enable everyone to take part here", Ahmed explains.

Why did this social solidarity develop

on Tahrir square?

People on Tahrir square are united in their political goal to end the sectarian political system but they are also frustrated by the corrupt system and the inequality in their country. There is a general understanding that the sectarian political system is not interested in the well-being of the people, and that unemployment, affects the Tuk Tuk drivers as well as the engineers, even if on different levels.

Unlike Ahmed, Nabil highlights that he actually has all material things he needs in life: A house, a car and money to support himself and his family. Nevertheless, he is at Tahrir square. It is his national duty, he states. In 2012 Nabil had been working for one of the militias in Baghdad as a driver. It was his feeling for justice that made him quit his job with the militias: "I saw how they took money from people, and many injustices that I could not take. I did not know many of the militia's secrets and so I was able to get out of the job." Not being dependent on the 600 USD income, it was relatively easy to leave the job.

In his tent, Ahmed, explains that many merchants support them. He receives different goods and money from them. For the merchants, a specific source of frustration is an illegal tax, the khawa, that they have to pay to militias so that they are allowed to sell their goods without being attacked. Different social classes are suffering from the same political system, and they all meet at liberation square where they formulate political demands to end this sectarian system. Ahmed describes the meeting of different social classes on Tahrir square as a lived social solidarity:

"We want a life: Water, Electricity, Security, decent education. We do not want others to decide on our fate. Here, on the square, even though I did not know the people before, I feel they are all my friends. There is a massive solidarity between protestors, on Tahrir square but also in other protest areas across Iraq."

In summer there is no rain

A young man walks by us, circulating flyers, that say: "I am going out to take my right and I am not going to lose them." Initially excited about the flyers, people in a tent warn us about these flyers, explaining that these belong to Muqtada Al-Sadr. Adil, who lives in Sadr City, explains that Sadr tries to build an indirect presence here on the square. Adil's neighborhood is known for its rather poor population and Sadr's influence. However, everything is changing now. Sadr is losing his popularity, especially among shop owners who have to pay the khawa to him. Adil explains that they will not allow him to gain any influence here in the square: "He tries to circulate slogans and his people try to mix in between protestors. But we all know it and we are against his presence because it would be dangerous for us."

Ahmed's assessment of Sadr is similar: "These demonstrations are also against him since 'all of them, means all of them', and he is one of those corrupt leaders. His attempts to spread here were not successful. Now there is a more awareness among the protestors about his destructive role."

Demonstrators on Tahrir square not only deem Sadr destructive for the protests, they also subvert his attempts to appropriate the narratives as we can observe under the bridge of Tahrir square. Walking along the underpass, where young protestors from Nasiriya greet us, we are astonished by the graffiti and their political messages. One of them says: "It rains in summer". There is no rain in Baghdad's summers. Directly next to it, the graffiti says "Alice in Baghdad" in reference to Alice in wonderland. Laughing with us about the graffiti, while we take a picture, one of the protestors says: "You should do a hashtag 'Sadr' on both these graffiti- this would fit both graffiti best". This is how protestors subvert and expose Sadr's narrative of being a supporter of the revolution.

Playing music to celebrate my revolution

On Tahrir square, there are different signs banning any harassment of women. In conversations with female activists, they underline that until now there has been no harassment. "This is a crucial change", explains Iqbal. Usually, women would not want to walk around here at night. This is different now. Previously, they would have also demonstrated separately from men. Today they are all protesting together. What unites them, are the common goal of the downfall of the whole political system. That is why they respect each other. This also means that Iqbal does not allow anyone to dictate her way of protest. She explains that some rather conservative people on the square wanted to forbid her to play her music because of the martyrs. "But I feel comfortable with my music here and it is important for me to celebrate my revolution. I am here to take back my rights." Every day, after her work, she goes to her shift, as she calls it, on Tahrir square. It is a duty, wajib. There, she also goes to the medical tents to change the bandages on her leg.

Musawa or equality for Iqbal also means socialism, which for her is one of the main goals of the revolution. "Of course, we want socialism. All people want this. Maybe they do not call it that but everyone you ask wants justice. Why, in this country with all its oil resources, are there so many poor people? There are some people who suddenly have a house, a car, and others who have worked or studied hard, but are at home with nothing. Why? This clientelist system must go."

The clientelist system is also expressed in the parliamentary system where the different members of parliament only represent their narrow (sectarian) groups. The women in parliament are part of that system. For Iqbal, these are elitist women, with different privileges as parliamentarians, such as a lifelong pension, whose interests are far away

from the ordinary Iraqi women. "This has nothing to do with feminism", she exclaims.

There are no obvious feminist organizations on Tahrir square. At the same time, women are everywhere. They are on the front lines of the confrontation with the government. By one of the blocked bridges, a woman walks past us with a full anti-tear gas gear and helmet, wrapped in an Iraqi flag. She asks her colleague about the latest news and takes over his shift. Her job? She tries to catch the tear gas canisters so they would not hit Tahrir square. Women like her make the ongoing occupation of Tahrir square possible.

Disenchantment with parliamentarianism

While the state engages in fake concessions, and discussions about early elections are ongoing, protestors on the square denounce anything that means working with the same corrupt political parties. For many protestors, especially after the death of hundreds of people, there is no return to the old system. A first step is for the government and the prime minister to step down.

For the past years, political parties and their slogans have caused widespread frustration and a depolitization of the current generation of protestors. "Now, many

of those young people learn how to do politics. Different new political forces are developing here. People who are capable of this kind of self-organization are also capable of leading their country", Iqbal states.

Maha, who leads a feminist newspaper, and who fled from her family into a shelter, is one of the many young women in the self-organization on Tahrir square. She explains: "After 2003, we as Shiites, thought everything would be good now that we controlled many of the important positions within the state. In reality, we discovered that for us as people, whether in daily life or as part of our region, little has changed for the better. What we therefore need is a secular state".

The ostensible party pluralism after 2003 did not lead to any political pluralism but rather to the intensification of the clientelist system. Maha explains, "Before 2003 we had a dictator and a one-party system, where we knew what awaits us. After that, we got 329 parliamentarians who are only interested in their party interests for which they even get high salaries and pensions. The system is stuck as each of those parties sees the state and its ministries as their resources to be exploited." Maha's opinion is widely shared here.

Understanding this kind of frustration with the post-US invasion system, makes it possible to understand one of the dominant calls of the protestors: a presidential system. Accordingly, the president shall be an independent person who does not belong to any of

the political parties and safeguards the rights of the people, mainly from the members of parliament. At the same time, the president shall have limited competences. Many people feel betrayed after the last election where members of parliament voted for a president who is rejected by the majority of people. It is crucial to note that people are not looking forward to bringing back the strong man. Activists underline that they want a mechanism for direct elections to have an actual impact on politics within the state:

"I went voting in the last elections. When Abdelmahdi was voted president, I felt screwed. I did not vote for that guy. He does not represent me, nor anyone of the people. Direct elections would mean that the people are represented by one of them", explains Ahmad, founder of the Tuktuk union.

For him, the question of the political system cannot be separated from socio-economic questions, as he clarifies further: "We are a rich country but our industry and agriculture have been completely destroyed by the USA and Iran after 2003". The oil sector produces 65 percent of the GDP [87] but only employs 1 percent of the population. There is almost no private sector. Some of the posters on Tahrir square call for an export ban on oil- as this resource is at times seen as Iraq's curse. Protestors think and demand political change and economic change in relation to each other.

Source *Open Democracy*, 21 November 2019.

Iranian regime crushes popular uprising

1 December 2019, by C.B.

Like in Lebanon, Chile and Ecuador, the recent revolt in Iran began following the announcement of price increases. On 15 November, the National Iranian Oil Products Distribution Company (NIOPDC)

announced a sharp increase in fuel prices: 50% for the first 60 litres a month, 300% for the following, with the indirect consequence of raising the prices of many other products. A surprise announcement, which elected

representatives in Parliament found out about at the same time as the people, and which immediately aroused a wave of protest throughout the country.

An ultra-violent but weakened regime

In the hours following the announcement, rallies and spontaneous demonstrations were organized in several major cities of the country and, by contagion, in dozens of other cities, small and medium, the next day. The slogans were obviously about the rise in the price of fuel and, beyond that, the price increases and the high cost of living. But, more generally, all the policies of the government were questioned, with slogans against the regime, against President Rohani and against Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, of whom any criticism is strictly illegal.

In a number of cities, the demonstrations, which remained

largely peaceful, turned into riots, with attacks on public buildings, banks, post offices, service stations and so on. Notable fact: the demonstrations and riots are much more diffuse, throughout the territory of Iran, than during the revolt of winter 2017-2018, and the participants are, according to testimonies and images, significantly more numerous. A sign of the weakening of the regime, indirectly confronted, moreover, with popular movements in Iraq and Lebanon.

Faced with this phenomenon and the fear of contagion, the regime has chosen bloody repression by calling the movement "rebellion" (a capital crime) with brutal interventions by various armed forces, use of snipers to shoot at crowds, and curfews imposed by the Revolutionary Guard. All in a terrible information vacuum since, from November 16, the regime has cut off access to the internet, preventing

information and images from circulating for several days during which the regime claims to have "quelled" the "rebellion" and threatens to execute, in dozens, the "seditious".

It is certain that US sanctions, following the exit from the Iranian nuclear agreement, have had a strong impact on the Iranian economy and on the living conditions of the population. But the regime's focus on excessive spending on its military and nuclear programs, as well as the maintenance of its clientelist networks, inside and outside the country's borders, does not help. The anger of the popular classes who refuse to undergo austerity again and again as well as being deprived of many basic democratic freedoms, is legitimate. More than ever, solidarity with Iranians fighting against an authoritarian and antipopular regime is on the agenda.