



IV545 - June 2020

Glasgow killing raises major questions about treatment of asylum seekers

1 July 2020, by [Mike Picken](#)

As the dramatic events unfolded on the afternoon of Friday 26 June, the BBC first reported that three people had been killed in a knife stabbing incident. This turned out to be untrue: six people including a police officer were seriously injured and hospitalised, while the apparent perpetrator was shot in a rapid and large armed police response in Glasgow city centre.

Interviews with eye-witnesses seemed to indicate that while all the 100 residents of the hotel were asylum seekers, there were also hotel staff on duty who may have been victims. Motivation for the knife attack and details of the victims other than the police officer are not yet confirmed at the time of writing, though Sky News is reporting that the perpetrator was an asylum seeker about whom mental health concerns had already been reported. [1]

But while everyone will wish the victims a speedy recovery, the events raise important political questions about the use of the hotel and the treatment of asylum seekers by the UK government and its private contractors.

Glasgow's Hotel Asylum Seekers

The incident happened at the Park Inn Hotel, one of six in Glasgow used by a

large outsourcing private company, the Mears Group plc, on behalf of the UK government Home Office. Mears agreed a ten-year long contract with the UK Home Office in 2019 worth over one billion pounds to provide accommodation for asylum seekers.

At the beginning of the UK's lockdown, the Mears Group had relocated nearly 400 Glasgow asylum seekers who had been living in the city as part of a longstanding Home Office 'dispersal' policy. This policy dates back 20 years to the Blair Labour government and moves asylum seekers who usually arrive in south east England to other locations across the UK, such as Glasgow, described by a Tory minister in 2015 as "areas where there is a greater supply of suitable and cheaper accommodation".

With only a few minutes' notice to pack their belongings, the hundreds of asylum seekers living in a wide range of properties across Glasgow were rounded up in April and moved into six major city hotels empty during the lockdown. Positive Action in Housing (PAiH) [2], a Glasgow-based charity working to support asylum seekers, raised concerns in May with both the UK Home Office and the Scottish Government [3] over the treatment of the asylum seekers by the Mears Group.

They particularly highlighted that relocating hundreds of people in vans carrying three or four people at a time

appeared to breach completely the Scottish Government's then imposition of a total lockdown and the strong message to "Stay Home"; that people should only move if absolutely essential for medical or other reasons. PAiH argue that it was completely unnecessary to move the asylum seekers. The previous landlords accommodating the asylum seekers were simply told that they would no longer be paid in circumstances in which it was clearly almost impossible for them to get new tenants.

PAiH Director, Robina Qureshi, raised numerous complaints about the treatment of asylum seekers in the hotels including the lack of social distancing during meal times, the inability to open windows, the danger of air conditioning circulating the Coronavirus and other infections, and particularly the withdrawal of the weekly payment of £35.50 - meaning that residents were unable to purchase , toiletries, fruit and other necessities. Including mobile phone credit to stay in touch with family and representatives

The situation escalated when a Syrian asylum seeker, 30 year old Adnan Olbeh, was tragically found dead in one of the hotels prompting local press coverage.

Robina Qureshi explained the treatment of the Glasgow Hotel asylum seekers to the public:

"The "hotel asylum seekers" are very isolated. It's true they are treated as less than human, a number, one of many. Many people, men and women are suffering from severe mental health conditions."

and in a letter to the First Minister she went on to say

"Levels of depression are increasing. Many people are survivors of trauma and torture and suffering mental health problems because of the length of time they have been in the asylum system. People are growing increasingly desperate."

PAiH were also concerned about the welfare of hotel workers and transmission of the virus:

"Hotel employees may also be subjected to an increased viral load in the workplace and then must go back out into the general community for a variety of essential purposes."

By Wednesday 17 June, so desperate was the situation that a demonstration was called to protest about the conditions of Glasgow Hotel asylum seekers in nearby George Square, outside the Glasgow City Chambers, offices of the SNP-led Glasgow City Council. However, that demonstration also coincided with a gathering of far-right "loyalist" activists who claimed to be "defending statues" in the Square and opposing the Black Lives Matter movement.

The far-right attacked the asylum seeker protest demonstration in scenes the First Minister described as "appalling". The police largely stood by, though eventually arresting around six people believed to be far-right thugs. But the Scottish Police Federation issued an awful statement saying that both sides were to blame and that the police were caught in the middle between "statue attackers" and "statue defenders". An emergency demonstration was called in George Square on Saturday 20th June to protest the attack on the asylum seekers demonstration, but SNP politicians called on people to stay away [4]

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Susan Aitken, SNP and leader of Glasgow City Council

SNP calls "not to politicise" wrong

In response to the killing and stabbing incidents SNP politicians such as Susan Aitken, leader of Glasgow City Council, told the BBC:

"I would absolutely urge anyone not to politicise this, not to use this to divide the city."

While Aitken obviously has genuine concerns about the far-right mobilising on Glasgow streets, this is the completely wrong approach, but one shared with the Scottish Labour Party whose spokespersons issued similar responses.

Important political questions need to be asked now about the UK Government/Home Office of Priti Patel and Mears Group policy of relocating the Glasgow asylum seekers to empty hotels during the middle of a pandemic. This also means questioning why the SNP at Holyrood and Glasgow City Council apparently did nothing about the "powder keg" situation.

Even a retired former senior police officer told Sky News in an interview on the morning after the incident that "we have got to question" the putting of hundreds of asylum seekers from stressed backgrounds, "packed" into such an environment. Robina Qureshi of PAiH highlighted in a radio interview for the BBC that there were no proper risk assessment procedures for the asylum seekers and that it was the "cheap" accommodation that was the motivation, not their welfare.

The UK' Government's privatisation of accommodation for asylum seekers through organisations like the Mears Group also needs to be challenged. Its predecessor in Glasgow, SERCO, also attracted massive criticism and then they moved on to a lucrative contract for the UK government's currently privatised and failing contract-tracing service for coronavirus. While Mears claims to be a "social" landlord and outsourcing organisation, it is also a

public limited company, trading shares on the stock market and making a profit for its shareholders. One of the directors of Mears is a former Chief Operating Officer of the massive profit-making insurance concern, Lloyds Register, and a leading light in the privatised water industry in England. Such people do not have the interests of asylum seekers at heart, only the pursuit of profit. As the official opposition in the Westminster UK Parliament, the Labour Party have an important responsibility to challenge the Tory government on the issue of private firms running public services.

Rather than calling for the situation not to be "politicised", SNP and Labour politicians should be looking to face down the far right actions by mobilising public demonstrations of support for asylum seekers, seriously challenge the Tory UK government's "hostile environment" over immigration, and question the role of private companies in running public services for profit rather than public good.

27 June 2020

Republished from [Socialist Resistance](#)

Footnotes

[1] <https://news.sky.com/story/glasgow-stabbings-warning-over-suspects-mental-state-before-knife-rampage-12015788>

[2] Positive Action in Housing [PAiH] <http://www.paih.org/> "is an independent, anti-racist homelessness and human rights charity (SC027577) dedicated to supporting women, children and men from refugee and migrant backgrounds to rebuild their lives. We believe in a society where everyone has the right to live safe and dignified lives, free from poverty, homelessness or inequality." (PAiH website). In May 2020 it issued three important statements detailing the Glasgow Hotel Asylum Seekers issues: a) Letter to the UK Home Secretary Priti Patel, 11th May 2020: <https://www.paih.org/letter-to-the->

[home-secretary-about-the-death-of-syrian-refugee-adnan-olbeh-in-glasgow/](#)

b) Letter to the Scottish First Minister, 13th May 2020
<https://www.paih.org/letter-to-the-first-minister-about-glasgows-hotel-asylum-seekers/>

c) Protest statement about press coverage of the death of a Glasgow Hotel Asylum Seeker 11th May 2020
<https://www.paih.org/statement-about-mr-adnan-olbeh-syrian-refugee-who-died-in-glasgow/>

[3] Under the UK's complex devolution arrangements, the UK Government of the Conservative Party, Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Home Secretary Priti Patel are responsible for immigration and borders policy/control including asylum seekers, while the Scottish Government of First Minister Nicola Sturgeon of the social democratic/nationalist Scottish National Party (SNP) are

responsible for policing, housing, health and other local services and has overseen dealing with the pandemic and lockdown. The two governments disagree about policies on a wide range of issues including immigration and asylum but have generally tried to minimise such differences during the pandemic crisis.

[4] See:-
<https://socialistresistance.org/glasgow-anti-racists-defiant-against-far-right-attacks/20250>

Indo-Nepal relationship under the cloud of Hinduvta

30 June 2020, by **Sushovan Dhar**

The Indo-Nepal diplomatic relations have hit a trough at the moment. Of course, the mounting tension was evident for quite some time. A recent construction of a motorable road by the Indian government, towards the Chinese border through the Lipulekh area near the disputed Kalapani area on the Indo-Nepal border sparked off the diplomatic row. India claims that this construction was done for the convenience of Kailash-Mansarovar bound pilgrims towards Tibet and this would cut down the travel time by at least three days. The Nepalese government protested against this construction alleging that India built the road violating Nepal's border. A number of anti-India protests were evidenced across Nepal, especially in the capital Kathmandu. Nepal's Prime Minister KP Oli threatened to send more troops to the disputed border area. Shortly afterwards, the Nepalese government released a new map showing the area as an integral part of Nepalese territory.

Border dispute

While essentially not taking part in these claims and counter-claims, let us examine these. According to Indian opinion, this road from India to Tibet has always existed through the Lipulekh area and the 1954 Indo-

China agreement mentioned it as one of the centers of border trade. Another Indo-China trade agreement in 2015 also reiterated this fact. This route has been used for walking to Tibet since 1981, when China reopened the Kailash-Mansarovar to Indian pilgrims.

On the other hand, Nepal claims that this area is part of their territory according to the Sugauli Treaty signed December 1815 and ratified March 4, 1816. This century-old agreement between the East India Company and Nepal marked what we currently know as the Indo-Nepal border. It was decided that Nepal would lie on the eastern part of the Kali river and India on the western part. The problem lies in locating the source of the river, a fact which has complicated the issue to its present state.

Nepal had written earlier to both countries protesting the 2015 Indo-China trade agreement acknowledging Indian claims on this territory, but the Indian government has not responded to their submission. Once again, in 2019 they wrote in opposition to the new Indian political and geographical map that included this area however, India is still unresponsive. It can't be denied that the Modi government is dragging this issue unnecessarily. Even at the beginning of the current

impasse, in early May, the Nepalese government demanded talks on demarcating the borders, but the Indian foreign ministry dismissed the issue under the pretext of the lockdown due to the current pandemic.

The Modi government, in order to defend its position came out with stories dished out effectively by its lackeys in the media. First, it claimed that KP Oli, the Nepalese prime minister, is finding it hard to retain his post because of Nepal's internal political turmoil and especially, due to the faction-fights within the Nepal Communist Party. He has picked up this border dispute in order to seek refuge under ultra-nationalism to consolidate his position. Secondly, it wanted to convert this into an anti-China show. It tried to prove that the Chinese instigation is the root cause behind this unnecessary border dispute with India. The present KP Oli government marched to power in 2018, on the back of a heavy win, based on the huge expectations of the common Nepalese people. However, there is a disenchantment with this regime owing to the implementation of neo-liberal policies, unpopular at its hilt. Something, that has made life difficult for ordinary folks in the country. Nevertheless, let us not be fooled by these justification that the

current Indian regime seeks to exploit in order to hide its own bankruptcy. The Modi government precisely wants to do this. It is using this pretext to diffuse, distract and divert public opinion when the whole country is suffering from an acute health crisis, exposed by the pandemic and also an economic crisis that sees no light at the end of the tunnel. A critical assessment of the Nepalese communists and their policies is certainly urgent but not in the footsteps of Modi and his cheerleaders, the India media.

Nepal occupies an important place in the China's capital export plans. China is investing heavily in the countries in sectors like big dams, airports, road construction, etc. It is an important partner in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The BRI is a large-scale Chinese-driven project aimed at building infrastructure across three continents and establishing international economic zones and corridors. Both, India and China are competing for the Nepalese market but despite all this fuss, Indian investment in Nepal is still much larger than its Chinese counterparts. Besides, there is no direct evidence of China's involvement in this border dispute. Instead, China in an official statement made it clear that the issue is a bilateral one between India and Nepal, and hoped that both countries would be able to resolve it issue through dialogues.

The Indian provocation

A closer look at the political problems behind Indo-Nepal relations reveal that the situation has worsened rapidly since Modi came to power in 2014, although there were minor complications in the past. Earlier, the BJP was accused of interfering in Nepal's internal politics. The BJP tried to meddle with Nepalese politics by inciting the Madhesis, in a political conflict involving the Kathmandu Valley and the Madhesis of Nepal's Terai region in the South. Taking advantage of relative under-development of the latter, the RSS spared no efforts in entrenching them in this region and has since started

promoting Hindutva, openly. This has led to apprehensions in Nepal. It is important to note that the largest number of RSS shakhas (branches) outside India, are in Nepal.

On September 23, 2015, India imposed an undeclared economic blockade on Nepal. This six-month unofficial blockade caused an economic and humanitarian crisis in the country and severely affected its economy. Nepal, a landlocked country, has to import all its petroleum products through Indian ports and transport them by road. This embargo virtually paralyzed the country. In addition, there were reports of Nepalese trucks being stopped at the Calcutta port. The blockade also hampered the imports of medicines and earthquake relief supplies. A major earthquake in April, that year, caused widespread damages in Nepal, including the Kathmandu valley. This unofficial embargo vitiated Indo-Nepal relationships and drew aggressive reactions from the Nepalese public.

The Hindu kingdom's march towards secularism

The root of the current problem is not in the diplomatic tensions between these two neighbours. This lies somewhere else. The people's movement (Jana Andolon II) of 2008 unseated the monarchy and proclaimed Nepal as a republic. Nepal's onward march towards secularism sent shocks to Hindutva forces in India that essentially backed the monarchy to preserve the Hindu identity of the country. The demise of the ancien regime was a blow to the latter - practical and ideological. Secondly, the leftist hegemony in Nepal is something that the RSS can't swallow at any cost. They take this opportunity to buttress the left, at any cost.

For the Sangh Pariwar, that seeks to turn India into a Hindu state, it is imperative that Nepal's secular achievements be thwarted. Especially, contemplating their own political

future. Whereas they attempt to intoxicate Indian masses with their doses of Hindutva, our neighboring Hindu state, that existed for centuries, has been crushed under the pressure of irresistible mass uprisings. This example is problematic for the RSS, extremely undesirable. Although Modi or Amit Shah could not make a public call on the issue owing to international diplomatic reasons, there is no obligation or responsibility for other Hindutva functionaries to remain silent. Many top RSS officials have reiterated on the for Nepal to return to the path of Hindutva. More than a couple of hundred RSS branches in Nepal are particularly active in this regard. In March 2010, Rajnath Singh, while attending the funeral of the former Prime Minister of Nepal, Girija Prasad Koirala, said, "We were proud of the Hindu kingdom of Nepal. Hopefully, Nepal will be a Hindu state again."

The Hindutva organizations in this country regularly send their sadhus and leaders to Nepal to campaign for the Hindu state. The collapse of the Hindu state and the triumph of the secular republic have undoubtedly frustrated and angered the Hindutva forces in this country. Although the BJP shares this anger, it cannot officially express it publicly. To understand the Modi government's aggressive stance on Nepal, we need to keep these facts in mind.

However, everything is overshadowed by a recent statement by the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. Commenting on the border dispute, he told the Nepalese people in an interview earlier this month to remember Tibet. He did not explain precisely what this meant. Is he threatening to say that if Nepal chooses its own independent path without listening to the Delhi calls or the Nagpur sermons, it will meet the same fate as of Tibet? In other words, similar to the unethical Chinese occupation of Tibet, will the Indian government attack Nepal, if necessary? Such shameless talk no longer strengthens the foundations of our democracy core. Let's raise our voice to these threats of occupation. We need to say aloud "Not in our name"! Not only to extend solidarity to the Nepalese population. In our own

interests. In order to preserve our future.

If they come in the morning...

29 June 2020, by [Socialist Resistance](#)

Peake made the mistake of claiming that Israel had trained the US cops who killed George Floyd in restraint techniques. This is probably incorrect - the US police were killing Black and Native Americans long before the Israeli state or the Zionist movement existed. But the bigger picture is correct: despite official denials, Israeli forces do use similar techniques, including kneeling on the necks of prisoners. And many US police forces have received Israeli police training, as Amnesty International USA has long been documenting. [1] This comment was just one sentence in a long interview, the gist of which is that people in the left should stay in the Labour Party to defeat the Tories and fight for social change. And it was in no way antisemitic, except for those who believe (as fascists and many Zionists do) that all Jews support Israel, and therefore should be held accountable for Israel's crimes.

Long-Bailey's tweet of the interview, with a comment that "Maxine Peake is a diamond", was enough to trigger the BoD's demand for a retraction and apology, to which Starmer responded by sacking Long-Bailey. This action has several apparent goals. Starmer clearly hopes to appease those who relentlessly attacked Corbyn, and may initially think that he has done so. His decision has been applauded by the renegades Mike Gapes, Joan Ryan, Louise Ellman and John Mann, as well as by Margaret Hodge (who for some unaccountable reason has still not been disciplined for bringing the party into disrepute by her foul-mouthed and libellous attack on Corbyn) and by the Jewish Labour Movement and the Campaign against Antisemitism, who are also calling for further scalps. [2] It would be naïve to believe that this will bring an end to the witchhunt.

The BoD has already demanded that the party take disciplinary action against Dianne Abbott, Bell Ribeiro-Addy and Salma Yaqoob for taking part in an online meeting hosted by Jewish Voice for Labour, and Starmer's capitulation will only embolden them to redouble these attacks, and launch others.

With this action, Starmer has removed the only prominent supporter of Corbyn still in the shadow cabinet. And Long-Bailey is likely to be replaced as shadow Education Secretary by a career politician who will not follow her unwavering support for the NEU [teachers' union] in its opposition to the premature and unsafe reopening of schools.

All this comes on the eve of Israel's threatened formal annexation of large parts of the areas it occupied in 1967. It remains to be seen how Starmer will act when the Israeli coalition government - of which the Labour Party's sister party, the Israeli Labor Party, is a member - takes this step confirming that Israel has become, in law as well as in long-standing practice - an apartheid state. His dismissal of Long-Bailey suggests that he will be more likely to take action against those who denounce this than against Israel and its supporters in the Labour Party.

There are signs of resistance to this shameful action. MPs Richard Burgon, John McDonnell, Zarah Sultana, Ian Lavery, and Jon Trickett have already tweeted their solidarity with Rebecca Long-Bailey, as have Len McCluskey and Jon Lansman [3]. Petitions have been initiated by the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs (who are meeting Starmer to discuss this) and Momentum. Reports from across the country suggest a groundswell of

opposition.

Of course Starmer will resist all demands that Long-Bailey be reinstated, but we must make clear that we will not allow this scapegoating, which comes in the context of a renewed witch hunt including against 'dissident' Jews, to continue. Long-Bailey may have hoped that her agreement to the BoD's Ten Pledges, and her failure to support earlier targets of the witchhunt, would safeguard her position. In this she was mistaken. And if even she can become a victim of this vicious campaign, then clearly none of us are safe.

Solidarity with Rebecca Long-Bailey!
Resist Israeli Apartheid!

Republished from [Socialist Resistance](#).

Footnotes

[1] Amnesty International, 25 August 2016 "[With Whom are Many U.S. Police Departments Training? With a Chronic Human Rights Violator - Israel](#)"

[2] [Twitter Jewish Labour Movement](#), Campaign Against Antisemitism "[Far-left Labour MPs and outriders defend Rebecca Long-Bailey after she is sacked for sharing antisemitic conspiracy theory even after Maxine Peake apologises for promoting it](#)".

[3] Len McCluskey is the General Secretary of UNITE, Britain's largest union, while Jon Lansman is best known for his senior role in Momentum.
<https://twitter.com/LenMcCluskey/status/1276243410626715648>.

Make Black Lives Matter

28 June 2020, by [Susan Pashkoff](#)

The breadth and intensity of the events has spread from city to city, state to state and country to country as anger over systemic racism explodes. Discussion of other similar murders for which there has been no justice come forward together with debate about more fundamental change.

Given the long history of institutional and blatant racism in the treatment of Black people by the 'justice' system in the US, why was it this case that became such a catalyst?

Was it the video itself showing Derek Chauvin (who had 17 complaints against him in almost 20 years) choking George Floyd for 8 minutes and 46 seconds despite pleas of witnesses that he couldn't breathe and the 3 other police involved refusing to intervene? [1] Was it that charges were not immediately brought against Chauvin and the other officers and that Chauvin was initially charged only with third degree murder?

Almost every interview on CNN begins by asking what set this movement off ... the obvious answer is that it has been built for over years by Black Lives Matter in the United States following the Ferguson uprising. [2]

In a country built upon slavery and genocide, whose effects are still a part of the daily lives of Black Americans and all Americans of colour, these protests are about more than police accountability. They address an unjust criminal justice system, the continual oppression of people of colour and the general inequality between the lives of black Americans and white Americans.

The history of the penitentiary system in the US (see e.g., Robert Perkinson's [Texas Tough](#)) is an horrific one. A primary role of incarceration and prisons in Texas were to ensure the use of forced labour of Black people after the end of slavery. Laws didn't apply to Black people before that as they were considered property not human beings. The use of forced

labour in prisons is one of the few exceptions to Human Rights laws prohibiting forced labour.

In a report from the Equal Justice Initiative in 2015, it was found that in the Jim Crow south in the period of 1877-1950 over 4000 black men, women, and children were lynched by white southerners; far more than had been previously known. [3] Directly confronting this legacy of racial terrorism has yet to be done, as is the case with so much of U.S. history and racism against people of colour.

Discrimination in housing and employment (the type of employment and pay differentials for the same work) exist throughout the country, not only in the Southern states. Unemployment for Black Americans is twice than of white Americans While it is no longer legal to deny housing to a family of colour in a majority white area that does not mean that it doesn't happen.

Systemic racism and white supremacy have created deep income and wealth inequalities in the US (entrapment in "low skilled" jobs with low wages impacts the ability to save money or purchase homes. Since healthcare is tied to employment many lack access to basic preventative medicine.

This systemic racism impacts the everyday lives of black Americans not only through policing but the incredibly unjust criminal justice system in which black American men are disproportionately criminalised and imprisoned. The point has again been reached where people have had enough of what is considered "normal" and are demanding radical change.

The current system of criminalisation and incarceration do nothing to reduce crime or to address the social and economic problems that lead to crime or address justice and injustice. We need to move beyond reform. Listening and hearing the protestors demands is essential. We must

support the campaign for defunding the police and support the movement that is arguing for a transition towards a more just society.

Trump's role

What is the role of the current US President? Racism has been central to his political career from the Central Park killing to demanding to see Obama's birth certificate. [4] His partisanship is clear. When the armed white far right were on the streets with violent and antisemitic posters to demand the lifting of the lockdown he called them "good people, just angry". [5] But when peaceful demonstrators of all protest George Floyd's murder, Trump calls them "terrorists" - and "violent outside groups and infiltrators." [6]

It's an old fascist meme calling protestors "terrorists" rather than people defending their communities and fighting for a better future for all. They are scapegoated for state repression which is apparently the fault of "outsiders" rather than those committing the violence, i.e. the state.

Trump will base his re-election campaign on a racist "law and order" platform; especially given the state of the US economy and his disastrous handling of the coronavirus crisis. "Law and order" is the only thing that has been consistent throughout his political career which is why he is unwilling to allow any reform of the system.

This has opened up a chasm between him and key military figures over questions like changing the names of US military bases bearing the names of Confederate generals who fought against the US) and his constant threats to unilaterally send in the armed forces against peaceful marches. [7] Such action against the will of State Governors and Legislatures could only be taken if constitutional rights were being violated (see the Posse Comitatus Act)

There may be attempts to hold protestors in the USA and elsewhere responsible for the inevitable rise in Covid19. But many US states refused to impose lockdowns and have rapidly opened up in fear of economic collapses. Trump himself argued for opening up the economy without PPE and protection for workers. The refusal of Trump, his cronies and his supporters to wear masks led to the spread of Covid-19.

Many protestors are wearing masks to protect each other and their families. They do not bear responsibility for the continued spread of the pandemic. What drove them onto the street was being fed up with extreme injustice. The blame for that lies in the economic, political and social oppression that is an essential part of the system. These protests would not have happened otherwise; so the blame lies with those that maintain the oppression and repression of Blacks and people of colour not those fighting against it.

And trying to force people to stay silent in the face of these grotesque situations is a denial of the right of freedom of speech and protest - fighting oppression and repression clearly takes precedence.

Evolving demands

The slogans chanted or written on placards have developed from focusing on justice for George Floyd and others murdered by the police to demands for demilitarising, defunding, dismantling and disbanding the police.

In 2014, police in NYC killed Eric Garner with a choke hold restraint while arresting him for selling single cigarettes; Ben Okri explains why Floyd's murder has so many parallels with the earlier killing. [8]

This March, Emergency Medical Technician Breonna Taylor was shot by police in Louisville Kentucky. [9] They erroneously entered her home looking for someone on drug charges that was already in custody using a no-knock warrant; meaning they did not identify themselves as police when they did so. [10] Jogging while black describes the racist murder of

Ahmaud Arbery on February 23. [11] No arrests were made even though a video existed showing the murder until 74 days later. A black trans man, Tony McDade was killed by a white policeman in Tallahassee Florida on 27 May, the third person killed by police there in two months and the 11th reported trans and/or GNC death of 2020; 7 black trans women have been murdered in Florida in the past two years. [12]

These are some of the many cases that protestors refer to when protestors chant: 'Say their names'.

In the middle of angry protests, we see bodycam evidence of the police in Midland, Texas on May 29 where they chased and arrested a 21 year old Black man, Tye Andrews, who they accused of a traffic offence. [13] He pulled over in front of his grandmother's house and lay down on the ground offering no resistance to police who approached him with guns - he was clearly terrified. His 90 year old grandmother came out of her home to lie across him to protect him from police.

As protests against police brutality continued we see a rise in that brutality. The use of tear gas (or pepper spray), rubber bullets and flash bang grenades against peaceful protestors happened in many cities. Tear gas can have long term health consequences and impact people living in the area or walking nearby. In the middle of a respiratory virus epidemic it can worsen the coronavirus which is already having a disproportionate impact on people of colour for a range of economic and political reasons. [14]

The imposition of curfews in various places also led to an increase in police brutality (and further arrests for breaking curfews). [15] Curfews were broken by deliberate civil disobedience by protestors in Washington DC, Philadelphia, L.A., and elsewhere. [16] This led to an important victory as curfews were cancelled and the national guard were sent home.

Testifying before Congress the day after his brother's funeral, the younger brother of George Floyd,

Philonise, asked: "He didn't deserve to die over \$20. [17] I am asking you, is that what a black man's life is worth?." Weeks of anti-racist protests seem to not have impacted on the behaviour of police; on June 12, Rayshard Brooks was fatally shot by police in Atlanta after falling asleep in his car at a Wendy's drive-through. [18]

Having been called by Wendy's, the police arrived woke Brooks and administered a sobriety test. A sobriety test does not require a police officer to use a Taser, fleeing arrest for DWI clearly is not a threat to the police and hence no justification for a fatal shooting; this is the case irrespective of their having the cop's Taser.

During this period of protest, Atlanta police have often reacted with extreme violence. [19] Protests against Brooks' killing have erupted in Atlanta, the Wendy's has been burned down by protestors, and police have responded violently in one case breaking the window of a car and tasing two black students inside. [20] The Atlanta police chief has resigned and while several police officers were sacked and placed on administrative leave, no charges have been brought against them.

Demilitarisation

Demilitarisation of police is a needed reform. Many police forces are trained by the Israeli military in crowd control - and this is being increasingly questioned. [21] They also have access to surplus used military grade hardware; often for free.

A federal programme, the Law Enforcement Support Office (LESO) which transfers excess military equipment to civilian law enforcement agencies, came under scrutiny after the police shooting of Michael Brown in August 2014. [22] The Ferguson police used military hardware against the ensuing protests including smoke bombs, flash grenades, tear gas, and rubber bullets. These together with the use of racial profiling and curfews became an important part of the discussion of the way policing is used against black Americans as well as

those facing a mental health crisis. [23]

“As of 2020, 8,200 local law enforcement agencies participated in the program that has transferred \$5.1 billion in military material from the [Department of Defense](#) to law enforcement agencies since 1997.[3] According to the DLA, material worth \$449 million was transferred in 2013 alone. Some of the most commonly requested items include ammunition, cold weather clothing, sand bags, medical supplies, sleeping bags, flashlights and electrical wiring. Small arms and vehicles such as aircraft, watercraft and armored vehicles have also been obtained ([LESO](#))—”

In 2015 Obama passed Executive Order 13688 limiting the type of military goods that could be transferred to civilian police. In 2017, Trump rolled this back.

Abolition

In an interview in *The American Prospect*, Alex Vitale the author of *The End of Policing* discusses how today’s protests are fuelling support for abolitionism. [24] He notes that after the Ferguson Uprising the movement against police violence did not fade but prepared for the next inevitable case of police violence. What we are seeing today is the culmination of years of hard work.

Policies for defunding, disbanding and dismantling the police derive from the abolition movement which calls for radical transformations in the criminal justice system which works to replace the current punitive system with one which addresses the causes of crime; the deep economic, social and political divisions that characterise our societies. It challenges the school to prison pipeline that characterises the lives of so many black men in the US.

In a brilliant op-ed in the *New York Times*, Mariame Kaba argues:

“We need to change our demands. The surest way of reducing police violence is to reduce the power of the police, by cutting budgets and

the number of officers.

But don’t get me wrong. We are not abandoning our communities to violence. We don’t want to just close police departments. We want to make them obsolete.

We should redirect the billions that now go to police departments toward providing health care, housing, education and good jobs. If we did this, there would be less need for the police in the first place.

We can build other ways of responding to harms in our society. Trained “community care workers” could do mental-health checks if someone needs help. Towns could use restorative-justice models instead of throwing people in prison.”

[25]

Funding investment in communities offers new ways to address issues of criminality and violence. Community members work together to provide support for each other, ensure that support like social workers, mental health support, after-school programmes, alternative environments for children to grow up enable the shift towards addressing poverty and shifting towards models of restorative Justice rather than punitive justice.

[Restorative justice](#) is one of the [13 Guiding Principles](#) of Black Lives Matter. It enables community involvement by bringing together victims and perpetrators rather than policies geared towards the punishment of criminals which only perpetuate the maintenance of inequality, injustice and racism. Restorative Justice, [decarceration of prisoners](#), and [prison abolition](#) share the aim of radically changing how law, crime and criminality are addressed; moving away from punitive justice and the incarceration of offenders towards an idea of social responsibility and respect.

Atlanta

In an interview on Democracy Now, Vitale argues that police violence will not be ended by reforms; this requires defunding. Society must address what the role of the police has been; that criminalisation to deal with fundamental inequalities of a social, economic, and political nature is itself a problem.

According to Vitale:

“We’re also talking about a story of the last 50 years, about neoliberal austerity and the way in which it has concentrated inequality in the United States, producing problems like mass homelessness and mass untreated mental illness and mass involvement in black markets because of economic precarity, and then using police to manage those problems. So we’ve seen this incredible explosion of the scope of policing.

And what the defund movement is talking about — [...] is about rethinking not just what are police doing, but why are we using police to paper over problems of economic exploitation. And the defund movement, which was occurring in dozens of cities before the events in Minneapolis, is about concretely identifying police spending that could be shifted into specific, targeted community interventions that will actually produce public safety without coercion, violence and racism.”

The Democratic Party establishment

It was entirely predictable that the leadership of the Democratic Party and its presumptive candidate Joe Biden would immediately reject the idea of defunding. Biden after all was the author of the 1994 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act which has directly led to an increase in mass incarceration which has impacted disproportionately on people of colour especially Black men. The Party’s response to the protests is set out in the Justice in Policing Act of

2020.

The bill came out of the House Judiciary Committee and was endorsed by some members of the Senate. Its framework is very limited reforms. It would establish a Department of Justice taskforce to coordinate the investigation, prosecution and enforcement efforts for cases relating to law enforcement misconduct at all levels. It would prevent former police officers with a history of problematic behaviour to move to another jurisdiction. It would ban the use of racial, religious and discriminatory profiling. It prohibits the use of choke-holds, carotid holds and no-knock warrants at Federal level (they do not have jurisdiction for state and local government but a number of states have already adopted these prohibitions). It would limit the transfer of military grade hardware to local and state law enforcement and mandates the use of dashboard and body cameras for federal officers. These should be funded for local and state police out of existing federal fund. It requires the creation of law enforcement accreditation and reforms qualified immunity protections that shield government officials from personal liability for their actions working for the government. It provides grant funding for community based organisations to develop "local commissions and task forces to help communities to re-imagine and develop concrete, just and equitable public safety approaches."

This is a long way from defunding and abolition; more generally these ideas are now in the public domain more widely than ever before thanks to the dynamism of the movement. Putting the genii back in the bottle will not be easy but that's definitely what the Democratic establishment wants. Instead the left must stand with protestors demanding radical change, with those fighting oppression and state repression. In this they are fighting for a better future for all.

15 June 2020

Source **Socialist Resistance**.

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The movement against racism and police violence - an initial assessment

27 June 2020, by Alex Guerin, Héctor A. Rivera , Marine Benjelloun

What is the context of the mobilizations taking place in the United States? How should they be characterized?

What took place on 29 May in the United States is a revolt. It is an organized resistance against the police, the judiciary and the state structures that cover them. It was certainly a revolt, because the demonstrators set fire to a police station in Minneapolis, before attacking two others the next day. This sparked revolts across the country, with looting.

I have been trying to understand for several days why the reaction to the murders was different this time. George Floyd, in Minneapolis, but also Breonna Taylor, in Louisville, who was killed in her home overnight by police, were organized people known in their communities, who have ties to neighborhood structures like churches, human rights NGOs, a broad network of different actors. As a result, Minneapolis and Louisville are cities where communities have been organized and concerned for a long time about the segregation that affects them (Minneapolis is divided into a white city and a black city). This is all the stronger in the southern states.

This started from the contesting of police violence against black people (in particular George Floyd). How do we place what is happening in the history of revolts and resistance against anti-black racism? What echo is there of the mobilizations that gave birth to Black Lives Matter?

Riots and urban revolts are not uncommon in the history of the black movement and in black neighborhoods as forms of protest, since the 1960s. From 2014, with Ferguson and Baltimore, we had organizational experience with Black Lives Matter. There was an attempt to develop a national network, but it did not work. The Black Lives Matter members decided to develop more local structures. National coordination has not been completed.

It is important to note that since Donald Trump’s election in 2016, racist violence has experienced very significant growth against black communities, including police violence. This time, there is a determination on the street not to give in, which is already shown by two weeks of uninterrupted demonstrations. Often, the police, with their budgets, pay the families of victims of police crimes. But here, George Floyd’s family is determined to have the four police charged, it’s a very important step. This made it possible to highlight other cases: Breonna Taylor in Louisville, Ahmaud Arbery [a young black man killed while jogging by a father and his son, linked to the Ku Klux Klan] and many others.

The conditions are in place to create a nationwide network, which Black Lives Matter has not been able to do so far. Black leaders have lost their moral authority. Indeed, racist police violence continued during the Obama years, the time when there were the most black political representatives, black judges.

Who are the protesters? It seems to be multi-racial, young; how do you explain this?

In Minneapolis, the black community began to mobilize and demonstrate on 26 May. But, quickly, the protest took over the country. We had just experienced a year of mobilizations, including teacher strikes in 2019, actions in hospitals linked to the Covid-19 crisis. Many things were moving. The women’s movement was mobilized when Trump was elected. There was also the youth movement on ecological issues, such as Sunrise Movement, Extinction Rebellion, Fridays for Future.

There is clearly a generational process, made up of young people more open to sexual diversity, against racism, who accept ethnic minorities. The demonstrations are multiracial, and it is adolescents, sometimes as young as 12, who mobilize. The leaders are between 19 and 20 years old. They are a generation very aware that their future is in danger. Solidarity is an almost natural issue among these young people, solidarity with their friends and their communities. More and more, the demonstrations are intergenerational and widening.

This movement is very determined, as evidenced by the non-observance of the curfew in several cities, even leading some of them to suspend it, like Seattle and Los Angeles. In the midst of a pandemic, it is also a strong political commitment to take a risk to show solidarity.

These revolts seem spontaneous: how much spontaneity and organization are there? Who is calling for mobilizations?

In Minneapolis and New York, protests were called by black community organizations. In other cities, it was Black Lives Matter groups or local organizations that built the mobilization. But the massive participation also rested on a certain spontaneity which is based on affinity groups in high schools and universities.

Some calls to demonstrate come from these networks of people who want to be in solidarity. In the state of Maine, for example, 90% of the population is white, and there have been demonstrations. They were organized in particular by people who have acquired experience in environmental movements recently and who have gained confidence in their ability to mobilize.

What demands are made?

The demands have evolved rapidly. It started with the demand to charge the police responsible for the murders and put them in prison. The national demand today is to reduce or even cut public and local budgets allocated to the police. In the epicenter of the protest, in Minneapolis, the demand to abolish the police has been raised.

Already, this has effects. For example, in Los Angeles, the city hall is debating the annual budget. Three billion dollars was to go to the police. Under pressure from the protest, the town hall proposed to reduce it by \$150 million, but people want to see it reduced even more. There is also a halt to programs to recycle army weapons for the benefit of the police.

In Minneapolis schools, contracts with the police are broken. This is not insignificant in the American context. Indeed, there is violence with firearms and the presence of gangs in educational institutions. The treatment of this problem is punitive and, as the organization of education is very racialized, there is a discourse on the problem of violent young blacks. In black and poor neighborhoods, in order not to let

weapons into the school, police intervene and are present in the institutions.

We talk about a “school to prison pipeline”, that is to say that there is a direct path from schools, which increasingly follow a punitive and prison model, to prison. You should know that in the United States, 8.5% of prisons are privatized and represent a juicy market for the economy. There is therefore an interest in this ultra-neoliberal logic in having an incessantly renewed prison population.

Can we make a link between what is happening and the crisis linked to the Covid-19 pandemic, which particularly affects the black and Latino communities? Can we make a link with the economic and social crisis, and in particular mass unemployment?

The numbers are catastrophic because the government has not taken the pandemic seriously. Here, there is no welfare state to deal with the economic crisis and unemployment. The government’s only promise was a check for \$1,200 that no one has received yet. You should be aware that essential workers are for the most part from ethnic minorities and many work in the post office, in hospitals. Many Latino and Black workers died from the Covid, while in contact with the public. Polls show that 70% of Latinos and Blacks are afraid of infecting their families

The reason for this strong presence of blacks and Latinos in these essential services is that historically it has been a means for them to improve their economic and social situation and to gain access to stable and integrated occupations. During lockdown, structural racism was revealed all the more clearly. On the way to work, the black population was exposed to disease and police control on the street. By wanting to do physical activity outside the home, black people could be the target of a racist neighborhood, as revealed by the murder of Ahmaud Arbery. Staying at home, blacks were still in danger, as shown by the murder of Breonna Taylor by police.

How is repression against the movement presented?

The media show images of fraternization between the police and the demonstrators with the aim of attenuating the rupture which exists between the police and the people. But make no mistake, the same policeman who kneels on the ground in tribute to George Floyd is clubbing protesters a few hours later. These images circulate on social networks which have an important role in raising awareness of police violence.

In the movement, in the street, on social networks, there is a debate on the role of the police with new questions and rapid awareness. Indeed, there is a strong anti-racism consciousness, but there was no widespread questioning of the role of the police at first. However, there are real contradictory phenomena among the police. In the United States, there is a difference between the police force which is a career and that of the National Guard which is part of the army and which intervenes in the event of an emergency. The National Guard is made up of people who exercise this profession for a few years, often to access free education, for example.

Cracks therefore exist: members of the National Guard laid down their shields in solidarity with the movement; an army veterans’ petition was sent to National Guard soldiers to side with the protesters; in New York, about six police officers resign every day; the Houston police chief, a Latino, stood in solidarity with the movement and acknowledged the racism he suffered from the far right. Demoralization is significant among the forces of order.

However, the repression is strong, especially in Washington where the secret services, the National Guard and even the army are deployed to protect the White House. People were killed in the protests, others injured, gassed and beaten by the police.

In recent years Trump has attacked the Latin community and the undocumented, notably with the construction of the wall at the Mexican border. Are there links

between this issue and police violence?

There is a direct link between the struggles of the black and Latino communities to fight the prison state and the privatization of prisons and detention centers. Locking people up is a business in the United States. For the Latin community, this is a lesson we have learned from the black abolitionist movement that preceded our structuring. The police and the far right have attempted to generate racial conflict between these two communities in the movement against police violence. For example, they incited vandalism in Latino neighborhoods against traders and small businesses.

However, we have some areas of convergence. On the one hand, there is in black popular culture the expression of solidarity between these two communities. In Minneapolis, black and Latino gangs allied in the protest. Latinos in the southern United States see border police come to support the police in suppressing protests. The Latin community has also been targeted by Trump, who developed the ICE, the immigration police. This appears in demonstrations with slogans like "Abolish ICE". This community still has in mind the massacre at El Paso in August 2019 where a racist killed 23 people, targeting in particular people of Mexican origin. This police force, which tracks undocumented Latinos, refers to the historical genesis of the police in the United States created to find and punish fugitive slaves.

Is there a place for the feminist movement in this mobilization? What is its state in the United States? What meeting is possible between the feminist movement and the anti-racist movement?

There is not a direct link between the structured feminist movement, which is not as militant and massive as in Latin America or Europe, and the anti-racist movement against police violence. But leaders of protests, such as black communities, are often women. Women play both a leadership role, speaking out publicly, being the voice of the movement, but also a role in the technical organization of

demonstrations, for example by providing water, food and masks for the protesters. For example, in Long Beach, California, there is a group of lesbian women, "Assistance for the Resistance", who have a popular canteen and intervene in demonstrations.

It is in terms of demands that the link with a feminist consciousness is created. The idea that it is not only black men who are victims of police violence begins to emerge. The case of Breonna Taylor is significant. Thus, there is the demand "Say her name", to make visible the black women killed by the police. The role of the police is also beginning to be called into question in rape cases. According to the *Star Tribune*, 1,700 cases of rape in Minneapolis have not been resolved in the past 30 years due to lack of investigation. On the other hand, cases of domestic violence have high rates among the police. According to two surveys, 40% of the police perpetrate domestic violence. These are figures that the feminist movement keeps repeating and that are starting to enter the public debate today.

Now, it should be noted that many of the contemporary intellectuals of the black left are women, like Angela Davis or Ruth Wilson Gilmore, an activist for the abolition of prisons. Their ideas and theories are taken up in the movement and on social networks. In the United States, there is a cliché conveyed by the right, that of "Angry Black Woman" to silence black women. Last week broke this reactionary cliché, because black women are angry and acknowledge it.

It should also be noted that, since the 1990s, there have been movements against the death penalty and prison led by mothers of victims of the prison system. These networks of mothers are very active in their communities and are linked to the churches. Since this week, they have taken an important place in the movement. Signs in the protests say that when George Floyd called on his mother at the time of his murder, he called on all of the mothers who are fighting for their sons.

We've seen the Sanders

phenomenon and the emergence of the DSA in recent years. How does this revolt shake up and/or reinforce this trend? Are links possible?

The current movement seems to settle two debates which took place in the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and in the Sanders campaign. On the one hand, the DSA were 100% in the Sanders campaign, with an electoral orientation. In March, when Sanders announced his withdrawal from the Democratic Party primary, he supported candidate Joe Biden. This has robbed him of legitimacy, particularly among women participating in his campaign, as Biden is accused of sexual assault. As a result, the DSA did not support Biden but developed a strategy of mass politics through the electoral struggle, by supporting independent Democratic and social democratic candidates in local elections.

This orientation was underpinned by the absence of social street movements. The current movement questions this strategic axis. The Sanders campaign and its networks of activists have also not been used in the context of the pandemic to support caregivers working without protection or victims of evictions. There was no clear leadership to guide the movement.

On the other hand, some sectors of the American left suffer from an economist and reductionist vision of what is the class struggle. This vision results in the failure to take into account intersectionality and identity policies as an entry point for raising awareness of people of color. Sanders' anti-racism program was therefore weak. There has been a high concentration of discourse on economic issues and the idea that identity politics divide. This economism also leads Sanders to think that everything that is public, health and the police, are therefore socialists. This logic has no place in light of the current movement.

This problem cuts across the DSA. There is a national statement from the organization in support of the Black Lives Matter movement, but no call to action. Many DSA cells and tendencies

have therefore published more militant calls, with slogans taking up the radical demands of the movement. In this context, the Afro-socialist collective in DSA is carrying out important work.

The revolt took the entire left by surprise. I think it will shake up a lot. There is a national DSA convention planned for this year, and it is possible that this may push them to the left. Conditions are favorable for a more militant socialist left, which must acquire a culture of calling for mobilization and intervention in mass combat.

What position does the trade union movement have on the ongoing mobilization?

Important things are happening on the union side. In New York, Minneapolis and Chicago, the transport unions, which are a historic sector of unionism, refused to transport intervening police officers to suppress the demonstrations, or to transport demonstrators to prisons. Drivers are rebelling with the support and support of their union like in Brooklyn where a driver got off his bus.

Last year's teacher movement

revealed democratic and supportive trades unionism, including the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) led by a black woman, Stacy Davis Gates. It is in solidarity with the demonstrations since it has developed social unionism which includes the fight against racism in its demands. It is not only focused on the working conditions of teachers, but also on the communities in which it is present. Groups of black students at universities are calling on education unions to take a position.

The Minnesota AFL-CIO (the main union federation in the United States) has called for the resignation of the secretary of its police union. There are also calls to exclude police unions from workers' representative associations.

What are the prospects for the continuation of the movement?

There are mobilizations planned until June 15. The pride marches that had been canceled due to the Covid-19 health crisis are being rescheduled. In various cities, they will take place in honor of trans black women like Marsha P. Johnson, Sylvia Rivera, two figures from the Stonewall riots. In

Los Angeles, the June 14 Pride March will take place in honor of Black Lives Matter. It could be historic. The demands of the Afro-transgender community, and trans people in general, are the same as those of the movement against police violence, because they are also victims.

Many already existing demands have achieved new life through the movement. The situation opens a new historical period in the United States. That also includes risks, as we have a president like Donald Trump and a strong far right. There is a beginning of awareness that this struggle is also against the far right, since Trump has sought to criminalize the anti-fascist movement by distinguishing good and bad demonstrators. We also see the destruction of monuments glorifying the leaders of the Confederacy.

In several of the country's cities, there are demonstrations every day. In New York, on Tuesday 9 June there will be a march called by the families of 16 African Americans killed by the New York police.

9 June 2020

*Translated by **International Viewpoint** from **Contretemps**.*

Chile: under the pandemic, the class struggle

26 June 2020, by [Alex Guerin](#), [Franck Gaudichaud](#)

Chile has experienced since last October a huge social and popular revolt, with mass demonstrations challenging the political regime, neoliberalism and the strong social inequalities affecting the country [1]. This process of collective rebellion notably resulted in what could be seen as a concession on the part of the government of the multi-millionaire Sebastián Pinera, at the same time as a way for the ruling government to take back control of the situation: namely the convening of a referendum for April 26 on a possible change in the Constitution (inherited, it must be remembered, from the Pinochet dictatorship). With the spread of the pandemic, the referendum has just been postponed until the end of

October, and as in the rest of the world, containment measures and the dangers of contagion have largely paralyzed the demonstrations and other acts of resistance.

Epidemic, resistance from below and class struggle

The coronavirus arrived in Santiago transmitted in particular by the wealthiest people, those who were returning from European countries, China or from cruise trips. With more than 18,000 officially infected people

and 250 dead (as of May 3, 2020), Chile is not the country most affected by the epidemic in Latin America, with a much lower mortality rate than Ecuador (proportionally the most affected country in the region). But the progression of the contagion has seen a dangerously ascending curve since the end of April. And over the last several weeks there have been multiple cases of non-compliance with quarantine, in particular on the part of well-to-do families circulating between their main and second homes. This even led to forms of protest and direct action, by means of barricades: inhabitants of coastal villages is thus trying to prevent the arrival of members of the bourgeoisie and the middle classes of the capital in their

holiday homes. During the Easter weekend, some major employers in the region even pushed the avoidance of confinement to the absurd by going to their seaside residences ... by helicopter, in order to avoid police checks!

The numerous territorial assemblies which have arisen during the revolt since last October have nevertheless made it possible to organise a certain popular response faced with the present health crisis and to continue the fight against Piñera and his world. These self-organized spaces played

a key practical role during the revolt: ensuring supplies while the shops were closed, ensuring security and vigilance in the face of human rights violations by the police, and strengthening the organization of the protest. These assemblies were then converted into spaces for deliberation and political debate "from below".

"With the pandemic, neighbourhood assemblies quickly made it possible to draw up lists of the elderly, people in economic need, vulnerable or isolated people in order to be able to help them. However, we must not imagine that there are neighbourhood networks that make possible, at this stage, a general organization parallel to the state with a significant social impact", says Karina Nohales, member of the [Feminist Coordination of 8 March](#).

"The fear that had disappeared is coming back with the epidemic"

On the government side, the health crisis has been the opportunity for a relative regaining of control of the political situation, after months of paralysis and contestation. This is summed up, symbolically, by the sight of Sebastian Piñera strolling around and posing arrogantly in the "Plaza de la Dignidad", epicentre of demonstrations and clashes with the police since October, in the centre of Santiago.

"During the months of revolt, everything the government could say threw fuel on the fire and angered the mobilized people," recalls Karina Nohales. Today, faced with the pandemic, the country is more or less obliged to obey government orders. This does not mean that decisions are accepted without criticism, but we obviously do not have the opportunity to demonstrate. The government is not staying calm, however. This is expressed by the deepening of repressive measures and by the strengthening of the state of emergency already considerably present since October. Piñera knows that he can only govern thanks to this exceptional moment".

Indeed, the pandemic arises as a moment breaking with normality in an already exceptional situation. According to various opinion polls, the approval rate of the incumbent president is less than 8 per cent, the lowest rate since the end of the dictatorship in 1990. It must be said that the management of the pandemic itself is catastrophic, with erratic confinement measures, varying from one city to another, from one district to another and from one street to another, and above all dictated by the imperative of maintaining economic activity, under pressure from local employers. Morning and evening, the Santiago metro is crowded with poor and precarious workers, and the streets are populated by workers in the informal sector who have no choice but to go to work for a few pesos.

The Minister of Health multiplied victorious declarations, while the epidemic was just beginning and the public health system is incapable of absorbing a large influx of those infected by Covid-19. More generally, the health service is extremely segmented, largely left to the logic of the market logic and private insurance, while the working classes must be content with crowded and less well-equipped hospitals.

"So, the fear that had disappeared is making a comeback in the face of the epidemic, faced with the massive layoffs of the past few weeks," says Karina Nohales. "Our political challenge is therefore to make the link

between the protest accumulated over the last few months and the way in which the pandemic brutally reveals everything that was already in crisis. This mass politicization is difficult," explains the feminist activist.

Workers pay for the crisis

The articulation between the health crisis and the economic crisis is leading to a catastrophic situation for the majority of Chileans. The Administrations of pension funds (AFP), which manages pensions, all privatized since the 1980s (with the exception of that of the military!), have already lost 20 per cent of their funds. And this is just the beginning. In 2008, during the entire period of the economic crisis, the loss was 40 per cent. The economic measures put in place by the executive are essentially of three types and, here again, aligned with the demands of big business (the Luksics, Matte, Angelini and others, who dominate the entire economy):

- aid to businesses, by facilitating access to credit at low interest rates;
- aid to the informal sector, to self-entrepreneurs, but with ridiculously low sums and only for a minority of these workers;
- for workers, the possibility of suspending the contract of employment, but without receiving a salary! The sole obligation of employers is to contribute to AFP, the National Health Fund and unemployment insurance, but at 50 per cent of the normal rate. It is therefore the workers who are paying for the crisis, since their only income can be their unemployment insurance financed by their own means, and while the amount received depends on what has been saved, in the logic of capitalization and individualization which reigns in all aspects of social life in Chile. 23,000 companies have already taken advantage of this measure, affecting 350,000 workers, the majority of whom will therefore only receive half of a minimum wage.

This suspension of contract is already being practised in fast food chains (Starbucks, Burger King). Finally, there is currently a dynamic of

massive layoffs in several sectors, including hotels, restaurants and commerce. When containment was put in place in the wealthy neighbourhoods of Santiago, there was also a wave of mass layoffs of construction workers, as all construction sites in these neighbourhoods were stopped.

Unions not up to the challenge

The trade-union movement, on the other hand, clearly did not respond to the challenge. The centrality of its intervention was essentially to try to maintain the number of workstations, without requiring the right of withdrawal, and without always thinking about the means of ensuring a dignified and safe quarantine for millions of people. Many unions have remained in a logic where the requirement of confinement is thought to endanger employment... However, other union organizations have fortunately taken legal action to protect fundamental rights and the immediate health of their affiliates. The labour courts have issued decisions which authorize workers not to go to work anymore, without losing their salary, if the health and safety conditions are not met (a form of right of withdrawal). However, to date, many unions have not taken it up and these actions are very minority. The Unitary Labour Confederation (CUT) appears once again as paralyzed, unable to make a critical voice heard while the country has been in rebellion for months, and stuck in a logic of "tripartite" negotiation which does not lead to any concrete progress.

This deafening silence is further reinforced by the pandemic and this May 1, 2020 will have been "one of the

saddest in the history of Chile" unable to make a critical voice heard while the country has been in rebellion for months and stuck in logics of "tripartite" negotiation which does not lead to any concrete progress. This deafening silence is further reinforced by the pandemic and this May 1, 2020 will have been "one of the saddest in the history of Chile" [2]

However, other sectors are on the offensive and very active. This is particularly the case with feminist struggles. The March 8 Feminist Coordination, in collaboration with other organizations, launched a campaign to respond to macho and gender-based violence in the context of confinement. This unitary feminist space that brought together millions of people on March 8 last year also sparked off the "strike for life", that is to say a strike to demand the establishment of a social emergency plan and to cope with the pandemic and its consequences. The activists also took advantage of this May to advance their slogans and analyses based on a feminist reading of the current crisis and the general precariousness of life, with the slogan: "Work and care to support life, not for their profits! "

Critical weeks

Undoubtedly, in Chile as in France, the end of confinement will also be marked by the return of demonstrations, strikes and the social movement. The Chilean ruling classes intend, for their part, to take advantage of the pandemic to advance their own agenda, organize a general recovery of control that allows them to channel and neutralize the deep political crisis that exists, while continuing the repression. And every occasion will be good for them.

An example of this is the struggle of many families and activists for the liberation of the hundreds of political prisoners (perhaps more than 2,000!) from the October revolt who are still languishing in prison, in a situation where the prisons represent an imminent danger of contagion. Finally, the government accepted that some of the detainees in the country considered as "of low danger" would have their sentences commuted to house arrest for reason of "health emergency", but no answer was given to those awaiting judgment and those who are considered prisoners for their participation in the social movement. And taking advantage of this situation, several right-wing members of parliament have tried to convince the government to release also, from the de luxe prisons where they are incarcerated, those responsible for systematic violations of human rights under the dictatorship ... Faced with the uproar this provoked, and despite the approval of some judges, the government had to retreat.

Thus, the next few weeks will undoubtedly be decisive both from the point of view of public health in the country and of the capacities of the popular movement to continue to advance the demands resulting from the October revolt, to roll back the right and the far right nostalgia for the dictatorship, while demanding an emergency plan to resolutely confront the Covid-19 and its consequences, both economic and health. The other challenge remains to be able to use this time of "transition", still unstable, to begin to weave forms of political organization "from below" which can give a clear, democratic and radical perspective to the force of the struggles which have been taking place on the streets for months against a decaying political regime and the authoritarian neoliberal economic model. [