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It's Time to Socialize Big Pharma

31 July 2020, by **Fran Quigley, Natalie Shure**

In the early days of the coronavirus outbreak in the United States, Health and Human Services secretary Alex Azar sparked viral outrage. When asked at a congressional hearing about whether any potential COVID-19 vaccine would be made affordable to all, Azar refused to be drawn into a promise. "We would want to ensure that we work to make it affordable," he replied, "but we can't control that price, because we need the private sector to invest ... Price controls won't get us there."

His answer was lambasted by commentators: Senator Bernie Sanders called it "an outrage," and Representative Jan Schakowsky tweeted that Azar was "giving Big Pharma a blank check." The Verge insisted the move "could put everyone's health at risk."

And yet, in the context of a system that relies on a profit-driven pharmaceutical industry to produce lifesaving drugs, Azar's answer was relatively mundane. These companies' business models are predicated on high prices and weak regulation, not altruism and the common good.

The multiple pharmaceutical firms currently working to develop vaccines and treatments are doing so in hopes of producing valuable commodities, something that by definition not everyone will get to have. If Azar's critics were correct to be irate, and in

their belief that COVID-19 drugs ought to be universally accessible, the recipient of their anger should have been the system responsible for drug production itself. Can we really be surprised when for-profit companies attempt to profit off their products?

But things don't have to be this way. We don't have to leave ourselves at the mercy of the most profitable sector on Earth to get the drugs we need to lead healthier lives. As drug prices soar, public health care systems in most of the world find themselves drained of resources. In 2018 alone, the National Health Service (NHS) in England spent £18 billion on medicines — or 16 percent of its total annual budget.

This is despite the fact that the UK government spent £2.3 billion of public money on health research and development (R&D) in 2015. In fact, in their recent book *The Pharmaceutical Industry*, Michele Boldrin and David Levine estimate that two-thirds of all upfront drug R&D costs are funded by public investments.

In the United States, of course, the situation is even worse. The prices imposed by drug companies are often passed directly onto patients, as all-powerful corporations tighten their grip on the political system and strangle progressive proposals like Medicare for All. In the current moment, it's clearer than ever that the

interests of the public and the interests of the pharmaceutical industry will never be aligned.

Ensuring that all patients are able to access treatments based on need rather than ability to pay will require reimagining how drugs are researched, developed, and manufactured. To turn medicines into public goods, we must nationalize the pharmaceutical industry — and doing so may be less of a stretch than you think.

Health Care Profiteering

Outcry over obscene drug prices long predates Azar's offhand comment about future COVID-19 therapeutics. An estimated 10 million people worldwide die each year because they can't afford the drugs that would have saved their lives. Even in advanced capitalist countries — where the burden of drug prices is less severe — Big Pharma's greed causes deaths.

In the United States there have been multiple cases of deadly insulin rationing in recent years as prices topped \$300 per vial. Around one in three Americans say they've skipped necessary doses due to costs, while pharmaceutical profit margins can reach as high as a mind-blowing 40 percent — a rate of return unseen in

most other sectors.

But even where the results aren't fatal, this system is a major problem. Last year in Britain there was the prominent example of Luis Walker, a young cystic fibrosis patient whose campaign to access Orkambi was frustrated by pharmaceutical corporation Vertex's refusal to lower their eye-watering £105,000 price tag.

On foot of his case, polls showed 68 percent of voters supported Jeremy Corbyn's proposal to establish a public medicine development company, including a comfortable majority of Tories (57 percent).

There's a very simple reason why pharmaceutical firms charge such exorbitant prices: because they can. In the United States, where prices are the world's highest, there's no robust mechanism for lowering them: companies name their price, and seldom receive actionable pushback.

In England, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) determines what drugs are available on the NHS — but are over a barrel when it comes to the price charges by pharmaceutical giants. Big Pharma argues that they are fair reflections of the value of the products and the money invested to take them to market.

But that explanation barely holds up under scrutiny. The private pharmaceutical industry's handsome profits are all the more galling when you consider the degree to which they're publicly subsidized. The most expensive and riskiest stage of the research process — the basic science on the back end — is usually funded by governments, not private companies.

But this doesn't mean that the public benefits. The 2017 Pills and Profits report for Global Justice Now found that the NHS was spending £1 billion annually on medicines developed through public funding — and that two of the five most expensive medicines available on the NHS were developed with UK government funding.

Across the world, publicly funded

research is nonetheless eligible for private patents, which guarantees a company years of market exclusivity and unchecked pricing power for a given drug. As if that weren't enough, governments are also the largest buyers of drugs, shelling out inflated prices for breakthroughs that would have never happened without them. In short, the public pays twice while the private sector profits.

If the situation is perverse for necessary drugs — the kind that public resources tend to flow toward — it's nothing compared to drugs we'd perhaps be better off without. Chief among these are so-called "Me Too" drugs, which are practically indistinguishable from already existing medicines but are aggressively peddled to doctors and patients to gain a market foothold, despite having little if any justifiable reason to exist.

Shockingly, the pharmaceutical industry's marketing budgets exceed what they spend on research and development. It is an industry geared toward chasing lucrative markets, not public health needs.

Toward Nationalization

Nationalizing the pharmaceutical industry would solve both major problems at once: it allows essential medicines to be made and distributed without the pressure to funnel profits back to private firms, and stops wasting valuable time and resources on medicines that no one needs.

Publicly provisioned drug development would not only keep public research in the public domain, but allow for democratic oversight over what drugs get made. Publicly funded clinical trials will reduce gamesmanship and concealment of critical data, giving us more reliable and credible information than ever. And public pharmaceutical manufacturing and pricing offers a much more straightforward pathway to affordable drugs than the current one, which relies on waiting out years of patents, followed by the entry of multiple generics manufacturers into

the market to eventually compete prices down.

Governments could accomplish all of this without being held hostage by Big Pharma. There's certainly plenty of legal precedent for doing so. In the UK, the beginning of the NHS coincided with an enormous appropriation of private hospitals. The groundwork for this was laid by the wartime Emergency Medical Service. In fact, in both the UK and the United States, manufacturing plants and even entire industries were taken over during wartime.

More recently in America the entire airport security system was nationalized after the attacks of September 11, 2001. The coronavirus crisis is a greater emergency by many magnitudes of scale. And if the United States and UK did seize the domestic assets of private pharmaceutical industries, it could potentially export affordable medicines globally, the way nations like India have done for decades.

The real hurdle isn't legal — it's political. And it's in that realm that the pharmaceutical industry has always fiercely protected itself, which is why little action has been forthcoming despite polls ranking lowering drug costs as the number one issue Americans want Congress to deal with.

Big Pharma pushes millions in campaign donations and lobbying out the door each year, notoriously earning itself a spot inside health care reform negotiations back in 2009. And because its profit margins are among the highest on Earth, the sector remains a prized investment vehicle for wealthy and powerful shareholders who'd prefer not to see their portfolios upended.

Taking control of the industry in any country for public benefit would be met with considerable opposition; this ought to be anticipated and fortified against by a grassroots movement demanding it, allied with elected politicians with the fortitude to stand up against the industry's attacks. After all, Nye Bevan was compared to the Nazis for founding the NHS.

The truth is abundantly clear: astronomical private pharmaceutical profits and universally accessible medicines will never be compatible goals. It's tough to imagine a more

dysfunctional industry than Big Pharma. But, as COVID-19 shows, the need for pioneering medical research and products is only likely to grow. If we want the results of these endeavors to be available to all of

those who need them, it's time to imagine a fundamentally different system of medicine production.

[Jacobin](#)

Far-Left Fascism: The Non-Existent Disorder

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30 July 2020, by **Susan Pashkoff**

While granting the peculiarities of some of the far-right in the US in their abhorrence of the idea of a central government; there is as much need to debunk the idea of far-left fascism as there is to debunk the existence of unicorns that fart rainbows.

Unfortunately, there was little else left for Trump to run his campaign on and to keep "his base" happy; his use of racist dog-whistles throughout his initial candidacy for President and throughout his Presidency were constant. In many situations, the dog whistles were jettisoned for clear unabashed racism. With all other avenues rapidly closing, the racism, misogyny, homophobia and transphobia that have characterised his political life are the only thing he has left in his toolbox that he can use to try to win re-election.

One of their political weapons is "Cancel Culture" - driving people from their jobs, shaming dissenters, and demanding total submission from anyone who disagrees. This is the very definition of totalitarianism, and it is completely alien to our culture and our values, and it has absolutely no place in the United States of America. This attack on our liberty, our magnificent liberty, must be stopped, and it will be stopped very quickly. We will expose this dangerous movement, protect our nation's children, end this radical assault, and preserve

our beloved American way of life.

In our schools, our newsrooms, even our corporate boardrooms, there is a new far-left fascism that demands absolute allegiance. If you do not speak its language, perform its rituals, recite its mantras, and follow its commandments, then you will be censored, banished, blacklisted, persecuted, and punished. It's not going to happen to us.

This left-wing cultural revolution is designed to overthrow the American Revolution. In so doing, they would destroy the very civilization that rescued billions from poverty, disease, violence, and hunger, and that lifted humanity to new heights of achievement, discovery, and progress."

Donald Trump's speech at Mount Rushmore; 4th July 2020 [1]

Whilst he also absurdly still has been touting his amazing handling of the pandemic (he has saved millions of lives in his mind), he and his sycophants are the only people that may believe that; even worse his idiotic insistence of trying to make wearing masks part of a political struggle against the evil forces trying to bring down the great American democracy (and both he and his supporters complete lack of understanding of their constitutional

rights - no offense but there is a notion of social responsibility built into the Bill of Rights) has enabled a virus whose only *raison d'être* is to find host bodies to keep on spreading.

Trump's other fantasy that the global economic crisis would be rapidly overcome (that famous v-shaped curve where we bounce right back) if only the economy was allowed to re-open is yet another pipe dream which is rapidly collapsing in the face of the further spread of the virus brought on by far too early opening of the economy in many states.

The protest movement of "really good people who were just angry" who opposed wearing masks and protested with neither masks nor social distancing (but of course they were armed with various types of weaponry) was not only encouraged by Trump but they also were used to pressurise democratic governors who were opposed to opening up the economy for fears of spreading the pandemic. [2]

Making wearing masks a form of political protest essentially served his agenda of trying to get the various state economies opened up in the hope of perhaps an amazing revival of his political fortunes. The irresponsibility of some state governors and officials who have happily marched in line with Trump has not only endangered the people that actually reside in the states they "govern;" given that the phrase "shelter at home" seems to be beyond

the ken of many people it has also meant that community spread has crossed into other states as well. It seems that some basic lessons have still not been learned and rather than worry about a second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in the autumn we are now facing the reality of the first wave continuing to slam its way through the US.

Trump is not just some cynical politician trying to whip up racism as a divide and rule tactic; Trump is a racist and that has both created and, is maintaining, an incredibly dangerous situation in the US. From his early days of his comments calling for the execution of the Central Park 5 in a rape case to his demands to see President Obama's birth certificate, he has clearly gone beyond racist dog-whistles favoured by many mainstream politicians trying to create divisions. [3] These are clear racist positions with strong undertones - including the idea that blacks are violent rapists and that Obama could not have been born in the US as he has a Muslim name (and hence he cannot be an American - it was not only that he could not be President if born outside of the US), this was beyond that trying to create an idea of a white supremacist America where black Americans cannot be President.

Moreover, Trump is part of a global revival of the far right that is happening around the world; so unfortunately Trump has a lot of company spreading hatred and division. He is a great fan of right-wing and religious nationalists and authoritarian right-wing leaders - from Modi (India) to Duterte (Philippines), from Bolsonaro (Brazil), Orbán (Hungary), Duda (Poland) and Netanyahu (Israel); his allies include those in power and those who share his ideology (e.g., Farage and Salvini).

His hatred of the "other" which underlies his racism is perhaps the only form of equality he favours often comparing those that he considers "others" to rats and vermin. In his first Presidential campaign and during his presidency he has accused Mexicans of being rapists (that is a favourite of white supremacists) and criminals, he has tried to ban people coming to the US from Muslim majority countries, he

has attacked both immigrants and migrants as vermin and tried to prevent their coming to the US - his administration has separated children from their parents - this is despite international obligations towards refugees (and the US historical and current role in making their countries unsafe in the first place). Being born in the US does not protect you from Trump's attacks. This is because if you do not fit into his narrow idea of what a "good" American is then you are fair game; Native Americans, Blacks, Latinx, Muslims and Jews have all been the subjects of his tirades.

The rapid responses to antisemitic and other racist attacks was a wonderful demonstration of solidarity across religions, cultures, and ethnicities and the defense of refugees and migrants under threat has threatened Trump's attacks on the oppressed; there is nothing more frightening to right-wing racists than solidarity between people. Not all of these people are on the left by any means; many of them are people that oppose divide and rule and actually support the elimination of oppression as part of the tenets of their religions and ethical beliefs - they believe that the actions of the US should actually match its ideology.

The Revival of the Left

The revival of the American left preceded Donald Trump by several years, think of the Occupy movement and the first BLM protests; but when those occupations folded the left did not disappear. The global ecological crisis united young people around the world (and while much of that is apolitical; the powerful fossil fuel industry correctly views that movement as a threat). BLM and M4BL have been organising at the grass-roots level from 2014 and have done an amazing job building the anti-racist movement - their reach extends beyond communities as well and has produced a fantastic amount of educational and political literature. The prison abolition movement has also been incredibly influential for BLM - it is from the abolition movement that calls for defund, disband, and dismantle the police

arise; "criminal justice" policies of punitive justice and incarceration in which racial profiling, police brutality and militarisation of police departments in which disproportionately large numbers of black people have become the victims of the school to prison pipeline. Black Lives Matter protests have spread across the country and internationally and have been continuing since the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis MN.

But, in many senses Trump's actions while in office have furthered the rise of the left; it has not come out of nowhere and oppressed minorities and younger people have responded to a rising right-wing threat both in the US (and internationally). This has led to the recent focus on the left to his list of un-American Americans who are threatening to undermine American democracy.

Trump has form against the left; his insistence in his comment on the protests at Charlottesville that "there are many fine people on both sides" was not only a defense of fascists and white supremacists; it was an equation between them and anti-fascist (antifa) protesters. This theme of "very fine people" describing fascists and far-right protesters was also used to defend the armed anti-mask protesters in several states in the US run by Democratic governors. Several times at his campaign stops he has attempted to place the left as those responsible for the BLM protests and the attack against American values. What is underlying these statements is what is important; a Black-led movement fighting against systemic racism with support of allies has been "hijacked by the left."

This is important as it assumes that young people of all ethnicities cannot work to transform the societies we live in because they actually believe that white supremacy and the criminal justice is systemically racist on their own; no, it is because left-wing infiltrators have subverted or are behind this movement. This denies the agency of people in this movement and is essentially fundamentally racist. This places (or revives) the idea that the left itself is not of American society they are "other" (while, of

course, the far right and fascists are good Americans). His attacks against anti-racists and anti-fascists have enabled and given succour to both rising fascist and white supremacist movements in the US. When Trump talks about the “glories of American history” and that he will protect and preserve it; what he is actually referring to is American white supremacy, he is referring to its history of racism: both slavery and genocide.

In his July 4th speech at Mount Rushmore, Trump unleashed a broad attack on the left. We should be grateful that he did not use the favoured fascist phrase ‘Cultural Marxism’ as the cause behind the threat to our country; but this still underlies much of his comments. [4] The threat against “our history, our heroes, our values” and let’s not forget the indoctrination of our innocent young people is an almost classic far-right screed and has been the defining basis of attacks by the far-right on the left — read this, if you want, as a two-fold attack: on the one hand, he defines American history as “sacred” and secondly it accuses anyone holding a position against that as closet Marxists and anarchists and do not forget “un-Americans.”

This is nothing less than a revival of the cold war “Red Scares” ideology describing hoards of evil and hidden Marxists combined with the sacredness of “American history”; this is nothing less than extolling the exceptional eternal history of the US. What is fascinating is that throughout the speech at Mt Rushmore, he discusses the contributions of black Americans to American society and history. The shift in the nature of his campaign is important as he has now put the blame for all the protests on un-American leftists rather than acknowledging that black people (and their allies) have had more than enough of police brutality, police literally getting away with the murder of black people, the disproportionate incarceration of black Americans and the systemic racism that pervades the economic, social and political conditions of the US - instead he is saying that all the BLM protesters all over the US (and internationally for that matter) are dupes of a dangerous

(external in the sense of American ideology) left-wing agenda trying to destroy the most exceptional nation on earth.

This is one more trick of divide and rule which he hopes will work by uniting everyone against the evil hidden Marxists and Anarchists — who are of course “far-left fascists” who are behind the attack on America. While we have long become used to Trump calling opponents what he is (e.g., calling people of colour racists when they criticise him) this one actually makes no sense unless you are living in a country which has no idea of what fascism and fascists are (but knows that they are bad because we fought them in WWII so they must be the bad guys but who knows perhaps they no longer teach that Hitler, Mussolini and Franco were fascists).

Our nation is witnessing a merciless campaign to wipe out our history, defame our heroes, erase our values, and indoctrinate our children. [...] Angry mobs are trying to tear down statues of our Founders, deface our most sacred memorials, and unleash a wave of violent crime in our cities. Many of these people have no idea why they are doing this, but some know exactly what they are doing. They think the American people are weak and soft and submissive. But no, the American people are strong and proud, and they will not allow our country, and all of its values, history, and culture, to be taken from them.

Donald Trump’s speech at Mount Rushmore; 4th of July 2020 [5]

He continued this theme at his Salute to America 4th of July speech at the White House and this time not only alludes to a “cultural revolution” (that’s how we know he didn’t write the speech at Mount Rushmore, it is doubtful he knows what the “cultural revolution” actually was) but explicitly states that they are “the radical left, Marxists, anarchists, agitators” and of course ... “the looters”:

“We are now in the process of defeating the radical left, the Marxists, the anarchists, the agitators, the looters, and people who, in many instances, have absolutely no clue what they are doing.” [6]

In his speeches on the 4th of July, Trump threatened action against the spread of this evil group and its ideology which is trying to destroy America itself. The question that obviously now needs to be asked is who is the biggest threat to American democracy and America itself? In this instance (hopefully), Trump wins by a landslide.

Portland, Oregon

What we are seeing in Portland Oregon where protests have been continuing since the murder of George Floyd by Derek Chauvin of the Minneapolis police on the 25th of May is the fulfillment of his threat in the speeches on the 4th of July. What we are seeing is in many senses the beginning salvo against the left that Trump promised in both speeches. That these are the actions of a dictator not the President of a country in which freedom of protest and assembly is enshrined in its “sacred” constitution tells us exactly where the threat to the US is coming from and it is not the anti-racist protesters.

Trump (with the help of temporary secretary of the Dept. of Homeland Security Chad Wolfe and AG Barr) has dispatched several groups of Federal Agents to Portland including Customs and Border Control dispatched from the Mexican Border (who are wearing camouflage with full face coverings and operating without identifying insignia), the Federal Protection Service, the US Marshal service and those wearing uniforms of Homeland Security to ostensibly “Protect Federal Property” in Portland. [7] Protesters have been attacked with teargas, federal agents are driving unmarked vehicles and protesters have been seized off the street and arrested and held without probable cause and due process, on the 11th July, one protester was wounded in the head by a member of the US Marshal’s service using a less-lethal round (he was critically injured). [8] The reality (and

deep concern) that the Portland police are working with the federal agents (and they have already been extremely violent against protesters before the Federal agents entered the picture) is creating additional problems and exacerbating the situation along with violating the civil rights (guaranteed in his beloved constitution) of protesters.

The Governor of Oregon Kate Brown and the Mayor of Portland Ted Wheeler have demanded that the federal officers be removed from Portland (or Wheeler added “kept

inside Federal Buildings”); the Oregon Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum has said she will file a lawsuit in Federal court against these Federal agencies for violation of the civil rights of Oregonians for detention without probable cause.

Defeating Trump is essential as the threat against our civil rights that we have been waiting for is here; his attempt to revive the accusations of the cold war that the left is a foreign influence on the US is as dangerous as it is fallacious. To defeat Trump and send all the American right-wing (in all its manifestations) back to the

caves from which they escaped requires solidarity and unity in the face of this threat – we must stand together to oppose the spread of hate and division. Only solidarity can stop this threat! We have now reached the point where sitting on the fence hoping that the nightmare just disappears simply means that you have abandoned everyone facing repression and fighting against oppression to fight their own battles while denying that it is also your battle. Silence is complicity!

[Daily Kos](#)

Worker organising under the pandemic: reflections from China

29 July 2020

The piece below, however, is a high-caliber example of the genre. It not only succeeds in framing the overall dynamic across regions and beyond individual struggles, but also hints at the potentials hidden in some of the pandemic organising that extended outside the workplace alone. Altogether, the result is an excellent overview of organising among Chinese workers (and students) under the lockdown and in the midst of the re-opening. Most striking here are a few of the telling contrasts with conditions in Europe and, in particular, the United States. In almost every respect, the Chinese situation seems to be an inversion of that in the US, where the shutdown helped to spur the largest, most assertive mass rebellion in recent history, including a steady simmer of labour unrest that has gone relatively unnoticed beneath the more spectacular riots against the police. In China, however, despite a recent history of worker organising, struggles have remained muted. In part, this is almost certainly due to another, identical inversion: the fact that China readily contained the pandemic while the US is brutally failing to do so.

But there is also a more telling inversion hinted at in the text below, relating to the question of exactly how China was able to successfully contain the initial outbreak. It remains evident that Chinese state capacity, while in the ascent, is nonetheless lower than that seen elsewhere (in, say, Taiwan, South Korea or any given European nation). Meanwhile, the American state seems powerful and rich in expertise, even if it is clearly in decline. How, then, was China able to mobilize the resources to contain the outbreak in such a large population? Largely, it was through an effective recognition of the limited capacity of the state, and a subsequent devolution of power not only to local governments (who were given wide-ranging authority for containment) but also to numerous ad hoc mutual aid groups of the type outlined in the text below. It was largely the activity of regular Chinese people that helped to contain the virus—many of whom, in particular medical workers, put in immense work and took serious personal risks. Containment was emphatically not the product of the quasi-magical powers of an authoritarian state, as many media

accounts would have us believe. The difference in the US, of course, is the absence of a similar popular mass mobilization around containment of the virus, with this task being deferred to the supposedly competent state authorities, who have proved themselves anything but. Instead, the US government has demonstrated that it does, indeed, still have an immense capacity for coordination and the allocation of resources—but this capacity has been directed almost exclusively into the hands of the police state and away from any real social functions. Such a shift is clearly indicative of a once capacious state in the throes of a decades-long decay.

Overall, then, the piece translated here gives one of the best windows into the average Chinese worker’s experience under the pandemic, while also giving some illustration of the broader social organising that helped to contain the outbreak. Meanwhile, it acts as a superb case study of some of the more advanced practical analysis offered by the Chinese left.

[Chuang](#)

Update from the authors, 17 July 2020

Two months after the publication of this article, the global pandemic is still raging. China's strict controls and effective contact tracing mechanisms have thus far prevented a second large-scale outbreak from occurring. Even when a resurgence occurs in one locale, it is quickly brought under control. Meanwhile, people's initial anger about the state's coverup of the epidemic was soon redirected against a few specific officials in Wuhan. Later, even this discontentment dissipated as the pandemic worsened abroad and people could contrast this with the gradual return to normalcy within China. Popular sentiment shifted toward praise and gratitude for the state's success in bringing the pandemic under control domestically. Beyond that, the international crusade against China led by the US has even become the focal point for a renewed patriotism.

Except for the brief surge of protests and discussion that followed the death of Dr. Li Wenliang, which was quickly suppressed, China has not witnessed any large-scale collective acts of resistance in the half year since the pandemic broke out. Compared with many other countries, our nation of 1.4 billion has remained unnervingly tranquil.

Let's take the industries of healthcare and delivery services, for example, two that have featured prominently in the labour-related protests abroad over the past few months. During the first two weeks of the lockdown—then in force only in a few cities like Wuhan and provinces like Hubei which were facing severe outbreaks in late January and early February—healthcare workers expressed intense anxiety regarding the state of panic, inhumanly long working hours, risks to their health and shortages of equipment they were suddenly forced to deal with. However, the pandemic was soon brought under control throughout most of the country, and a run on

medical resources was ultimately averted. The nation's medical resources were transferred into the affected areas, quickly relieving the pressure on healthcare workers. The state provided material rewards for healthcare workers (although they didn't all make it into the hands of the workers themselves), and the discourse of "heroes in the fight against the pandemic" affirmed their contributions and sacrifices. Both counteracted the negative psychological effects of the situation on these workers. Some of those who volunteered to go work on the frontlines in Hubei expressed that in the process they actually regained a sense of vocational pride in their work as healers: the occupational contradictions that marketization had brought to the industry, performance evaluation, quotas of patient turnover related to profitability, etc. — all these worries temporarily disappeared, so they could finally focus on treating patients, while being widely respected for their work.

Since this pandemic broke out during the Chinese New Year, people had already stockpiled food and other supplies as usual, preparing to relax at home for a few weeks, so delivery orders actually declined significantly in comparison with the rest of the year. By the same token, however, most of the delivery workers were also on holiday, so there was still a serious shortage of labour in the industry. In response, delivery platforms raised their rate of payment. Workers reported that their interactions with customers had never been so harmonious as they became during height of the pandemic, since the workers were glad to make more money than they normally did, and customers were grateful to obtain the food and supplies that had grown so hard to come by. Moreover, there was some degree of lockdown all over China, and in places with serious outbreaks, residents were prohibited from going outside at all, and the delivery of supplies was coordinated by local authorities through the use of specialized personnel. Many places prohibited delivery workers from entering residential complexes, so instead they left packages at the entrance from where volunteers would then deliver them to the door of each

home, increasing safety for the workers and residents alike. After the lockdown ended, most delivery companies continued monitoring the health of their employees in order to coordinate with the authorities, going so far as to send the workers' health status to the customers.

Factors such as these reduced the negative effects of the pandemic on workers in industries facing the greatest risks, so it isn't hard to understand why there was less resistance than in other countries regarding safety measures. On the economic front, however, resistance occurred throughout the pandemic and continues into the present. In May, healthcare workers in Xuzhou, Jiangsu went on strike against moves to privatize the public hospital where they worked. Periodic strikes have occurred among food delivery workers against fines and pay cuts. And over the past two months (June and July), there has been a slight increase in the number of labour disputes in the manufacturing and service sectors. Overall, though, no large-scale collective actions have occurred, probably because the economic slowdown has made everyone pessimistic about the prospects of winning any significant gains, coupled with the state's heavy-handed repression of the few struggles that have occurred, which are detailed below.

Worker organising during the pandemic

By *Worker Study Room*, May 2020

This article focuses on workers' organising and actions in China during the pandemic, particularly within the Pearl River Delta (PRD). The article aims to bring together some useful information and make an initial analysis of the situation.

Self-organisation

among ordinary people

The unprecedented health crisis of COVID-19 witnessed the rapid emergence of self-organised mutual aid among residents and students. These included localized organisational efforts by residents of Wuhan and other parts of Hubei, people elsewhere organising from a distance to provide support for healthcare workers and patients in the province, as well as similar local self-organisation in other cities and regions.

There also emerged some temporary organisations and actions related more directly to the interests of workers as such. The most noticeable of these were the “face mask supply groups” providing masks and equipment to sanitation workers such as street-sweepers. The main participants in these groups were students, who investigated the poor safety conditions of the sanitation industry and decided to provide the workers with PPE such as masks and gloves, as well as with educational materials about how to protect oneself during the pandemic.

The formation of the face mask supply groups across the various regions was not the result of any plan made in advance. Instead, these were initiatives seeded online in response to the immediate situation that then bloomed rapidly across the country. The process by which such groups formed in each place thus had a character unique to that location. In some places they formed out of university student groups that were already concerned with social issues, elsewhere they evolved from the aforementioned groups initially focused on sanitation workers, while in still others places groups formed with the involvement of explicitly left-wing students.

The organisational practices of these groups were relatively open. Those who initiated their formation did not exercise absolute authority over the groups within a hierarchical system, and the planning of events and division of labour were decided

through discussion among participants. Many of the founders did not have any experience with social or community work, and some were not even in the locale where the team would be operating but were instead participating online. The groups worked through the democratic, egalitarian participation of all, with enthusiastic volunteers collecting and sharing information day and night.[1]

The face mask supply groups mainly operated online, the whole process was transparent and open, and their activities were not politically sensitive: they did not pull back the dark curtain (exposing secrets of state malfeasance) or provoke negative public opinion, playing a supplementary role to the state’s counter-pandemic work rather than an antagonistic one. The groups also consciously adopted a cautious approach to any possible risks. For example, when it came to fundraising, the volunteer groups paid close heed to the new Charity Law’s strict regulations about what types of entities are allowed to raise funds. Some dealt with this obstacle by affiliating themselves with more established foundations. All of the groups working in this area were highly cognizant of the domestic political situation and avoided unnecessary risks. Even though some of those involved in establishing these groups were known to have been under surveillance by the authorities, the groups were not prevented from functioning.

Online organising

Since face-to-face communication had largely ceased during the pandemic, an array of online activities emerged. Based on our own observations, numerous new groups focused on worker issues have formed. These include: groups that are calling for, organising and conducting online polls to press the government to extend the Spring Festival holiday; groups that have formed to protect worker rights when they resume work; and other groups to share information about trends in the pandemic, protective measures against the virus and policy information. The founders and participants in these groups have

some relationship with pre-existing student groups focused on social issues, have been in worker organisations and include some left-wing activists. The workers in these online groups are from different factories and they are often from different places, meaning that they were not familiar with each other prior to the pandemic.

It was easy for people to participate in groups such as those that were mobilizing to extend the Spring Festival break. This is largely because the goals were clear, the timeframe for action was short, there was not much need to establish deep connections between people involved and it was easy to see a result through online activity. But for groups like those organising to protect workers’ rights and wages when they resume work, it’s only through the workers taking action in their own workplaces that they can resolve the issue. For online organising, where participants are not familiar with each other and are dispersed, it’s difficult to take meaningful action. And this is without even considering the extra difficulties and risks posed by state surveillance. As a result, at this point such groups are primarily involved with providing advice, outlining the situation that workers are facing, and providing a forum for communication.

These groups also play a role in educating and circulating analyses of the unfolding events. The conditions of the pandemic have pushed workers to focus on wider issues than those of their wages and income. Since so many long-standing social crises have now become evident within the more general catastrophe, the tricks of the ruling class have also been made plain for all to see. While ordinarily workers tend to avoid thinking about the impact of current events on their life, it is impossible not to consider the impact of the pandemic on society and on oneself. For example, people are now driven to ask questions like: where did the outbreak come from, and how did it spread? Meanwhile, they begin to contemplate the importance of social security and wonder what a safe return to work might look like.

Activities of Pearl River Delta workers during the pandemic

For the sake of making this narrative clearer, the analysis of the period from January 23 until the time of writing (in May 2020) will be split into three parts more or less corresponding to distinct phases of the pandemic:

(1) Start of the Pandemic: Late January to Early February

(2) First Stage of the Return to Work: Mid-February to Early March

(3) Later Stage of the Return to Work: After Mid-March

Start of the pandemic: late January to early February

Industrial workers in the PRD appeared calm during the relief operations at the beginning of the outbreak.

At the time of the initial outbreak, workers had already left their workplaces for the Spring Festival holidays to visit their hometowns and were therefore dispersed across the country. Thus, most were monitored by their respective neighborhoods or villages, which operated through a program of family-based prevention. Workers who had already had difficulty linking up in an effective way while in the factory were now further scattered apart by the sudden onset of the pandemic. Moreover, many ordinary workers found it difficult to obtain the prophylactic medical resources they needed and to coordinate online. It is therefore not surprising that workers in general appeared to be passive and silent.

Sanitation workers, who have been the focus of much attention during this pandemic, have not undertaken any significant collective action that we know of, despite their working throughout the whole period. Even in areas where there has been a tradition of resistance in the past, the response from sanitation workers has been muted, and other workers who

remained working during the Spring Festival, such as those in transportation and logistics, including delivery workers, have not carried out any significant action aimed at raising protection requirements. Some possible reasons for this might be: When Wuhan was sealed off and news of the pandemic first came out, most people did not have a clear idea of the severity of the new coronavirus and were unaware of the danger. Later, as news of the outbreak spread nationwide through official and private channels, and quarantine control measures were strengthened everywhere, the pandemic did not break out on a large scale outside Hubei. Therefore, the workers who remained working didn't feel very threatened by the disease. This is different from many countries across Europe and the Americas where workers from various industries working in life-threatening situations during the spread of the pandemic went on strike in order to demand protective measures.

Beyond this, sanitation workers in non-infected areas were already in normal times facing occupational health and safety issues such as noncompliance with protective measures. These pre-existing problems only become prominent during outbreaks of infectious diseases, which finally bring them into more widespread attention through the work of such volunteers. For sanitation workers (and similarly for other workers), occupational health and safety issues, while directly related to their own health, belong to a more advanced level of concern than wage issues. Before the workers felt their health was really in danger they generally treated the problem with a somewhat lackadaisical attitude, hoping that dumb luck would protect them (□□□□). Overall, the issue of occupational health and safety is more complex than the issue of wages since it requires that workers grasp more information. This is why systematically organised education efforts are needed for workers to be able to achieve an improvement in this field. The activity of the volunteer face mask supply groups was one such "external" effort directed towards the sanitation workers, providing them with donated equipment and information about

personal protection. Meanwhile, these student volunteers also had an opportunity to step out of their lives, previously focused solely on school, and come into contact with a social group from a very different background. All this is of course still a long way from bringing about a collective action by workers.

A small number of spontaneous actions

A senior employee of a private company in Shenzhen who had already experienced SARS was, upon hearing news about the pandemic in early January, conscientious enough to take the initiative of ordering face masks to protect his coworkers. Because the company was unresponsive, he set up an awareness-raising group for protection measures among his coworkers and started stocking up on masks. When the company restarted operations and demanded workers return to their posts, he again made an appeal to his colleagues to collectively demand that they continue working from home. He reminded the young audience listening to his presentation that: "Our present is your future. Most of the people who graduate will go on to work for someone else. Making money is the only thing bosses care about, not the health of their employees. For us it's a matter of life and death."

There were also frontline workers who used the group to post information about where to locally buy affordable protective equipment, and helping others in the community to obtain these goods at a reasonable price.

Other than this, there were, according to our knowledge and China Labour Bulletin statistics, only a few random wage demands made in this period.

First stage of the return to work: mid-February to

early March

For various reasons, the State Council extended the Spring Festival holiday to February 2nd, with each province setting its own exact time for the resumption of work. Most provinces implemented a gradual return to work beginning no earlier than February 10th (day 17 of the first lunar month), but, because of the pandemic, certain provinces and municipalities postponed the resumption of operations in construction and other industries to a later date.[2] This partial postponement was an official government policy in the form of an executive order that was publicly announced via lower-level government departments. It is unclear how the policy was drawn up, since the process of its formulation was not transparent. However, when coupled with a series of stringent control measures, it did actually help to stem a new outbreak of the pandemic after the return to work, which meant that people returned to work without undue fear and panic over the risks of being infected. Consequently, with the exception of online groups calling for a more general postponement of the return to work altogether, workers' resistance during the initial stage of this period was rather weak and there are no reports of large-scale incidents over issues of protective equipment or health policies in the companies that had resumed production.

To restart work, companies had to comply with protective measures and submit to a series of audits conducted by the local government.[3] If new cases appeared in any company or factory, they were to immediately stop operations and isolate the whole company or even the whole building.[4] In the initial return to work period, neighborhoods and factories were imposing stringent quarantine measures for workers. For example, factories with dormitories demanded that employees remain inside dorm rooms under a lock-down regime. In factories with canteens, the dining tables were slightly modified by adding screens to guarantee separation for individuals sitting down to eat. In factories without canteens, employees were required to eat their meals while scattered outdoors. As a

result, most people were not overly concerned about getting infected upon returning to work. On top of this, there were punitive measures for firms that didn't follow the rules: if some small companies restarted work in violation of the policy, workers would complain to the subdistrict office or to the management of the industrial park and the company would be penalized and instructed to rectify the situation. There were occasional reports in the media of factories, training schools, places of entertainment and similar enterprises which had restarted production early, and in such cases the persons in charge were put under "administrative detention" (行政拘留).[5] The government, whether central or local, adopted stringent measures in order to more tightly control potential new outbreaks, and there were many channels for complaints. In particular, people could use WeChat to directly reach relevant departments and log complaints on any manner of incident related to the pandemic.[6] To resolve issues pertaining to the revival of production, workers could now (in contrast with the normal situation) more easily complain when factories violated regulations. The result was that collective actions became less likely.

In this period the main conflicts were to be found in the necessity of simultaneously controlling the pandemic and restarting production. There were only a limited number of companies truly capable of realizing an all-round return to work. Besides strict control measures and complicated return to work procedures, the temporary shutdown of public transport in Hubei, Henan, Liaoning, Shandong, Hebei and other provinces as well as certain cities also significantly hindered the flow of workers back to the factories. Many cities and provinces simply imposed a two week self-quarantine period before returning workers could go back to work.[7] On top of this, many workers were afraid of getting infected on their journey back or in the factory itself and so refused to return. This meant that many companies were unable to fully restart their operation even after being officially allowed to do so. In order to both control the pandemic and

address the sudden labour shortage, many places did all they could to make sure that factories got a sufficient supply of labour power and chartered transport to bring workers from labour-exporting localities to factories in the PRD and the Yangtze Delta.[8] At the same time factories increased their drive for new staff through methods like giving rewards to recruiters. Enterprises like the Shenzhen Foxconn plant even adopted recruitment strategies such as the "I want to hire" (我想 hiring) campaign, during which they promised every newcomer that came into the company before the 31st of March a record high bonus of up to 7,110 yuan.[9]

Later stage of the return to work: after mid-March

Outstanding wage disputes

Wages have been the principle concern of the class struggle between labour and capital. As soon as the phased-in return to work was announced, then, the calculation of wages became the focal point for everyone involved, with all kinds of lawyers swarming online to decipher the policy. Even though the Department of Human Resources and Social Security immediately released an even more clear explanation of the official document—in particular clarifying the expectations in regard to workers who fall sick and pay during periods of isolation—this didn't prevent companies from passing the costs of pandemic-related work stoppages and isolation onto their workers, with a number of small enterprises even using particularly bizarre methods to suppress workers' gains.

Sure enough, as workers (now going in March) obtained their February salaries one after the other, inquiries about wages began to increase, as did online lectures about how exactly to calculate them. A few relatively large-scale enterprises which were already in line with regulations correctly understood the situation and kept their wage calculations more or less in line with the official legislation,

leaving their employees very little legal room to challenge them. That said, there's also been news of some workers' demands pushing beyond the provisions laid out in the law. For example, workers at Foxconn in Shenzhen made formal complaints through their [official ACFTU] union in order to change the company's policy of forcing employees to use their yearly vacation time to cover their period of isolation.[10] By contrast, those small enterprises that were already violating regulations on a day to day basis prior to the pandemic continued as usual, confiscating wages and generally leaving workers' pay in a state of disarray. Wage arrears, lowered pay during the extended isolation period, or even treating the isolation period for migrants returning to work from outside the area as if it were a leave of absence for a personal matter—these were the main issues being discussed and reported by workers.

The continued blockage of roads prevented many workers registered in Hubei from returning to work elsewhere, making the problem of severe wage arrears and reduced pay even more widespread. Three such workers employed at an underwear factory in Shenzhen didn't receive their back wages after returning to work, and were instead told that they needed to apply for personal leave for February and March. Similar allegations spread through online media, where it was claimed that some large-scale enterprises in Shenzhen were docking the wages of Hubei-registered workers who had spent their two months of isolation in their hometowns to a degree beyond that experienced by other workers, with the lowest only being paid a mere 600 yuan. As one worker lamented: "The pandemic has already caused such suffering for us Hubei people, this wage issue is only adding oil to the fire!" The companies then played further tricks, not even sending the reduced wages to workers who were in quarantine in Hubei, or asking other employees to "donate" to support their coworkers. Certainly, many enterprises suffered serious losses due to the shutdown, but how much could they really recoup by docking wages? In reality, the situation is summarized well by one

worker, in a report made to the labour bureau complaining of a firm not in line with regulations: "It's not that the company is not turning a profit, just that it's making less than before."

On the 20th of March, workers at the electric car firm BYD—which had just received a 2.3 billion yuan subsidy from the government—made headlines for unfurling a protest banner. As one employee explained: "Our bonuses were all cut: bonuses for productivity, for working time and for performance points.[11] Then the one week of doubled salary that we'd originally promised was cancelled on the 16th, making everybody angry." [12] Although BYD officials have declared that the version of events reported online is untrue, this and other grievances from BYD employees continues to be posted on places such as Baidu forums.

Throughout March, dissatisfaction among workers generalized due to declining income. But the actions ignited by this dissatisfaction don't actually appear to have been very aggressive. While there are, for example, reports of a thousand workers at an electronics factory in Shenzhen protesting the reduction in pandemic pay by collectively requesting a leave of absence or simply skipping work, it has been far more common for workers to seek formal legal advice, file official complaints, or make allegations online.[13] Some possible reasons for this are that, for the most part, the issues only really applied to income for a short period of time, and that everyone could see the losses being taken by enterprises under the pandemic with their own eyes. The result was that neither expectations nor motivation were particularly high.

In addition to this, the Labour Bureau was already prepared for battle, ready to prevent and control such disputes between capital and labour at every level of government, from the central state down to local administration. As conflicts arose, they all coordinated to release a series of guidelines and measures to be used in managing industrial relations.[14] At the same time, the lowest-level government agencies strengthened the forces they'd deployed to resolve such

disputes, or even broke new ground by setting up online platforms for mediation or having local level officials mediate directly in order to ease the tension between capital and labour.[15] This was all particularly effective in dissolving workers' shared grievances into an array of individual complaints, thereby reducing the potential for collective action.

The high tide of lost work and halted production

The severe scarcity of work experienced in February continued into the first third of March. As the virus spread to Europe and the US, the automobile, clothing and electronics industries were greatly impacted, and the effects were worst for companies engaged in export processing and foreign trade.[16] Gradually, the common practice of working regular overtime became more rare, hiring paused, and then production. On the internet and within workers' groups on social media, it became common to see reports about several months of time off being circulated.[17] Rumors emerged online that, due to the steep decline in Apple sales, Foxconn workers would be asked to take four months off starting in May. Foxconn's official response to these rumors was that "the factory districts of mainland China are currently all operating as usual, and there simply isn't a situation of mass layoffs or forced vacations." But regardless, large portions of the country had stopped hiring new workers, and the decline in overtime was an undeniable fact.[18]

Aside from compulsory leave, some companies also used other methods to cut down on labour costs during the production stoppage, including encouraging workers to resign or to request an unpaid absence. Thus, questions of pay during the shutdown, alongside both overt and covert layoffs, ensured that wage demands would once again become prominent. At one technology firm in Guangzhou, employees alleged that the company requested every department place 15-20% of its staff on 6 months leave until orders began coming in again, at which point they'd be expected to return to work. Meanwhile, the company planned to immediately

deduct the 6 months from the workers' social insurance funds in advance for the time they'd be on "vacation." [19] This made the workers placed on leave absolutely indignant. On the one hand, they felt that it was simply unfair, but on the other, it was more than unfair, since the company was making cuts to their social insurance at the same time that their income had been reduced to an unsustainable level. Some workers complained to the Labour Bureau, but they were simply told that the company was within its rights to arrange time off, and all that could ultimately be done was to strive for regular social insurance deductions, as opposed to the advance deductions announced by the company.

In the midst of all this there were also workers who were still on the job, but even they didn't have it easy. Employers used every method to reduce their official staff numbers, leaving those who remained with heavier burdens. The remaining work intensified, and workers grew dissatisfied even as they went along with it. Complaints arose in every industry. Those heard in manufacturing were a mirror image of those heard in food service: the bosses said that business was not good and therefore they had to cut staff, but, in reality, the amount of work for those left never actually decreased that much. They didn't get any days off, and they didn't get paid for overtime either. If anyone asked for more money, the bosses would just say, "Get the damn work done or go home—there are tons of people out there waiting to take your place."

Meanwhile, news of numerous bankruptcies began to arise. It was reported that the Fantastic Toys (玩具) factory, which had been in operation in Dongguan for 30 years, began to see its cash flow fragment. [20] Early on in the pandemic, the boss had briefly disappeared, becoming difficult to contact. He finally reappeared on the 24th of March, only to announce that the factory was shutting down. Negotiations between workers owed backpay and the district labour bureau ended with no results, and when they went to file a complaint with the Dongguan city labour bureau they were met by attackers of unknown

origin (maybe thugs hired by the company, possibly cops out of uniform), clashed with them and were dispersed, some suffering injuries. [21] Nor was this an isolated example. According to the National Enterprise Bankruptcy Disclosure Platform, from January 1st to March 15th of this year, there were already 8,243 cases of bankruptcy. In the corresponding time period for 2019, there had been 4,895 and for the same period in 2018, only 2,078. [22]

Confronted with the rapidly changing situation in these first few months—which saw declining overtime, work stoppages and layoffs, all resulting in lowered income—it seems that workers were still in a period of adaptation, so the forms of struggle that emerged were largely defensive in character. According to statistics gathered by the China Labour Bulletin, collective actions by workers from January to April of 2020 were fewer than those seen in the same time period in 2019. As in the past, it may be that there have been some more limited collective actions on the part of workers at certain enterprises that have not yet been picked up by the news and have therefore been difficult to hear about. But it may also simply be that, up to this point, no large or sustained collective actions have taken shape. For most workers who've suddenly become unemployed or been asked to take compulsory time off, the normal response has been to find temporary work of some sort in order to supplement their income or to return to rural hometowns in order to reduce their cost of living, all the while waiting for the situation to improve before they begin looking for work again.

Comparing the current crisis with that of 2008-2009

There are many comparisons being made between the present crisis and that of 2008-2009. During that crisis, many industries made cuts to workers' conditions and wages, factories ceased production, and there was a wave of closures across the PRD. At that time

workers were also dissatisfied with their situation, but most chose to put up with it and worker protests went into a lull. However, as the economy picked up again, workers started a new cycle of actions.

So, how does the current situation compare? If we analyze the conditions of employment, wage income, commodity prices and other elements related to workers' lives, we find at least the following points:

In 2009, while there was also a significant number of workers who lost their jobs and returned to their hometowns and villages, many of those workers would have had some amount of savings. And following the subsequent and substantial state investment in infrastructure, the renewed stimulus for domestic demand, and the recovery of the global economy, it wasn't long before workers could find a job again. But the economic prospects for the PRD today are far less hopeful. After all, at that time the Chinese economy was still in a period of growth and development. But since 2014 the domestic economy has entered a weaker "new normal," characterized by a declining growth rates. The impact of the pandemic has already caused a huge reduction in income and we are seeing the beginning of widespread bankruptcy of businesses large and small. At this point it is unclear when these conditions will ease.

As a result, it seems that the unemployment situation in the PRD (and we might even say for the Chinese economy as a whole) is far more serious this time around. Even though the national unemployment rate for March 2020 was only 5.9%, this is still an increase of 0.7% on the March reading for 2019. But according to a report by Zhengtai Securities, in reality the number of unemployed has already surpassed 70 million people, in which case the unemployment rate would be 20.5%. [23] The latter figure is more in accordance with what is generally understood about the current situation.

Coupled with the already widespread condition of temporary and insecure employment, it will be a long time

In sum, the impact of job losses and declining real incomes on workers' lives is much greater than before. Each of these factors has increased the hesitancy and concern of workers to act and has repressed the beginning of a renewed period of struggle. However, the willingness of Chinese workers, particularly those in the PRD who have fought directly before has not changed. Viewed from another perspective: given the seriousness of the conditions and the caution that workers will take in planning collective actions, the result will likely be that their resistance becomes better organised.

- [8] "China's major labour exporting provinces and cities open special trains to help migrant workers return to work across provinces" 中国劳务输出大省和地区为返乡务工人员开专列 中国劳务输出大省和地区为返乡务工人员开专列
- [9] "Apple's anxiety behind the 300 yuan-a-day recruitment rush" 300 元日招聘冲刺背后苹果的焦虑 <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1660696997818355674&wfr=spider&for=pc>
- [10] Long Xiaodong, "Under Worker Pressure, Foxconn Provides Restitution for Lost Vacation Pay", Weixin, 29 February 2020. <<https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/IloUonAR...>>
- [11] TRANSLATOR: Many Chinese companies' wage systems are fairly complicated and localized to that particular company. Often, various "points" systems are used to calculate workers' final wages in addition to their base salary. This is similar to a productivity or performance "bonus" being added, but with the "bonus" often being a substantial portion of their final income. Conceptually, it's most similar to working on a commission system in sales or relying on tips in the service industry, but translated into the factory production context.
- [12] "Investigating the 'Rights Abuse' at BYD: Employees' wages for February are a mere 300 yuan, while the company just received a 2.3 billion stimulus," ifeng, 24 March, 2020. <<http://finance.ifeng.com/c/7v6tEviewja4>>
- [13] Long Xiaodong, "After protests at several electronics factories in Longhua: What is the result?", Wexin, 20 March 2020. <<https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/InUiAYCp...>>
- [14] "Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security's best practices in the workplace with regard to the novel coronavirus epidemic", Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security of the People's Republic of China, 23 January 2020. <<http://www.mohrss.gov.cn/SYrlzyhshb...>>
- [15] "Ningbo Comprehensive Plan for

Prevention and Control: Guaranteeing Harmonious and Stable Labour Relations during the Pandemic”, Zhejiang Province Human Resources and Social Security Department, 17 March 2020, <<http://www.zjhrss.gov.cn/art/2020/3..>>

[16] “Key overseas parts suppliers halt production, revealing the Chinese auto industry’s long-standing bottleneck”, Baidu, 11 May 2020, <<https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=16..>> ; Jia Linwei and Huang Shan, “With foreign orders dropping precipitously, what can bosses in the clothing sector do aside from halting production and laying off workers?”, Sina, 02 April 2020. <<https://fashion.sina.com.cn/s/in/20...>>

[17] “Notice: Because of declining orders due to the pandemic situation, work and production will be halted for 6-9 months!”, Kuaibao, 29 March 2020. <<https://kuaibao.qq.com/s/20200329A0...>>

[18] “Foxconn: Mandatory Overtime, Reduced Salaries and No More Overtime”, QQ News, 07 May 2020. <<https://new.qq.com/omn/20200507/202...>>

[19] According to the relevant law, social insurance taxes are supposed to

be withheld from an employee’s pay each month and transferred to the Social Insurance Department. Moreover, if the employee’s wages are lowered upon their return from time off, the amount they pay in social insurance taxes should be lowered to a comparable degree.

[20] TRANSLATOR: The original Chinese reads 供应链. The implication here is that the company was dependent on a complicated chain of financial transactions, and when one link in that chain shattered, it broke the company’s overall cash flow. Reading the sources cited here, and other related stories about the factory closure, it appears that this Hong Kong-owned firm would use its regular big orders received from Europe as collateral to secure loans to fund production, many of which used the local government (not that of Dongguan city, it seems, but the even more local government of Chashan Town, within the city) as the ultimate guarantor of the loan. This is one reason that the municipal authorities got involved so early and directly in the case. In general, this is also a good example of the fragile financial character and generally low profitability of many firms such as this, a typical old-style Pearl River Delta factory, financed from Hong Kong and clearly reliant on collusion with local government officials who may have originally had some sort of

family ties to the original investors.

[21] “Well-known old toy factory in Dongguan goes out of business, the employees seek payment and are assaulted” 玩具厂倒闭员工讨薪被殴打, 25 March 2020, <http://news.ctoy.com.cn/show-35675.html>

[22] For a summary, see: “Latest Update: Well-Known Firms going Bankrupt due to the Pandemic!”, CBF Trade Focus, 13 May 2020. <<https://dy.163.com/article/FCGK7SDN...>>

[23] “How high is China’s unemployment rate?” 中国宏观经济政策报告 2020, Zhongtai Securities 中泰证券, 24 April 2020.

[24] Data sources: National Bureau of Statistics 国家统计局, <http://data.stats.gov.cn/ks.htm?cn=A01&zb=A1201>; 国家统计局2020年2月CPI和PPI, Sina Finance, 11 March 2020, <http://finance.sina.com.cn/money/future/roll/2020-03-11/doc-iimxyqvz9563625.shtml>; 国家统计局, 14 March 2020, <http://news.ynet.com/2020/03/14/2452357t70.html>

2月CPI环比5.2% 2月CPI同比21.9% 2月PPI同比3.5% 2月CPI环比6% 2月CPI同比6%

Authoritarianism & Lockdown Time in Occupied Kashmir and India

28 July 2020, by **Mona Bhan, Purnima Bose**

In India the context involves growing Hindu majoritarianism materialized in a national-security state intent on demonizing Muslims and stripping them of citizenship. It is also a state determined to crush Kashmiri aspirations to sovereignty.

On March 24, 2020 Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a lockdown

of 21 days for India’s 1.3 billion population as a critical public health intervention to strengthen India’s “war” against COVID-19. Giving four hours notice before the order would go into effect, Modi’s abrupt decision to “ban” Indians from leaving their homes, and to “put every state, every district, every lane, every village”

“under lockdown,” bore striking parallels with his earlier crisis management measures, which have garnered considerable criticism across international print and media outlets. [9]

Among them are Modi’s perilous policy of demonetization (e.g. pulling more than 50% of the country’s

currency out of circulation) and the attendant decimation of the Indian economy at the greatest cost to the poor and marginal, along with the abrogation of Kashmir's quasi-autonomous status, which has intensified Indian military repression of Kashmiri Muslims and legally sanctioned India's Hindu settler colonial project in the region. What might seem like Modi's thoughtless or sudden string of decisions over the past seven years since his ascent to India's prime ministership have moved India closer to the reality of an authoritarian Hindu Rashtra [Hindu Nation] — one crisis at a time.

We perceive authoritarianism through its spatial effects --- the shrinking of space for free speech, activism, and public dissent; the retreat of unionizing and labor protests; and the expansion of carceral spaces through prisons, detention centers, and policing and surveillance infrastructure.

But so too is time marked under authoritarianism. Our essay explores how the Indian state manipulates three simultaneous and competing notions of time to popularize and naturalize Hindu majoritarianism: authoritarian time (compressed historical time), Hindu nationalist time (elongated mythic sacred time), and Kashmiri time (militarized lockdown time).

“Efficient” Compression of Time

As suggested by the brief period between when Modi first announced a COVID-19 lockdown and its implementation a mere four hours later, authoritarian time is compressed time. Authoritarian time does not allow for a lag between decree and implementation. It eschews the time needed for democratic deliberation, which is perceived as an impediment to efficient governance, or worse still, as a threat to the social and political order.

Under the guise of crises,

authoritarian governments can compress time, manipulating it in ways to render decisions that are long in the making seem like spur-of-the-moment measures taken to protect the public interest.

In India, Hindu zealots have attempted to rid India's body politic of Muslims through pogroms, massacres, detentions and public lynchings. They have been encouraged by several political parties which have manufactured socio-political and economic crises over the years.

In the last seven years in particular, each crisis has demanded an exceptional response that upends democratic time, which is by virtue of its process and character, slow and deliberate. In its place, we have the compressed time of a crisis legitimizing quick and sudden decisions. The compression of time becomes an expression of dictatorial agency and sovereign power.

When Modi placed India in a complete lockdown, he brought the entire country to a halt, snatching away people's fundamental rights to secure food, a livelihood, medicine and healthcare. He criminalized those who were unable to comply with his orders.

Deprived of daily wages in the metropolitan cities they helped build, migrant workers were forced to walk hundreds of miles to reach their homes in the many villages and towns across India. Devastating images of hungry and broken migrants revealed the disproportionate burden of Modi's dictatorial will on the country's most vulnerable populations.

Since the big Indian lockdown -- ostensibly meant to protect human life -- hunger, thirst, sickness, and road and train accidents have brutally killed hundreds of migrant workers.

Manipulating Mythic Time

Insofar as the compression of historical time occurs against the elongation of mythic sacred time, a fundamental contradiction informs Modi's exercise of power.

Modi belongs to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), whose socio-political vision is inspired by its parent organization, the Hindu militant group, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Since its inception almost a century ago, the RSS has demonized Muslims and Christians in India as bloodthirsty invaders and rapists.

Like fascist movements in general, the RSS's temporal orientation is toward a mythic distant past. Their members look with nostalgia to an era represented in the Hindu epic the Ramayana, which dates to 1400 BCE. That epic ends with the restoration of Ram's throne and a kingdom kept in line through bodily surveillance. Female chastity, as represented in the fate of Sita, Ram's wife, is exalted even though it comes at the expense of her life.

For members of the RSS, governance modeled on Ram's rule (“Ram Rajya,” in popular parlance) is highly desirable. Such a government is based ostensibly on the Hindu virtues of honesty and morality led by a revered king in the mold of the God Ram.

Indeed, Prime Minister Modi explicitly invoked the Ramayana in his appeal to Indians to think of the COVID-19 lockdown as a “Lakshman Rekha.” He warned them that a “single step outside” their homes could “bring a dangerous pandemic like Corona inside.” [10] His choice of vocabulary referenced the famous scene in the epic in which Sita defies her brother-in-law's orders to stay indoors, and consequently is abducted by the demon Ravana for her intransigence.

With one phrase, Modi simultaneously injected a sectarian note in the discourse of public health and managed to reinforce patriarchal norms that restrict women to their homes. Predictably, following the Prime Minister's lockdown order, DD National, India's state-owned television station, began broadcasting reruns of the serial adaptation of the Ramayana, contributing to the effort of making Hinduism even more ubiquitous. [11]

The television serial's first run in 1987-1988, according to media

scholar Arvind Rajagopal, “violated a decades-old taboo on religious partisanship, and Hindu nationalists made the most of the opportunity. What resulted was perhaps the largest campaign in post-Independence times, irrevocably changing the complexion of Indian politics. The telecast of a religious epic to popular acclaim created the sense of a nation coming together, seeming to confirm the idea of a Hindu awakening.” [12]

In 1992, when a Hindu mob destroyed the Babri Masjid, a 13th century mosque rumored to have been built on Ram’s birthplace, many of the religious fanatics were dressed like characters from the televised Ramayana.(5) Today Modi and his Minister of Home Affairs Amit Shah are sometimes respectively described in the idiom of the epic as Ram and his brother Lakshman. [13]

In Modi’s and the BJP’s vision of Ram Rajya, Muslims are the perpetual outsiders who must come to terms with their newfound status as India’s non-citizens. In 2019, the BJP government passed two parliamentary acts, the National Register of Citizens and the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), which could render two million of India’s 200 million Muslims stateless. [14]

Apart from its constitutional provisions, Ram Rajya is also instituted through strict cultural sanctions, which include among other things proscriptions against beef eating. Muslims are now routinely lynched publicly by self-appointed gau rakshaks, protectors of Hinduism’s sacred cows.

Cow protection is a constitutive aspect of patriarchal authority and a defining feature of a robust Hindu state. Both of these, Hindu ideologues believe, are critical to India’s transformation into a Ram Rajya. [15]

Modi’s lockdown order in March 2020 appears engineered to break the massive sit-in protests against CAA, which started in early December 2019. Then hundreds of Muslim women from the Shaheen Bagh locality of North Delhi defiantly took over the streets, emphatically opposing the prime minister’s persistent attempts to

portray them as victims of Muslim patriarchy.

Even the brutality of an anti-Muslim pogrom that killed at least 53 people and injured hundreds of others in Delhi, in February 2020 during President Donald Trump’s visit, failed to end the longest protest in India’s history.

But in March 2020, after Modi announced a ban on public gatherings, hundreds of police in riot gear forced protestors to empty the streets, destroying their tents and defacing their posters and billboards.

In addition, the police detained and jailed many protestors. The lockdown served as a lakshman rekha -- meant to contain the unruly bodies of Muslim women who had dared to challenge a tyrant.

At the same time, the lines of surveillance were drawn even closer to home for many Indians when the government made it mandatory to download a COVID-19 contact-tracing mobile application, called Aarogya Setu. That name evokes the Hindu philosophical tradition of yoga.

“Aarogya Setu” in Sanskrit means a bridge to health (or freedom from disease). For many critics, the app is a “sophisticated surveillance system,” which can be retooled for targeted discrimination by monitoring, regulating, and containing the movement of some groups more than others, and forcibly quarantining unwanted social elements. [16]

The Sanskrit-Hindu naming of a health-surveillance app advances the BJP’s overall mission to portray India as an entrepreneurial mix of Hindu modernity and ancient Vedic wisdom. In the middle of the lockdown, during one of his television and radio addresses, Mann ki Baat, Modi reminded India’s youth of the perils of forgetting India’s “strengths and glorious traditions.” Modi urged them to return to Ayurvedic practices, popular among some Hindus, to strengthen their immunity against the virus.

Scapegoating Muslims

The Hinduization of the vocabulary of COVID-19 is also evident in the scapegoating of Muslims as vectors of infection for the virus and the creation of terms such as “corona jihad,” “bio jihad,” and “thook jihad (spit jihad).” [17]

Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai explains that “One of the key features of anti-Muslim sentiment in India for quite a long time has been the idea that Muslims themselves are a kind of infection in the body politic. So there’s a kind of affinity between this long-standing image and the new anxieties surrounding coronavirus.” [18]

An Islamic convention held in mid March 2020, which had previously been authorized by the Indian government, provided a convenient origin story among police and senior BJP officials for the spread of the pandemic.

Some 8000 members of the Tablighi Jamaat, including several hundred people from abroad, gathered in Delhi for their annual conference. When it emerged that the virus had taken root among attendees, the ruling BJP moved swiftly to quarantine members and their contacts in 15 states. A cash reward was even offered for people to report information on suspected conference goers. .” [19]

Although the ruling party had also authorized other large religious gatherings, BJP political rallies, and conferences in this period, it singled out the Tablighi Jamaat as a source of infection. Notwithstanding the pathetically low rates of testing for the virus, Tablighi Jamaat conference goers were administered the test and results announced in the government’s daily briefings, giving the impression that Muslims were the source for the majority of infections.

As economist Saugato Datta points out, “This is basically sampling bias: Since people from this one cluster have been tested at very high rates, and overall testing is low, it is hardly surprising that a large proportion of

overall positives is attributed to this cluster.” [20]

Sampling bias thus provided false evidence for BJP and government officials to make irresponsible and incendiary pronouncements, claiming the existence of an “Islamic conspiracy” determined to enact “corona terrorism.” [21] Senior BJP officials accused members of the Tablighi Jamaat of committing a “Talibani crime,” which consisted of launching its membership as “human bombs” in “the guise of coronavirus patients.” [22] Some party members even called for Tablighi Jamaat leaders to be shot and hanged as punishment. [23]

In a now familiar routine, social media enthusiastically began spreading hatred; vile hashtags such as “#biojihad,” “#coronajihad,” and “#TablighiJamaatVirus” began to proliferate on twitter. This was augmented by the circulation of the usual bogus doctored footage of Muslims purporting to spit and sneeze on others in order to spread the virus. [24]

The Islamophobic social media barrage was accompanied by physical attacks on Muslims rumored to have attended the Tablighi Jamaat Convention, by social and consumer boycotts of Muslim merchants, and by violence directed against Muslims attempting to deliver food aid.

Kashmir: Militarized Lockdown Time

Since Prime Minister Modi ordered a lockdown of the entire country, the English-language press has laudably published a significant number of articles critiquing this move as an expression of his authoritarianism. These articles have emphasized his exploitation of the pandemic to further marginalize and rid the country of Muslims.

In their critiques, Indian commentators link Modi’s lockdown to the BJP’s actions in Kashmir last summer. For them, the BJP’s strategic

experiments have perhaps revealed the illiberalism of India’s democracy. Many of these Indians subscribe to what we might call “liberal national time” and track the emergence of Hindu nationalism and the BJP to the 1980s.

However, the history of Hindu authoritarianism in Kashmir is much older. It dates back to 1846 when the British sold Kashmir to Hindu Dogra kings for 7.5 million dollars. In 1947 the Hindu King Hari Singh provisionally acceded the Muslim-majority state of Jammu and Kashmir to India. Since then India has tried all means possible to deny Kashmiris their right to self-determination, granted to them through several United Nations Security Council resolutions.

Kashmiris realized long ago that India’s democratic experiment was from its inception a colossal failure. But the darkest phase of India’s rule in Kashmir was inaugurated on August 5, 2019, when India revoked Kashmir’s semi-autonomous status.

The Indian COVID-19 lockdown was preceded by the longest ever known military lockdown and communications blackout in Kashmir. During this period people had no access to telephones or internet. They struggled to buy basic medical supplies and stay connected with their family and friends.

Hundreds of mainstream politicians were imprisoned and thousands of Kashmiris, often young boys, were tortured and illegally detained in prisons across India.

While India restored cellular phones and 2G internet connectivity on January 25, 2020, six months after the beginning of the clampdown, Kashmiris continue to be denied high-speed internet. This makes it difficult for medical professionals in Kashmir to tackle the pandemic.

For Kashmiris, in other words, India’s big lockdown is neither spectacular nor out of the ordinary; nor is it sudden nor immediate. This lockdown too, like the others preceding it, is experienced as a continuum that merges and fuses with previous

moments of curfews and shutdowns.

Just as the virus can be superimposed on other preexisting conditions, making some people more vulnerable than others, so too is the COVID-19 lockdown superimposed on the Indian military’s lockdown. As a result Kashmiris are even more at risk of injury and harm. These superimposed lockdowns lose their distinctive characteristics, in part because the regulations and conditions of a military occupation never cease to operate. Their violence too continues unabated.

Kashmiri journalists have tirelessly documented how India’s big lockdown has expanded the scale of police and military operations against Kashmiri civilians. Umar, Rauf, and Haroon report that the police’s powers have intensified because of the pandemic, with many Kashmiris now being arrested for flouting stay-at-home orders.

The police use a militarized surveillance mechanism to track “Covid Suspects,” (18) while the military has escalated its cordon and search operations in which Indian soldiers drag people out of their homes in routine night raids, destroy their fields, and burn down their houses, rendering many Kashmiri families homeless. [25]

Pandemic lockdowns typically construct homes as safe spaces (a debatable proposition), yet under military occupation the home can become a frightening place.

Violence enters the home through the bullets that penetrate its walls, the soldiers who break down its doors, and the bombs that flatten its rooms, maiming and killing those inside. The proclamation of lockdowns and curfews in the name of maintaining law and order becomes one more way for states to enact terror on those who oppose their presence.

How then do we understand a lockdown order issued by the Indian government in the name of public health in a context like Kashmir where the state’s agenda revolves around terrorizing the population rather than protecting it? For Kashmiris, there are

no safe spaces under the Indian occupation.

Whether in the streets or in the home, they are targets of state violence manifest in both deliberate acts and apparently accidental ones (such as stray bullets that injure and kill). Such is the character of daily life in a militarized zone with the highest density of troops in the world.

Time in Stasis

Against the backdrop of authoritarian

time (compressed historical time) and Hindu nationalist time (elongated mythic sacred time), Kashmiris continue to live in “lockdown time.” Confined to their homes, they experience time as a perpetual present. One day blurs into the next with little to distinguish yesterday from today and from tomorrow.

Lockdown time is time in stasis. Even before the current lockdown, visual representations of time in Kashmir depicted the future as blocked. As cultural critic Deepti Misri points out, Kashmiris experience time as a “listless passage” with “temporal

stasis” shaping their daily lives under conditions of military oppression. [26]

In the current lockdown as the occupying regime has scaled up its violent infrastructure, static time makes it even harder to imagine alternative futures. Yet grounds for optimism remain, existing in the very real possibility of an autocratic, occupying state brought down by a virus and its own hubris. The hope for dignity and democracy in Kashmir and India might very well depend on it.

[Against the Current](#)

The pandemic has exposed the nakedness of European neoliberalism

27 July 2020, by **Éric Toussaint, Miguel Urbán Crespo**

What is the objective of the Covid Tax initiative at the European level and at the level of specific states?

Through this last decade, we have seen how banks were rescued by the European institutions and national governments. While millions of families were allowed to founder, the peoples of southern Europe were subjected to a real neoliberal shock doctrine and interventions in their economies, with a de facto suspension of their sovereignty. Ten years that have been a lost decade for the popular classes, but a time of gains for large corporations who have continued to increase their profits and power. A time marked by the combination of scarcity and inequality, where the loss of weight of labour income in favour of capital stands in a particularly striking way. A time of accelerated oligarchizing of power, a phenomenon that is simultaneously result, cause and central axis of the new historical cycle that Europe in general and Spain in particular are experiencing.

Tax evasion and avoidance by large fortunes and multinationals are at the

heart of both the dizzying rise in inequality worldwide and the increasing financial shortfalls of states. The EU's own economic architecture encourages, within a framework of freedom of capital movement and without fiscal harmonization, internally disparate fiscal regimes, thus promoting a permanent fiscal devaluation. In the same way, it has its own offshore structures and a regulatory framework whose unevenness, permissive nature and stimuli in the shadows enhance this evasion and avoidance, which in fact only benefits big capital, rentiers and richer families, to the detriment of the popular majority. A European project of inequality, of millionaires at the expense of millions of poor people.

But as an additional consequence, the increasing concentration of income and wealth was also the cause and engine of the crisis that we have not yet emerged from before we see the next one arrive. The economic policies applied by the Community institutions and by the governments of the member states have produced a massive transfer of resources from the bottom up. A socialization of losses

before, during and after the crisis. And now, with the one that is coming, what?

If we want history to be different this time, we have to stand up firmly to the revolt of the privileged: that handful of billionaires and multinationals that refuse to pay taxes, practicing a real fiscal terrorism with the complicity of governments and the major parties, while dedicating itself to denouncing or directly threatening those who denounce their practices of embezzlement of public finances.

Because facing the looming social pandemic inevitably involves the fight against inequality, of all the growing, plural and interconnected inequalities, intervening in the realities that are the source and reflection of that inequality, such as taxation, precariousness, austerity or corporate power. In short, putting the redistribution of wealth and resources back at the centre of the debate as the central axis of an eco-socialist program. This is the main objective of the Covid Tax: to intervene in the public debate on post-covid reconstruction with a concrete

proposal that places the distribution of wealth as a central element against the prevailing neoliberal logic that only discusses the debt model as the only way to increase spending. At the European level, the Covid Tax is introduced precisely in this debate on the mutualisation or otherwise of debts, on the financing of the reconstruction fund, proposing a concrete initiative at European level that collides with the EU's own architecture from a redistributive, supportive and internationalist perspective. A way to challenge the EU, but also to build a different Europe from mobilization around a concrete proposal that should not stop there, but should evolve towards a social emergency program to face the crisis.

In fact, in the Spanish state, through Anticapitalistas, we launched the idea of a Covid Tax within the framework of a broader campaign entitled "*¿Que Pague los Ricos!*" ("Make the Rich Pay!"), where we address questions of taxation and distribution of wealth, nationalization of strategic sectors of the economy, of distribution of employment and reduction of work time, and of change of productive model. Starting with the Covid Tax has allowed us to place in public debate and in the whole of the left of the Spanish state the need for the distribution of wealth. In such a way that the whole of the left has reappropriated the idea with different formulations, to such an extent that even the PSOE has been forced to go out in public rejecting the different proposals for taxes on large fortunes and corporate profits.

The importance of taxing the rich and big companies is understood, but why go into detail about the percentage?

We have been on the defensive for three decades. Precisely because we are in the process of reconfiguration, we have to move the tab. More biting than licking our wounds. Many of the neoliberal consensuses are in question today. It is time to practice a shock doctrine against the elites and in favour of those below. To put the distribution of wealth and jobs on the table as a central element of political discussion; to openly ask who will pay

for the next crisis; to point to the revolt of the privileged who feel they have the right not to pay taxes or to hide their wealth in fiscal sewers. But that window won't stay open long. We have already seen how long the promises of "re-foundation of capitalism" made by Sarkozy and company in 2008 lasted, how in the end it translated into a twist on the same policies that had led us to disaster.

That is why we believed that we needed more than just slogans or manifestos about the crisis and its alternatives. But it is also a concrete, grounded, urgent and useful tool, one that aims high: so high that it questions the model of construction of neoliberal Europe or, what is practically the same thing, that it questions the increasing hoarding of all resources by a dangerous minority. In the fight for this other Europe of which we speak so much, the fight against inequality and the distribution of wealth will be central. Obviously, the application of these European emergency COVID-19 taxes will not suffice for this battle. The challenge is much broader. But you have to start somewhere. And perhaps it is time to put concrete proposals on the table. We have to put the fight for the distribution of wealth at the centre of debate and political action. Only in this way can we ensure that this time the crisis is not paid for by the popular classes. This time let the rich pay. That is the big idea that can pull the rest. The percentages are technical questions, important without a doubt, but they do not mobilize.

What is your position on what needs to be done regarding tax havens?

Tax evasion and avoidance are not isolated or conjunctural cases: they involve a structural phenomenon of the liquid capitalism of our time, closely linked to the neoliberal offensive that has plagued our economies for decades. A network of avoidance and evasion that could not function without a network of tax havens outside of tax obligations. And we say "lairs", if not directly "sewers", because to call them "tax havens" would be to accept the grammar of the same dangerous minority for whom

those places are havens. Thanks to these places where the *lex mercatoria* prevails over any other right, creative accounting and legal loopholes, a handful of privileged people have found numerous fissures to hide or conceal a substantial proportion of their fortunes. And today the entire system is leaking water from those cracks. According to all the studies, there has never been as much money in tax havens as today. The fight against these fiscal sewers should today be a central element in the fight against inequality and for democracy. A fight that we can start by implementing a series of concrete measures that attack the root of the problem in various spheres and levels of action:

In the framework of the EU, the list of third party jurisdictions which do not cooperate in tax matters should be reviewed and modified (following, for example, the criteria of the European Parliament itself or of social organizations such as Oxfam, Tax Justice Network or Gestha, the union of technicians of the Treasury of Spain). This would create a first real repertoire of tax havens common to the entire EU, instead of the previous national indices that were produced by some states or the current list of the European Commission, which was intended to be a blacklist but has ended up being a list for laundering tax havens. Of the 15 tax havens most used by multinationals, only one appears in that compilation of the Commission. Having a truthful list of tax havens, which also points to those who operate within the framework of the EU, would be a necessary first step to commercially and economically isolate those who promote and/or benefit from this fiscal framework, sanctioning those who operate in them and thoroughly investigating the big banks and the complicit intermediaries who take advantage of banking secrecy - which should also be eliminated - and systematically skip any standardized due diligence practice in order to make tax evasion and avoidance a lucrative business. And for these measures to last over time, dissuasive sanctions would have to be applied, including the withdrawal of banking licenses. In addition, it is essential to apply a homogeneous accounting regulation

that forces multinationals to present relevant economic information structured by their business base and real activity by country, to pay taxes in each territory based on the presence of personnel, physical capital and effective profits extracted in it, avoiding abuse through transfer pricing.

Secondly, and as plan B in case the EU refuses to sanction the tax shelters operating within it, an unfortunately very likely scenario, trade sanctions could be established between some member states for countries that operate as tax havens, starting with the Netherlands or Luxembourg and continuing with Switzerland. With a firm alliance of several countries in southern Europe, these states could be forced to abandon banking secrecy and cooperate fiscally, using the argument that the losses resulting from this change in practices would be less than those derived from trade sanctions that would be imposed in the event that they did not cooperate.

At the state level we must also act. While the EU decides to update its blacklist of tax havens, progress could be made in this regard in the Spanish state, following the same criteria mentioned above and thus helping to set an example and encourage other countries to join. This would imply and allow prohibiting aid to companies that operate or have subsidiaries and/or branches in tax havens. Likewise, tax evasion and avoidance could be included among the criteria that would disable a company from participating in public procurement processes, a measure that could be replicated at the regional and municipal levels. Another affordable measure would be to ban tax amnesties by law. And, finally, continuing with the list of proposals within the reach of a government that claims to be one "of change", sanctions could be established for banks and financial intermediaries that operate in these extraterritorial territories as facilitators and/or beneficiaries of tax evasion and avoidance.

But it would be naive and irresponsible for civil society to entrust everything to the action of institutions to combat the scourge of

evasion, avoidance, or tax havens. This is even more so when the little that has been advanced so far has come due to journalistic leaks and scandals involving a political-business class that no longer needs revolving doors to connect their shared loft. To prevent a handful of cosmetic measures from trying to cover the stench that comes out of those sewers, it is essential that civil society take the leading role in this fight and mobilizes decisively for fiscal justice and the distribution of wealth, with campaigns to point out and boycott these companies and billionaires. In this sense, the Apple store occupations campaign that Attac France carried out a few years ago is as interesting as it is inspiring. Protests against and denunciation of the firms, consultancies and banks that operate and are necessary intermediaries in tax avoidance and evasion would contribute to damaging the corporate image of these multinationals, precisely one of their main assets in these times of liquid capitalism.

What does the debt appeal say?

We know that the medical, social and economic emergency of the Coronavirus pandemic requires an urgent and immediate response. In fact, billions of euros have already been mobilized for this purpose, which is fattening an unaffordable debt for the states and which is hampering the ability to face this situation. For this reason, we believe that it is essential that the European Central Bank (ECB) cancel all the debts of the member states intended to fight the causes and effects of the pandemic or, failing that, that they be transformed into "permanent debt" unrelated to budgets. current. Meanwhile and as a form of pressure for this measure to be carried out, we propose the unilateral non-payment by the states, as well as a citizen audit of the debt as a whole with a view to the repudiation of the illegitimate part. Debt remains one of the key elements in understanding the EU crisis. A true straitjacket for southern countries with which it is essential to break if we want to change Europe.

Who are the signatories?

Initially, the manifesto was signed by

45 personalities from the trade union, social, political and intellectual world of various European countries. Among the names we find for example Susan George, Eric Toussaint, Christophe Aguiton and Eleonora Forenza. Since the launch, we have received dozens of new signatures from various countries and policy areas. In the next steps we will open support to organizations and the general public. And beyond the names and their number, the reception we are receiving from countries in the north of Europe is important, many of them are considered as "frugal" so we are contributing to breaking this false north-south division of Europe. that hides the common interests of the elites of all countries faced with the necessary bridges and shared agenda that must be raised by the popular and working classes from the four cardinal points of Europe.

Do you have a calendar?

During the summer we will close the collection of this second phase of signatures, after which we will assess how to proceed according to the support received and the health situation. The idea would be to propose some type of meeting, face-to-face or telematic, in the autumn to continue advancing more chorally and to rebuild ties between organizations and spaces in struggle.

As an anti-capitalist MEP, what is your role in the European Parliament?

Our first function is to note and contribute modestly but decisively towards breaking the enormous and solid consensus that exists in Parliament and in the European institutions in general on many issues: the role of Europe in the world, the inability to conceive the economy or society through different market mechanisms or the supposed values that the EU "contributes" to humanity with its external action, among many other issues. The Grand Coalition of social liberals and Christian Democrats that has traditionally co-governed the European Parliament and most European countries has expanded to include liberals and a good part of the Greens today, while reaching out to the reactionary right

which is ever more Euro- reformist. All this forms a nucleus of power that is very robust and perfectly aligned with the rest of the European economic and political elites. Our first task is to break the fence that tries to make our statistically minority positions even more minority. The problem is that, even within the left, there are those who consider that this is done by integrating at any cost into the consensus of that extreme centre of the neoliberal Grand Coalition.

Our second role, and this is common for any anti-capitalist in any institution, is not to succumb to the charms and dangers of an institution like the European Parliament. Not only because of the risks of getting comfortable or getting infected by the classism, cynicism and arrogance that mark this institution and against which you have to be vaccinated on a daily basis, but because there is a real danger of getting caught in the parliamentary game, thinking that it is the most important thing, consuming the bulk of scarce resources that, however, must be put on other fronts. Being aware of your minority position is essential not to make the seat in the parliament an end in itself, but rather a lever to work within, but above all outside Parliament, driven by proposals and movements that clash head-on with the logic and interests of the really existing EU. .

How do you conceive it?

In the first place, the question, and therefore the answer, must be formulated in the plural: we, as Anticapitalistas and as an international current, conceive of institutional work as one more front, important, but not indispensable, and especially sterile if it is not supported by an organized and struggling social movement outside the institutions. Accompanying these struggles, giving them support and learning from them, articulating political and social action, or contributing to their take-off, is a fundamental part of our conception of institutional work and of our role therein. Furthermore, an institution such as the European Parliament provides two more interesting elements: an enlarged territorial perspective, on a European scale, and a temporal perspective that allows

anticipating some attacks by capital that soon impact at the national and local scales. Having a presence in that institution is useful in order to locate other actors and establish alliances, and to prepare the ground for new battlefields.

After the failure of the strategy of the Syriza leadership nucleus in Greece, is the participation of Unidas Podemos in the Sanchez government continuing along the same lines? Or is it different?

The Greek experience is, or should be, the great political lesson of the late period. We can in fact establish a watershed within the European left according to how they interpreted and positioned themselves then and since with respect to Syriza's experience of government. The fundamental strategic differences that have ended up crystallizing our exit as Anticapitalistas from Podemos are intimately connected with the discussions that we already had during the situation in Greece in 2015. In the Spanish case, as Anticapitalistas we were very clear that entering a minority in a government led by social-liberalism had many risks, but mainly three: 1) revitalizing the PSOE as an actor of change despite the fact that the 15M cycle had as one of its main axes the challenge to bipartisanship and its policies, of which the PSOE is a fundamental pillar and the great "state party" in the Spanish state; 2) aging and deactivating Podemos as a transforming force, confining it to the institutional sphere, subject to the majority of the social-liberal government; and 3) giving to the right and to the extreme right the monopoly of the opposition and the potential channelling of the unrest that derives from the management of the new crisis that is already here. It would have been easier to support from outside the formation of a minority government of the PSOE and continue to oppose inside and outside the Spanish Parliament, with the movements and without the current commitments derived from being part of the government.

You are also launching a campaign for the nationalization of various strategic sectors? Such as? Big

pharma? Energy? Banks? Others?

This pandemic has exposed the shame of capitalism. The insufficiencies of capitalism to meet the challenge of protecting the popular classes and safeguarding lives have been demonstrated. These are times to analyse the consequences of continued years of cuts to the public. The right to health has been curtailed by neoliberal policies. And the cost of this pandemic is not only economic, but above all amounts to hundreds of thousands of lives.

The pandemic has also exposed the nakedness of "the emperor" of European neoliberalism. In the midst of a viral crisis, we saw that in Europe there was no way to manufacture the necessary emergency equipment to combat Covid-19, as a consequence of years of relocation and deindustrialization. Europe needs a reindustrialization in line with a change to a socially and ecologically just production model. The economy has to be at the service of life, and not to fatten private profits. It is undoubtedly one of the great lessons of this crisis. For this, we need the nationalization of strategic sectors under social control to ensure the common good. For this reason, as Anticapitalistas we have launched a campaign of agitation and propaganda about the need for the nationalization of strategic sectors and a change in the production model, with different concrete proposals such as the case of the factories that Nissan intends to close in Catalonia.

Capitalism is on a long depressive wave, caused by a profitability crisis, the main cause of which is the downward trend in the rate of profit. Faced with this permanent difficulty in achieving take off, capitalism has sought a way out, as it has been systematically doing, through the intensification of human and natural exploitation in a process of permanent devaluation of work and degradation of the biosphere. Thus, it will be the ecological crisis that introduces, as it is already doing, new limits to capitalist developmentalism, but also new limits to transformative cycles and their strategies. In this sense, it is essential to build a new militant solidarity-based internationalism that

can construct an eco-socialist project that responds from different contexts

and regional particularities to the

common challenge of facing a post-capitalist scenario.

From one Arab Spring to another

26 July 2020, by **Gilbert Achcar**

Events in the Arab region fit into this general global crisis, to be sure, but there is also something specific about the region. There, the neoliberal reforms have been carried out in a context dominated by a specific type of capitalism: one determined by the specific nature of a regional state system characterised by a combination in various proportions of rentierism and patrimonialism, or neopatrimonialism.

What is most specific to the region is the high concentration of fully patrimonial states, a concentration unequalled in any other part of the world. Patrimonialism means that ruling families literally own the state, i.e. its apparatuses and resources, whether they own it by law under explicitly absolutist conditions or just in practice, as a matter of fact.

Such ruling families regard the public sector as their private property and treat the armed forces – especially the elite armed apparatuses – as their private guard. These features explain why neoliberal reforms achieved their worst economic results in the Arab region, of all parts of the world. Neoliberal-inspired changes implemented in the region resulted in the slowest rates of economic growth of any part of the developing world and, consequently, the highest rates of unemployment – specifically youth unemployment.

The main reason for this is that neoliberal dogma is based on the primacy of the private sector, the idea that the private sector should be the driving force of development, while the state's own social and economic functions must be curtailed. ‘

Introduce austerity measures, trim the state down, cut social expenditure,

privatise state enterprises and leave the door wide open to private enterprise and free trade, and miracles will happen’, says the dogma. However, in a context lacking the prerequisites of ideal-typical capitalism, starting with the rule of law and predictability (without which long-term developmental private investment cannot happen), most private money tends to go into quick profit and speculation, especially in real estate along with construction, rather than into manufacturing or agriculture, the key productive sectors.

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

That is why such an impressive revolutionary shockwave as the Arab Spring rocked this whole region in 2011. This was much more than a series of loosely connected mass protests. The prospect was truly insurrectionary, with people chanting ‘The people want to overthrow the regime!’ – a slogan that has become ubiquitous in the Arab region since 2011. [27].

The first revolutionary shockwave of that year forcefully shook the regional system of states, revealing that it had

entered a terminal crisis. Almost every single Arabic-speaking country saw a massive rise in social protest during the 2011 Arab Spring. Six of the region's countries – that is, more than a quarter of them – witnessed massive uprisings. And yet, the ‘lesson’ according to the IMF, the World Bank, those guardians of the neoliberal order, is that all this happened because their neoliberal recipes had not been implemented thoroughly enough. The crisis, they claimed, was due to an insufficient dismantling of the remnants of yesterday's state-capitalist economies. The solution, they said, was to end all forms of social subsidies, in even more radical fashion than had already occurred.

However, governments of the region did not do *more* of what the international financial institutions have been advocating because they were worried about the political consequences. They had good reason to worry. Unlike Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall, when people swallowed the bitter pill of massive neoliberal changes in the hope that it would bring them capitalist prosperity, people in the Arab region are under no illusion that their countries will become similar to Western European countries. In order to impose further neoliberal measures on the people, brutal force is therefore required in most of the region's countries.

The full implementation of neoliberalism does not go hand in hand with liberal democracy as Fukuyama's ‘end of history’ fantasy claimed thirty years ago. The first such radical implementation was in Chile, of course, under the rule of General Augusto Pinochet.

In Egypt, it is currently taking place

under the post-2013 restorationist dictatorship led by Field Marshal Sisi – the most brutally repressive regime that the Egyptians have endured in decades. The Sisi regime has gone the furthest in implementing the full range of neoliberal measures advocated by the IMF, at a huge cost to the population, with a steep rise in the cost of living, food prices, transport prices, etc. People have been completely devastated.

The main reason why their anger did not explode once again on the streets of Cairo on a massive scale is that they are now deterred by state terror. But the full implementation of the IMF's neoliberal recipes has produced no economic miracle, and it won't produce one in the future. Tensions are building up and, sooner or later, the country will erupt again.

Unfortunately, both the left and the workers' movement in Egypt are in bad shape. They have suffered a painful defeat – not only due to the brutal return of the repressive state, but also because of their own contradictions and illusions. The major part of the Egyptian left has pursued a politically erratic trajectory, switching from one misconceived alliance to another: from the Muslim Brotherhood to the military.

In 2013, most of the left and the independent workers' movement supported Sisi's coup very short-sightedly, subscribing to the illusion that the army would put the democratic process back on track. They thought that the overthrow of Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood, after their year in power, would reopen the way to furthering the revolutionary process, even though the overthrow was brought about by the military.

This terrible blunder discredited the left as well as the independent workers' movement. As a result, the left-wing opposition is much weakened and marginalised in today's Egypt.

This is another crucial reason why people have not mobilised massively against the new neoliberal onslaught. When there seems to be no credible alternative, people tend to accept the regime's discourse that says: 'It's us

or chaos, us or a Syria-like tragedy. You must accept our iron heel. It will be tough, but at the end of the day you will find prosperity.' Most Egyptians do not really buy the last promise – prosperity – but they are still paralysed by the fear of falling into a situation much worse still than what they are enduring.

Linked to all this is another specificity of the regional revolutionary process, of which Syria is the most tragic illustration. The Arab world has experienced the development over several decades of an Islamic fundamentalist reactionary current, long promoted by the US alongside its oldest ally in the region, the Saudi kingdom.

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

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

As a result, what evolved in the region was not the classical binary opposition of revolution and counter-revolution. It was a triangular situation in which there was, on the one hand, a progressive pole – those groups, parties and networks who initiated the uprisings and represented their dominant aspirations.

This pole was organisationally weak, except for Tunisia where a powerful workers' movement compensated for

the weakness of the political left and allowed the uprising in this country to score the first victory in bringing down a president, thus setting off the regional shockwave.

On the other hand, there were two counter-revolutionary, deeply reactionary poles: the old regimes, classically representing the main counter-revolutionary force, but also Islamic fundamentalist forces competing with these old regimes and striving to seize power. In this triangular contest, the progressive pole, the revolutionary current, was soon marginalised – not or not only due to organisational and material weakness, but also and primarily because of political weakness, of the lack of strategic vision.

Nevertheless, a new generation has entered the struggle on a mass scale in the region in recent years, one that came of age through and after the 2011 Arab Spring. The bulk of this new generation aspires to a radical progressive transformation. They aspire to better social conditions, freedom, democracy, social justice, equality, including gender emancipation. They reject neoliberal policies and dream of a society in sharp contrast with the programmatic views of the Islamic fundamentalist forces that hijacked or tried to hijack the uprisings to direct them towards their own goals.

This huge progressive potential came back to the fore in the second revolutionary shockwave that started in December 2018 with the Sudanese uprising, followed since February 2019 by the Algerian uprising, and since last October by massive social and political protests in Iraq and in Lebanon. Sudan, Algeria, Iraq and Lebanon have been boiling since then, while all other countries of the region are on the brink of explosion. The Covid-19 pandemic will undoubtedly suspend the revolutionary process for a while – it has already ended the weekly mass demonstrations in Algeria and the various forms of protests in Iraq and Lebanon – but it will only worsen the conditions that led to its ignition in the first place.

Protracted revolutionary processes, such as the one that is unfolding in the

Arab region since 2011, are cumulative in terms of experience and know-how. They are learning curves. The peoples learn, the mass movements learn, the revolutionaries learn, and the reactionaries learn as well, to be sure; everybody learns. A long-term revolutionary process is a succession of waves of upsurges and counter-revolutionary backlashes – but these waves are not mere repetitions of identical patterns. The process is not circular, it must move forward or else it degenerates. People grasp the lessons of previous experiences and do their best not to repeat the same errors or fall into the same traps. This is very clear in the case of Sudan, but also for Algeria, Iraq and Lebanon.

Sudan and Algeria, along with Egypt, are the three countries in the region where the armed forces constitute the central institution of political rule. Of course, armed apparatuses are the backbones of states in general, but it is direct military control of political power that is peculiar to these three countries in the Arab region. Their regimes are not patrimonial. No family owns the state to the point of making of it whatever its members wish. The state is instead dominated collegially by the military high command. They are ‘neopatrimonial’ regimes: this means that they are characterised by nepotism, cronyism and corruption, but no single family is in full control of the state, which remains institutionally separate from the persons of the rulers. This explains why, in these three countries, the military ended up getting rid of the president and his entourage in order to safeguard the regime. That’s what happened in Egypt in 2011 with the dismissal of Mubarak, and last year in Algeria with the termination of Bouteflika’s presidency, followed by the overthrow of Bashir in Sudan, all three carried out by the military. However, when this happened in Egypt, there were huge illusions about the military among the population, which were renewed in 2013 when the army deposed the Muslim Brother president Morsi. These illusions were not reiterated in Sudan or Algeria in 2019. On the contrary, the popular movement in the two countries has been acutely aware that the military constitute the central pillar of the regime that they wish to get rid of.

But there is more than just that difference at work in Sudan. There is a leadership that embodies the awareness of the lessons drawn from all previous regional experiences. This is mainly due to the role of the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA), which started in 2016 with teachers, journalists, doctors and other professionals organising an underground network. As the uprising that started in December 2018 unfolded, the association developed into a much larger network involving workers’ unions of all key sectors of the working class. It has been playing the central role in the events on the side of the popular movement. The SPA was also instrumental in the constitution of a broad political coalition involving several parties and groups. These forces are presently engaged in a political tug of war with the military. They agreed temporarily on a compromise that instituted what can be described as a situation of dual power, somewhat reminiscent of the situation in Russia after February 1917. The country is ruled by a council in which the leadership of the people’s movement is represented alongside the military command. This is an uneasy transitional period that can’t last very long. Sooner or later, one of the two powers will have to prevail over the other, which will inevitably entail splitting the other.

The real spearhead of the Sudanese revolution is constituted, however, by a network of ‘resistance committees’ that involves several thousands of mostly young and politically unorganised people in big cities’ neighbourhoods and small towns across the country. These committees are defiant towards the existing political parties and refuse to centralise their activities and statements, insisting on the preservation of their local autonomy. They are as radically opposed to military rule as they are to Islamic fundamentalism, especially since both were represented in power under Omar al-Bashir. They decided to authorise the SPA to speak for them, but they keep it under vigilant scrutiny as well as they exert a critical pressure on the whole political process.

The popular movement in Algeria is remarkable for having staged huge mass demonstrations every week for over a year. Its stamina is truly exceptional. But it has no recognised and legitimate leadership. Nobody can claim to speak in its name. This is an obvious weakness, in stark contrast with Sudan. Forms of leadership naturally change over time, but we haven’t entered some postmodern age of ‘leaderless revolutions’ as some want to believe. The lack of leadership is a real and far-reaching impediment: a recognised leadership is crucial in order to channel the strength of the mass movement towards a political goal. This exists in Sudan, with all its contradictions, but not in Algeria, nor in Iraq or Lebanon.

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

The big question in Algeria, Iraq and Lebanon is clearly this: in a situation shaped both by the endurance of mass mobilisation and by the new opportunities for oppressive state interventions provided by the menace of Covid-19, will the popular movement succeed in finding ways to organise, like their Sudanese brothers and sisters did, in order to amplify their struggles’ impact and achieve major steps towards the fulfilment of their goals, or will the ruling classes manage to quell each of these three uprisings and defuse them? The fate of the Sudanese revolution will very much impact the regional revolutionary process in its entirety. There is ground for hope, albeit not for optimism given the difficulty of the challenges lying ahead.

Radical Philosophy

Jeremy Corbyn's Opponents Burned the House Down to Stop Him — Now Keir Starmer Is King of the Ashes

25 July 2020, by **Daniel Finn**

It seemed a safe bet as the year began that British politics was about to enter into a period of calm. Instead, the COVID-19 pandemic has plunged Britain into a crisis without any precedent in the last century, combining the mortality rates of a conflict with the economic devastation of a global slump.

It's far too early to say what the long-term political fallout of the pandemic will be. No developed capitalist state has gone through an economic crisis on this scale in tandem with mass fatalities and disruption to everyday life. To say we're about to enter uncharted waters doesn't do justice to the situation.

However, one thing is already clear. Under Keir Starmer's leadership, the Labour Party is taking an approach that differs sharply in both style and content from that followed by Jeremy Corbyn after 2015. At a time when the gravity of the crisis demands a break with the status quo — for better or for worse — Labour is retreating from the ambitious reformist agenda developed under Corbyn.

The arguments made by Starmer and his shadow cabinet team over the public health crisis have already supplied ample evidence of that turn. But we've also seen how the new leadership intends to tackle some key issues that are internal to the Labour Party. Starmer has now set the seal on this political turn by sacking his leadership opponent Rebecca Long-Bailey from Labour's shadow cabinet on trumped-up grounds.

This is no trivial matter for British politics. Without taking account of the information that's come to light about Labour's inner-party struggles, we

can't fully grasp how Britain came to be in its current position, with a manifestly incompetent crew of shysters and sociopaths responsible for the management of a catastrophe.

Official Inquiries

The first major development after Starmer took over as leader was the publication of a leaked report on the Labour Party's internal culture. Party officials compiled the report under the supervision of Jennie Formby, Labour's outgoing general secretary. It puts forward a devastating indictment of the party officials against whom Jeremy Corbyn had to struggle after 2015, backed up by voluminous evidence.

We'll come to the particulars of that indictment in a moment. For now, it's important to say why Formby ordered the report to be drafted in the first place. It was intended as a submission to the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), a government-funded body which is currently investigating Labour over allegations of "institutional antisemitism."

The EHRC announced a formal investigation of the Labour Party at the end of May 2019, in response to submissions from two groups, the Campaign Against Antisemitism (CAA) and the Jewish Labour Movement (JLM). [28] In the run-up to the 2019 election, Corbyn's opponents repeatedly cited the fact that his party was now under investigation by an official body as a devastating blow against his leadership. They took the investigation itself to be proof of Labour's guilt: no smoke without fire, as the saying goes.

Of course, this only held true if the EHRC itself was guided by the evidence when it decided whether or not to launch investigations into the conduct of political parties. The EHRC has now confirmed in the most emphatic way possible that this is not the case. Its criteria for launching investigations are strictly political, in the worst sense of the term.

Whitewash

That confirmation came on May 12, when the EHRC announced that it would not be investigating the Conservative Party for racism. The statement concluded a lengthy saga. The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) first asked the EHRC to investigate the Tories in May 2019. [29] It repeated that request in November after receiving no reply. Once again, the EHRC kicked the issue into touch. [30]

The Conservative Party is racist in every conceivable way. Its leader Boris Johnson has a history of inciting racism against British Muslims, as do some of his senior cabinet colleagues, and the party ran an openly racist campaign against Sadiq Khan in the 2016 London mayoral election. [31] Johnson's predecessor David Cameron used parliamentary privilege to lie about a British imam, falsely claiming that he was a supporter of ISIS in order to taint Khan by association.

A poll conducted last year found that nearly two-thirds of Conservative Party members believed Islam to be a "threat to Western civilization." [32] 43 percent said they could not accept the idea of a Muslim prime minister. It beggars belief that the EHRC could see all this and still hesitate before

starting an investigation.

By dragging its heels, the EHRC ensured that the Tories would go into last year's election campaign without the stigma of being officially investigated for racism. Several months after the horse had bolted, the Commission was still unable to decide whether it was going to shut the stable door. The MCB submitted a new dossier in March 2020, with exhaustive documentation of Tory racism, but the EHRC could only say that it was "actively considering what, if any, action" it might take. Two months later, it ceased "actively considering" anything and authorized the Conservative Party to investigate itself. [33]

Protective Shield

To describe this as a case of double standards would be the understatement of the decade. It is objectively impossible for anyone to believe that the Labour Party merits investigation for racism, yet the Tories do not. Instead of defending the rights of ethnic minorities, the EHRC is functioning as a protective shield for racism in high places.

Disgraceful as this may be, it's not difficult to understand why it should be the case. The EHRC does not exist in a vacuum, after all. Most of Britain's private media outlets support the Conservative Party, and even the ones that don't were bitterly hostile to Jeremy Corbyn.

If the EHRC announced an investigation into the Tories, it would be setting itself up for relentless flak from the Tory press. It faced no such backlash when it put Labour in the spotlight. One path leads to brickbats, the other leads to praise. One might as well ask why more people go to Spain than Scotland for their beach holidays.

Setting the Record Straight

We can therefore dispose of the idea that the investigation itself constitutes proof of guilt for Corbyn's Labour Party. Needless to say, the EHRC's

track record doesn't constitute proof of innocence, either. After all, following the path of least resistance can sometimes lead you to the right destination, purely by chance. This is where the leaked Labour report comes in. [34]

For those who don't have time to read the full thing — it's over 800 pages long — *Novara* have published an excellent series of articles summarizing its most important findings. [35] To the extent that mainstream British journalists have acknowledged the report at all, the usual response has been to belittle its significance, playing down the contents as tittle-tattle, which in any case has no connection to the party's handling of antisemitism. [36]

This approach is brazenly disingenuous. The report punches a series of holes in the dominant media narrative about the Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn. The only way for journalists who promoted that narrative to deal with the challenge is to put their fingers in their ears.

Three main points emerge from the report. First of all, the officials who controlled Labour's party machine until Jennie Formby took over in 2018 were bitterly hostile to Corbyn and the Labour left. They desperately wanted Corbyn to fail, and responded to the party's electoral advance in 2017 as if they had experienced a personal bereavement.

For many Corbyn supporters, this revelation came as little surprise. They had seen the way that Labour's right-wing element acted before, during, and after the 2017 campaign. If they needed visual confirmation, they could watch the clip of Labour MP Stephen Kinnock dumbstruck with horror at the sight of the exit poll, which revealed that Labour had deprived the Conservatives of their majority. [37]

But it's still bracing to read the messages exchanged between party officials on election night, describing their own reactions to the poll: "stunned and reeling," "silent and grey-faced," "in need of counselling," and — most striking of all — "opposite to what I had been working towards for the last couple of years!" It's not so

much a smoking gun as a detailed confession signed by all the defendants.

Normal People

Secondly, their hostility to Jeremy Corbyn clearly stemmed from profound ideological disagreements rather than concerns about "electability." Corbyn's speech after the Manchester terrorist bombing during the 2017 campaign encapsulated this division between opposing worldviews. [38]

Two party officials, Jo Greening and Francis Grove-White, were horrified by the thought of what Corbyn was planning to say. Greening hoped that it would cause the party grave electoral damage: "With a bit of luck this speech will show a clear polling decline and we shall all be able to point out how disgusting they truly are."

Grove-White was worried that Corbyn's perspective "won't go down as badly as it deserves to, thanks to the large groundswell of ill-informed opposition to Western interventions." Greening reassured him that there was no cause for concern: "In the face of a terror attack normal people do not blame foreign intervention, they blame immigration."

As it turned out, Grove-White was right to be apprehensive: British public opinion overwhelmingly endorsed Corbyn's analysis. [39] 53 percent agreed with the statement that "wars the UK has supported or fought ARE responsible, at least in part, for terror attacks against the UK"; just 24 percent disagreed. The same poll showed pluralities of voters agreeing with Corbyn's opposition to every war that Britain has fought in the Middle East since 1991 (rising to 55 percent for the invasion of Iraq in 2003 — just 18 percent thought it was the right thing to do).

The Manchester speech was one of the most hopeful moments for public debate in any Western country since 9/11. It shattered the conventional wisdom about the way left-wing politicians have to approach questions of national security. [40] But some of

the officials who received generous salaries from the Labour Party to help maximize its vote would have preferred to see “normal people” blame immigrants for terrorism instead.

“A Catalogue of Reporting Failures”

Thirdly, the report contains alarming documentation of the attitudes held by party officials. Their position on racism towards black people could most generously be described as complacent (some might want to use stronger adjectives). Three of the officials — including Emilie Oldknow, who had been Starmer’s choice to replace Jennie Formby as general secretary — expressed their horror when Corbyn appointed a black Labour MP, Dawn Butler, to his shadow cabinet. Butler’s main sin appears to have been suggesting that the Labour Party itself had issues with racism.

Another party official, Patrick Heneghan, discovered that Corbyn’s ally Diane Abbott was crying in a toilet cubicle, having been overwhelmed by the sheer volume of racist and sexist abuse that she was receiving online. Instead of expressing sympathy with Abbott, Heneghan boasted that he had passed on this juicy piece of gossip to a television reporter.

Most striking of all is the evidence — carefully summarized by Charlotte England in this article — that Labour officials in charge of the party’s disciplinary process were at best profoundly incompetent in their handling of antisemitism complaints. [41] This is a vital point, because the very same officials appeared on the BBC’s flagship documentary slot Panorama in the guise of “whistleblowers,” accusing Corbyn and his associates of having sabotaged their efforts to root out antisemitism in the party.

This is not the first time John Ware’s documentary has been called into question. The Labour Party issued a strong rebuttal as soon as it was aired

in July 2019, showing that the program-makers had distorted the meaning of emails from the leader’s office. [42] Ware’s choice of “experts” could only be described as outlandish: he presented Alan Johnson, who works for Britain’s leading pro-Israel campaigning group, BICOM (Britain Israel Communications and Research Centre), as a neutral academic authority on antisemitism (in particular, its alleged overlap with left-wing criticism of Israel). [43] The Media Reform Coalition listed “a catalogue of reporting failures” in the documentary that violated the BBC’s editorial guidelines. [44]

However, none of this had much impact on public discourse. As far as the British media was concerned, Panorama crashed through the arguments of the Labour leadership like Boris Johnson at the wheel of a bulldozer. The anguished testimony of its “whistleblowers” brings to mind an infamous line from the Simpsons: “Your tears say more than real evidence ever could.”

Sabotage

To put this controversy in its proper context, it’s important to remember the wider political scene in July 2019. Theresa May had failed to push her Brexit deal through parliament and resigned after the European elections, in which both main parties took a hammering at the hands of pro- or anti-Brexit forces. Boris Johnson was about to become Tory leader, having promised to “get Brexit done” in the hardest possible form.

That was more than enough for the Labour leadership to worry about, as they shifted towards a policy of support for a second referendum on Brexit that posed grave dangers for Labour-held seats in Leave-supporting areas. And yet they had to deal at the same time with a manufactured controversy cooked up by factional opponents within their own party.

For all the importance attached to it by the British media, the Panorama documentary only accounted for one part of that false narrative. Jennie Formby was able to show that the documentary’s claims were

diametrically at odds with reality: far from protecting antisemites in the Labour Party through malice or neglect, Formby had substantially increased the number of people expelled for antisemitism after taking over from Iain McNicol in April 2018. [45] The fresh evidence of negligent behavior by the old guard adds substance to a picture that was already apparent from emails published last year and commented upon by Momentum’s Jon Lansman: [46]

Former compliance unit officials from the Labour Right may have delayed action on some of the most extreme and high-profile antisemitism cases, including Holocaust denial, allowing a backlog of cases to build up that would damage the party and Jeremy’s leadership . . . these emails now expose that the party bureaucracy when under the control of Labour’s right even went so far as to turn a blind eye to antisemitism, to destabilize Jeremy’s leadership. And this is partly why the party has not yet managed to get to grips with this problem.

However, it’s important to put the question of party discipline in perspective, because we are still talking about a tiny proportion of the Labour Party membership. According to Formby’s figures, disciplinary panels heard 274 cases “relating to antisemitism” in 2019; 149 members were expelled or left the party before the proceedings concluded. As a proportion of the total membership — 520,000 — that adds up to a little under 0.03 percent.

When academic researchers asked members of the public to guess what percentage of the Labour membership had been disciplined for antisemitism, the average estimate was one-third — a thousand times greater than the actual figure for 2019, and scarcely less absurd if all the disciplinary cases from 2015 onwards are added up together. [47] One could hardly blame them for getting it so wrong, if they had been relying on the British media to convey an accurate picture.

“Deeply Irresponsible”

The Labour leadership also had to deal with prominent figures in their own party — not least its deputy leader Tom Watson — grossly and maliciously exaggerating the scale of the problem. As Jennie Formby wrote in a letter to Watson, soon after the Panorama documentary went on air:

By choosing to ignore the steps taken by this party, and commenting so uncritically about the Panorama programme, you are complicit in creating a perception that antisemitism is more prevalent in the Labour Party than wider society. This is deeply irresponsible for the deputy leader of a party which seeks to be in Government, and risks exacerbating the fear that Jewish communities will feel.

Shortly after Formby composed that letter, the Observer interviewed Emily Thornberry, a prominent member of Corbyn’s shadow cabinet. [48] The interviewer, Rachel Cooke, started off by asking “how much longer the vast majority of Labour MPs intend to put up with the stench that currently rises from their party.” For Cooke, Labour’s detailed rebuttal of the Panorama documentary constituted further proof of its guilt: “The denial goes on.”

Jennie Formby had recently taken a break from cancer treatment to brief the shadow cabinet on Labour’s response to the EHRC investigation. Tom Watson attended the briefing, said nothing, then went on to compose an open letter, demanding answers to a whole series of questions that he hadn’t bothered to ask Formby in person. The Unite trade-union leader Len McCluskey spoke for many when he described Watson as a “fucking disgrace.”

But not for Rachel Cooke, who pointedly asked Emily Thornberry if she didn’t think it was “a bit cheap of McCluskey to deploy Formby’s cancer in the way that he did?” Thornberry delicately set her straight:

She took a break from her chemo and gave a presentation on antisemitism

and what was happening. I asked her some questions. She looked glorious, but she had no hair, and we know how ill she is, and from what I can remember Tom didn’t ask her any questions — and then he writes a public letter having a go at her. On a human level, I just don’t think it’s right.

For Britain’s liberal broadsheets, Tom Watson was a man who combined the virtues of Harold Wilson, Brian Clough, and Mother Teresa, so this devastating character-portrait could not be allowed to stand. Cooke insisted that Thornberry couldn’t really mean what she had said, and must have been hoping to curry favor with McCluskey ahead of a future leadership bid.

Saint Thomas

This interview is worth dwelling on, not because it was exceptional, but because it wasn’t. There’s no reason to think that Rachel Cooke is an especially callous person: she was merely channelling the house orthodoxy of her own paper and its sister title. This adulation of Watson reached a farcical apotheosis shortly after Christmas last year, when the Guardian trumpeted Watson’s claim to have stepped down as a Labour MP because he found the “brutality” of Corbyn and his associates intolerable. [49]

If José Mourinho announced that he was retiring from football management because the cynical gamesmanship of Pep Guardiola and Jürgen Klopp was too much to bear, the derisive hooting of the nation’s sportswriters would be audible from space. But an equally preposterous claim from Watson, a notorious factional bruiser with a taste for the dark arts, can be reported with the utmost solemnity.

Formby decided to step down as general secretary after Corbyn’s departure, instead of remaining in her position for as long as possible to wage a war of attrition against the Labour right, just as Iain McNicol did against the Labour left. One might regret that choice in political terms, but it’s hard to reproach her on a

personal level.

Tom Watson took advantage of the fact that Formby was undergoing chemotherapy to drag her name through the mud. A liberal journalist saw this happening in plain sight, and still managed to insinuate that it was Formby and her defenders who had done something wrong, with specific reference to her cancer. Who on earth would want to carry on working in such a toxic environment, after the possibility of doing something constructive with the Post had largely evaporated?

“A Giant of This Land”

There was never really a campaign against antisemitism in the Labour Party — there was a campaign to brand Corbyn and his supporters as antisemites, which is something very different. That campaign relied upon the debating tactic known as the Gish gallop, in honor of the creationist ideologue Duane Gish. Gish would wheel out a whole series of false or misleading claims, each of which took longer to refute than to make, in the hope of bamboozling his audience. [50]

In this case, we would have to imagine a debate where Gish had several hours to make his case, with the assistance of a megaphone, while his opponents had a few minutes for rebuttal at the end, struggling to make their voices heard over a chorus of booing. Journalists and politicians have repeated the main points of this particular gallop so many times that they’ve hardened into conventional wisdom, despite their inherent fatuity.

Reflecting on Corbyn’s leadership in the pages of the New Statesman, the ex-Labour MP Phil Wilson blamed Corbyn for his difficulties with the media: “If you don’t want the press to write you are a terrorist sympathizer, don’t lay a wreath at the grave of a terrorist.” Wilson was referring, of course, to the controversy about Corbyn’s presence at a 2014 ceremony in Tunisia. [51] The Daily Mail accused the Labour leader of laying a wreath for the PLO

commander Salah Khalaf, better known as Abu Iyad, and the matter quickly passed into legend.

As it happens, Corbyn didn't lay a wreath for Khalaf, but so what if he had? Khalaf was accused of helping plan the Black September attack at the 1972 Munich Olympics (with characteristic disregard for trifles of fact, the Jewish Labour Movement's EHRC submission denounced Corbyn for "laying a wreath next to the graves of Black September terrorists, who murdered Israeli Olympic athletes in 1972" — the actual hostage-takers are buried in a different country, Libya). Abu Daoud, who certainly did help organize the Munich attack, stated that Khalaf was involved — but he also testified that the current Palestinian National Authority president Mahmoud Abbas took part in the planning. [52]

If Khalaf is beyond the pale, then logically the same principle must apply to Abbas. The idea that Khalaf was an irredeemable terrorist with whom no decent person could associate had to be retrospectively concocted by the British media to justify another round of shrill polemics about Jeremy Corbyn's moral depravity. In fact, Khalaf was one of the chief architects of the PLO's peace strategy in the late 1980s, before agents of Saddam Hussein murdered him in 1991. Dovish, center-left Israeli politicians welcomed his conciliatory message to the Israeli people in 1989. [53]

The following year, Foreign Policy published an article by Khalaf in which he expressed the PLO's support for a two-state peace settlement:

A unitary, binational state cannot be built without the acquiescence of both communities; and if it is established by force against the will of one of the two, it cannot stand the test of time. The day may come when the Jews of Israel and the Arabs of Palestine, their mutual trust nurtured by a period of peaceful, prosperous and cooperative coexistence, decide that their interests lie in some form of union. But unless and until that day comes, both peoples' interests would be served best if each went its separate way. [54]

Corbyn's detractors generally claim to be in favor of a "two-state solution," yet they anathematize a man who used all the authority of his track record — including his role in Black September — to argue for Palestinian acceptance of an Israeli state.

Needless to say, the British commentariat never applies the "terrorist" label to Israeli politicians with a record of violence against civilians far in excess of anything that Khalaf could be accused of. David Cameron and Tony Blair attended the funeral of Ariel Sharon — Blair even praised Sharon as "a giant of this land" — without facing any backlash from respectable opinion-formers.

Beneath the double standard lurks a single, racist standard. Jeremy Corbyn never internalized the principle that Palestinian lives are worth less than Israeli lives: one Israeli death is a tragedy, a thousand Palestinian deaths are a statistic. For much of the "Labour antisemitism" controversy, anti-Palestinian racism served as a load-bearing wall. Without that underlying assumption, many of the attacks against Corbyn and his allies would have crumbled.

The Daily Mail recently had to pay a large sum in damages to the Palestinian Return Centre (PRC), a British-based group, after publishing false claims about the PRC in the course of another anti-Corbyn hit job. [55] The Mail's error was to defame a particular organization that could sue for libel. If it was possible for an entire people to sue collectively, the Palestinians could easily bankrupt the British newspaper industry.

Self-Serving Elites

Not content with enshrining anti-Palestinian racism as part of the consensus view in British politics, at a time when Israel's political mainstream brazenly denies the right of Palestine to exist, Corbyn's factional opponents have even chosen to promote antisemitism themselves. That's the only way to describe a claim made by the Labour MP Wes Streeting in a pamphlet setting out his stall for the post-Corbyn era: [56]

Labour's antisemitism crisis stems from a worldview that puts Jews or Zionists at the center of a global capitalist conspiracy working to create a rigged system that works for the wealthiest few at the expense of the many. It was this worldview that voters found repulsive and that we must comprehensively abandon.

This theory is no innovation of Streeting's: the Guardian columnists Jonathan Freedland and John Harris have previously expressed it in print. [57] In March 2019, Harris claimed that the Labour Party "now tends to present the very real failings of modern capitalism not as a matter of anything systemic, but the work of a small group of people who are ruining things for the rest: what Corbyn calls a 'self-serving elite,' who 'monopolize the wealth that should be shared by each and every one of us.'" According to Harris, this could only result in the scapegoating of Jewish people.

It's difficult to convey in words how pernicious this line of argument really is. The speech of Corbyn's that Harris singled out for rebuke was in fact a boilerplate exercise in left-populist rhetoric. It could have been delivered by any politician standing up to the power of big business, from Franklin Roosevelt to Pablo Iglesias. [58] There is absolutely no reason to think that Corbyn had Jewish people in mind when he spoke about "the cosy cartels that are hoarding this country's wealth for themselves." Nor is there any evidence that his supporters understood it in that way.

To give a thoroughly cynical and meretricious talking-point more engagement than it deserves: at a very abstract level, we might say that capitalism can reproduce itself without any need for human agency. In practice, that's not how the system works. Individuals like Jeff Bezos exercise agency in a very real and tangible way — for example, by deciding to sack union organizers while reaping a fortune from the COVID-19 lockdown. [59] Amazon may still be subject to certain structural imperatives that even Bezos cannot overcome. But it is not a price-taking firm in an idealized world of perfect competition.

In any case, there is no contradiction between a systemic analysis of the British economy — something that was central to Labour’s campaigning platform, as John Harris knew perfectly well — and sharp condemnation of the individuals who appear as the personification of structural forces. [60] When left-wingers called for bankers to be jailed after the 2008 crash, it was meant to be a complement to structural change, not a substitute for it, and it certainly did not imply a belief that the financial system was basically healthy.

The arguments made by Streeting, Freedland, Harris, and others only make sense if they believe that Jews actually do play a disproportionate role in the functioning of modern capitalism. In the guise of opposing antisemitism, they are promoting a deeply antisemitic conflation, forcibly conscripting Jewish people into the role of human shields for our economic system. If antisemitism really was a matter of great concern for the British media, these individuals would be driven out of public life before their feet could touch the ground.

Out of the Bottle

The “Labour antisemitism” narrative has already done incalculable harm to public debate about racism in Britain. For one thing, it has probably given many people from ethnic-minority groups the mistaken impression that antisemitism is taken more seriously than other forms of racism. In fact, we have already seen that antisemitism gets a free pass so long as it comes from the political right and targets liberal and left-wing Jews. Conservative MPs can promote antisemitic conspiracy theories about George Soros and “cultural Marxism” without fear of sanction. [61]

This culture of impunity reached a nadir during the 2019 election campaign, when the Sun’s political editor Tom Newton Dunn promoted a far-right hit list drawn directly from neo-Nazi sources. At a time when charges of antisemitism dominated the news agenda, a prominent journalist could channel readers to a group called Aryan Unity without exciting

the interest of his colleagues. Apart from a Guardian opinion column by a freelance contributor, Britain’s mainstream media outlets left the matter well alone.

The response of the British right to anti-racist protests bears the stamp of this toxic campaign. Conservative Party supporters now feel emboldened to claim that left-wingers are the real racists (and in this context, that clearly means “anti-white”). Risible as such claims may be, these knuckle-dragging xenophobes are just following a lead from people higher up the food chain.

After all, it’s barely six months since a motley crew of celebrities signed an open letter urging people not to vote for Labour, supposedly because of concerns about antisemitism. [62] They issued no such appeal against a vote for the Conservatives, implicitly granting their approval to the party of Windrush and the “hostile environment.” [63] Instead of being laughed out of town, these pompous hypocrites received front-page treatment from the liberal press.

“Why Hasn’t He Sorted This Thing Yet?”

Keir Starmer was not responsible for any of this. But his leadership campaign proved to be its indirect beneficiary. It didn’t really matter whether people believed that Jeremy Corbyn had done more to inflame antisemitism than any politician since the Second World War (as one of John Ware’s alleged “whistleblowers” suggested last year). [64] The long-running saga fed into damaging perceptions of Corbyn as an incompetent leader: he was always in trouble, always embroiled in controversy about issues that seemed obscure to the average person, and always at odds with senior figures in his own party. [65]

One of the most revealing comments on this protracted affair came from the New Statesman journalist Stephen Bush, shortly after the election was over: “Very few conversations I had

during this campaign about antisemitism were about it as a moral failing, but as [a] ‘why hasn’t he sorted this thing yet?’ failing.” (Tellingly, Bush made this point as an aside in a Twitter thread, not in a published article.) A question like that appears superficially reasonable — “if he can’t put this to bed, how does he expect to run the country?” — but ignores the fact that Corbyn’s opponents had successfully defined the problem in a way that made it impossible to “sort.”

There was a coda of sorts to John Ware’s Panorama documentary in April 2020, when a consortium took over the ailing Jewish Chronicle newspaper and kept its editor Stephen Pollard in his post. [66] Pollard has turned the Chronicle into a right-wing propaganda sheet with a costly track record of publishing falsehoods about his political opponents. [67] He directed its fire against Corbyn from the earliest stages of his leadership and played a significant role in constructing the overall narrative.

The head of the consortium was Robbie Gibb, erstwhile director of communications for Theresa May. It also included the ex-Labour MP John Woodcock — who resigned from the party in a haze of controversy and campaigned for a Tory victory last December — and none other than John Ware himself. [68] Gibb, Woodcock and Ware clearly believe that Stephen Pollard and his Muslim-baiting columnists have a valuable role to play. [69]

The BBC even nominated Ware’s Potemkin village for a prestigious BAFTA award, the institutional equivalent of flicking triumphant V signs at Labour supporters after the broadcaster’s egregious display in last year’s election campaign. [70] American readers might like to imagine a scenario in which the New York Times submitted Judith Miller’s reporting to the Pulitzer judges instead of apologizing to their readers. [71] A more fitting verdict came from academic research that revealed a staggering decline in trust for the media among left-leaning voters: from 46 percent in 2015 and 38 percent at the start of 2019 to just 15 percent today. [72]

Rewarding the Guilty Parties

In his pitch for the Labour leadership, Starmer promised incompatible things: to keep the greater part of Labour's 2017 and 2019 manifestos, while unifying the party and forging a better relationship with the press. Reeling from the election defeat and worn down by years of infighting, the majority of Labour members decided to buy what he was selling.

The leaked report, which only surfaced after Starmer was home and dry, shows in exhaustive detail exactly why the Labour Party was so divided after 2015. When Starmer spoke of "unity," his intention was to reward the guilty parties for their behavior — and this is the point at which he does become culpable.

The report itself may have derailed Starmer's plan to appoint Emilie Oldknow as general secretary, but his inquiry into its contents is a transparent whitewash. [73] By brushing the report under the carpet and pressing Jennie Formby to resign, Starmer has sent a clear message to the EHRC: Labour's new leadership won't put up any serious defence of the party's record. [74] After Oldknow's eclipse, Starmer pushed through the appointment of an equally partisan Labour-right apparatchik, David Evans.

If the EHRC publishes a report that is a tissue of lies from start to finish, most of the British media won't bat an eyelid. But it can also deliver a more elegant stitch-up, identifying some minor failings and transgressions — which are sure to be present in any large bureaucratic organization — and exaggerating their significance in the executive summary (an approach already pioneered back in 2016 by the report of Westminster's Home Affairs Committee on antisemitism in British politics). [75]

The Road to Nowhere

Starmer's evident desire to placate the

Labour right will come with a hefty price tag in terms of political orientation. Already Labour MPs have started grumbling that they had to vote against xenophobic immigration laws: "a significant number of us were incandescent at the whip," one backbencher claimed. Starmer probably won't face the same kind of open mutiny as Corbyn, but that's because a strategy of attrition is likely to be more effective in chipping away at residual left-wing policy commitments. [76]

Meanwhile, Starmer has sacked his left-wing opponent Rebecca Long-Bailey from the shadow cabinet on a farcical pretext. Long-Bailey had shared an interview with the actress Maxine Peake, a prominent Labour supporter who campaigned tirelessly for the party in the last two general elections. Peake noted in passing that the Israeli military provides training for US police forces — a well-established fact that underlines the elective affinity between two forms of state racism. [77]

Claims that Long-Bailey was promoting an "antisemitic conspiracy theory" should be dismissed with the contempt they so richly merit. Long-Bailey's critics are the ones guilty of antisemitism, by holding Jewish people collectively responsible for the actions of the Israeli state. At a time when Benjamin Netanyahu's government is preparing the formal annexation of the occupied territories, such tawdry exercises in mudslinging are the only thing Israel's supporters can offer in its defence.

In any case, Starmer was clearly grasping for the first excuse he could find to remove Long-Bailey from her post as shadow education secretary. It may have been a relatively marginal role, but Long-Bailey's presence in Starmer's front-bench team still made it more difficult for him to shift right — for example, by siding with Boris Johnson against teachers over the reopening of schools.

The Labour leadership has also signalled its intention to move away from the Green New Deal platform that Long-Bailey helped devise. [78] As Owen Hatherley pointed out, Long-Bailey was the candidate who actually

possessed the "forensic" policymaking skills that Starmer's enthusiasts credited him with: she was well-placed to carry on the work of John McDonnell, developing a left-wing economic program that's adapted for modern conditions. [79] Instead, Labour has an empty suit with a vision spliced together from focus groups.

Rewriting History

Ultimately, the idea of "Labour antisemitism" in the British media — like the "Bernie Bros" narrative in the United States — was a placeholder for the real message that media outlets wanted to put across: we don't consider this politician and his supporters to be legitimate, and we'll churn out a limitless supply of disinformation to prevent their arguments from being heard. If they want to achieve anything in politics, they'll have to wade knee-deep through a thick sludge of our nonsense.

Neither Corbyn nor Bernie Sanders were able to overcome the opposition they faced, for multiple reasons in both cases. In Britain, the Labour left is going to be on the defensive for the foreseeable future, and one of its main tasks will be resisting attempts to rewrite the history of the past five years in the most shameless manner — a process that is already well underway.

Soon after the election, Andy Beckett warned against dismissing what Corbyn had achieved, and rejected glib comparisons between Labour's infamous 1983 election defeat and its more recent setback:

Unlike [Michael] Foot, Corbyn won the support of a cohort of voters that will only become more important. According to the Conservative pollster Michael Ashcroft, last week Labour received almost three times as many votes from the under-35s as the Tories. In 1983, the Tories led Labour comfortably in this group . . . Labour's youthful support, and policies addressing what are by common consent the biggest contemporary issues — the climate emergency, the inadequacies of the modern economy and Britain's proliferating social crises

— suggest a party with the potential to do much better at future elections. [80]

You'll struggle to hear good sense like that over the conformist din, but this kind of insight is vital to keep hold of.

A Job Well Done

Meanwhile, the best epitaph for Corbyn's inner-party opponents comes from one of their own: Gavin Shuker, the Labour MP who helped form a new party, Change UK, at the start of 2019, with the goal of preventing a left-wing government. Many of Shuker's fellow MPs agreed that

Corbyn had to be stopped at all costs, but refrained from joining his splinter group on tactical grounds.

Looking back on a now defunct party, and the wreckage of his own parliamentary career, Shuker consoled himself with the thought that it had all been worth it: [81]

People might ask me in 30 years "what did you achieve in your time in politics." I'm no fan of this government obviously. But still, I will be able to say I helped prevent Jeremy Corbyn from leading us through a huge national crisis. And to be honest, I'll take that.

Shuker wasn't just speaking for himself or his Change UK colleagues. He was unquestionably speaking for a host of influential figures who preferred a Tory government to one led by Jeremy Corbyn: from Tom Watson and Margaret Hodge, to Iain McNicol and Emilie Oldknow. They look at the record of Britain's Tory government — the vertiginous death toll, the normalization of prejudice, the sheer wanton cruelty — and congratulate themselves on a job well done. This is what they wanted; this is the world they made.

June 25 2020

Jacobin

An ultra-parasitical global financial system that enjoys unwavering protection

24 July 2020, by **François Chesnais**

On June 12, the Fed lowered the key rates on its loans to 0 per cent and announced the unlimited purchase of treasury bills [82]. On June 18, the ECB (European Central Bank) immediately announced that it was lending to eurozone banks 1.310 billion euros at a rate of one per cent. In April 2019 I concluded an article for *A l'Encontre* thus: "The political question which may arise in one or more European countries, depending on the circumstances, is a new rescue of the banks by the state and the "socialization of losses" at the expense of the workers which goes with it in such cases." [83]

That is where we are now. The economic newspaper *Les Echos* stresses that for the ECB the amount is a record for a programme called TLTRO (Targeted Long-Term Refinancing Operation): "The offer is particularly incentive. Institutions that have taken out these loans will be charged a negative interest rate. In other words, the ECB will pay the banks to lend to their customers. And the level of this remuneration, -one

per cent, is completely unprecedented. For this, banks must maintain their credits to the economy at their level before the explosion of the pandemic. A condition which should be easily fulfilled thanks to the guarantees provided by governments to enable businesses to withstand the crisis".

The stated objective is to strengthen the lending capacity of banks, in particular to SMEs (small and medium sized enterprises), but "several establishments could choose to partially invest these funds borrowed at one per cent in government bonds that offer a positive return, including those of Italy [84]. In short, it is a question of restoring the banks' profitability and their ability to pay dividends to their shareholders.

But things are not that simple. The IMF's quarterly report on global financial stability, the Global Financial Stability Report, of April 2020 and the article posted online on the blog by IMF economists give on the contrary the idea of an unprecedented situation

revealed by the pandemic, of institutions - central banks and the IMF - faced with a new situation of ungovernability and decoupling between the markets and the "real economy", starting with the stock markets. The two major long-term systemic trends discussed in previous articles will help to understand their roots.

The long-term context: an endless financial accumulation and a continuous fall in interest rates

The first is the global movement which has seen global financial assets grow at a rate well above that of global GDP. I have spoken about this in many articles published by *A l'Encontre*. It results from the specific mechanism of accumulation of money capital/loan

capital as opposed to the "real accumulation of capital" which Marx studies in the three chapters (30,31,32) entitled "money-capital and real capital" of Part 5 of Book III of *Capital*. At the time when Marx studied it, the movement was linked to the economic cycle: part of the capital accumulated by industrial capitalists in the phase of expansion sought during the period of crisis and recession to be valorised as loan capital. He adds somewhat laconically that the accumulation of money capital may be "partly the result of circumstances which accompany it but are quite different from it". [85]

What was in the nineteenth century a conjunctural fact has become in the case of contemporary capitalism a systemic process, born first of "North-South" imperialist relations, then of institutional mechanisms of transformation of wages into money capital by means of pension systems by capitalization and then fuelled by the issue of securities of private debt, and more and more massively of public debt, in the central capitalist countries. We are in the presence of virtual drawing rights on present and future surplus-value, direct in the case of shares and bonds issued by companies, indirect in the case of public debt securities. They represent capital for those who hold them and expect a return, but are fictitious capital in terms of the movement of capital as a whole. [86]

The McKinsey Global Institute has calculated that stocks measured by market capitalization, private and public debt securities and bank deposits increased from 100 per cent to 200 per cent of global GDP between 1990 and the global economic and financial crisis of 2007-2009.

Figure 1. Growth of global financial assets and world GDP 1990-2010 (left axis and in red global financial assets as a percentage of world GDP; right axis their amount in trillions of dollars at 2011 exchange rates)



Source: McKinsey Global Institute, *Financial Globalization, Retreat or Reset?* 2013

The McKinsey Global Institute has stopped publishing its estimates. On the other hand, the Visual Capitalist site published figures in May which show that the movement has continued. [87]

Shares, measured by their market capitalization (89.5 trillion dollars) and titles of public and private debt (253.0 trillion dollars, of which 27.4 per cent is state debt) reach a total of 342, 5 trillion dollars, 95.5 thousand in bank deposits (not counting the 35.2 trillion in tight monetary aggregates), that is, a total of 438.2 trillion dollars as against 225 trillion dollars in 2012, an increase of 98 per cent. In addition, 280.6 trillion dollars in real estate assets are to be added.

- The second long-term trend is the continuing fall in interest rates.

Figure 2. United States: Interest rates on ten-year treasury bills at constant prices



Source: Federal Reserve Bank of Saint-Louis Economic Research

The policies (the term "unorthodox" which was used for a long time has gradually disappeared from comments) of massive monetary creation and permanent support from banks followed by the Fed and other central banks have contributed to this fall in rates. The studies department of the Natixis group even estimated that they explain two-thirds of the fall in rates from 2009. [88] But the economists of the BIS in Basle insisted that this was not enough to explain the fall, since it had started in 1995. As regards these falling interest rates, it is impossible, they say, to "disentangle what is structural and what is cyclical, and in what is cyclical, the respective importance of monetary and non-monetary factors" [89] Indeed, the major causes of the long fall in rates on the debt securities markets are to be found in the sharing of productivity gains controlled by the relationship between capital and labour, the skewed effects of technological change and the blocking of the mechanisms of accumulation that they create. The growth of the

current and future surplus value of the virtual drawing rights constituting fictitious capital is slowing down. The lack of profitable investment opportunities means that the supply of capital exceeds demand. [90] In response, investors have increased year by year what has been called from the early 2010s their craving for risk ("risk appetite") and have turned towards the opportunities for micro-profits offered by artificial intelligence.

The advent of big data and algorithms

High frequency transactions (HFT) were the first form of "automatic trading" based on statistical decisions managing big data in the financial sphere. These virtual market operators use complex algorithms to analyse several markets simultaneously and execute orders according to their condition. Whereas the HFT transaction speed was still 20 milliseconds in the early 2010s, it increased to 113 microseconds in 2011.

Non-specialists in the financial markets discovered HFT on May 6, 2010. While the European markets had opened slightly down due to concerns coming from Greece, on Wall Street, without warning or apparent reason, the Dow Jones index lost almost 10 per cent in a few minutes. [91] After an investigation, the American regulatory authorities (SEC and CFTC) questioned the technique of buying and selling assets based on algorithms. By studying the so-called "e-mini" contracts of the S&P 500, researchers found that HFT traders made an average profit of 1.92 dollars for each transaction made for large institutional investors and an average of 3.49 dollars for those made by retail investors. [92]

HFT was followed by what is called "robo-investing", which represented in 2019 according to *The Economist* [93] 35 per cent of market capitalization on Wall Street, 60 per cent of assets of institutional investors and 60 per cent of purchases and sales of securities on

the American markets. This management takes different forms. On the equity markets, the most common is that of the ETF (Exchange Traded Fund). Being programmed to follow the fluctuations of a benchmark index, without seeking to obtain a better performance than the market average, they are called “passive management”. It is in particular in the management of private portfolios that we find fully automated online investment platforms called “robot-advisers”. Funds traded on the Stock Exchange (Exchange Traded Funds) automatically track indices of shares and bonds. In October 2019, these vehicles were managing 4,300 billion dollars of US stocks, exceeding for the first time those managed by human beings. Software called “smart beta” isolates a statistical characteristic - volatility, for example - and focuses on the stocks that present it. As algorithms have proved themselves for stocks and derived products, they are also developing on the debt markets.

Fund managers read reports and meet with companies under strict insider trading and disclosure laws designed to control what is in the public domain and ensure that everyone has equal access. Today, an almost infinite accumulation of new data and the constant rise of algorithms are creating new ways of evaluating investments. They have more up-to-date information on companies than those available to their boards of directors. So far, the rise of computers has democratized finance by reducing costs. A typical ETF charges 0.1 per cent per year, compared to perhaps one per cent for an active fund. You can buy ETFs on your phone. An ongoing price war means that the cost of transactions has collapsed and that markets are on the whole more liquid than ever before. [94]

The Economist wonders whether ETFs are a threat to financial sustainability. [95] “Computers can distort the prices of assets, since many algorithms target at the same time titles having a given characteristic, then suddenly abandon them. Regulators fear that liquidity will evaporate as the markets fall. That is to forget that humans are perfectly capable of causing damage themselves and that computers can help manage

risks. Nevertheless, a series of “flash-crashes” and bizarre incidents have occurred, including a crash of the British pound in October 2016 and a fall in debt prices in December 2018. These incidents could become more serious and frequent as computers become more powerful”.

The current state of the global financial system

In April, the IMF published its first quarterly report, the *Global Financial Stability Report* of 2020. The director of the Department of Money and Capital Markets published the main lines of the June report on his blog prior to its publication. [96] It recalls that although the financial system came to the attention of the general public only at the beginning of March, the situation was very tense for weeks. Thus: “In mid-February, when investors began to fear that the epidemic would turn into a global pandemic, stock prices fell sharply from the excessive levels they had reached. In credit markets, credit spreads soared, particularly in risky segments such as high-yield bonds, leveraged loans and private debt, issuance of which practically stopped. Oil prices plummeted due to weaker global demand and the lack of agreement among OPEC + countries on production cuts, further reducing the appetite for risk. Volatility in the markets led to a flight to quality assets and the yield on bonds where investors had taken refuge dropped abruptly”. [97]

The emerging countries have experienced enormous capital flight.

Figure 3. Emerging countries: an enormous flight of capital



Source: [Financial Times](#)

This involved mainly very vulnerable African countries, which experienced the largest reversal of portfolio investment flows ever recorded by emerging countries, both in dollar

amounts and as a percentage of their GDP. The speed with which speculative capital moved reflected the fear of speculative funds confronted with the situation.

The FMI is pleased that “the central banks, on the whole, have mobilized to prevent the health crisis from turning into a financial hurricane. Whether by lowering their interest rates, by extending their programme of buying financial assets, by setting up currency swap lines between them or by granting credit facilities and liquidity”. The configuration that mainstream economists describe by the counter-intuitive term “moral hazard” when an entity (in this case a bank or a pension fund) is induced to increase its exposure to risk because it knows that it will not bear all the costs goes back to the doctrine of “too big to fail”. This doctrine was applied to the rescue of the Continental Illinois National Bank in 1983 [98] and has not stopped expanding since, the Lehmann Brothers bank being the only exception in September 2008. The IMF recognizes that in 2020 moral hazard was widespread and warned: “The unprecedented use of unconventional tools has undoubtedly cushioned the blow to the world economy by the pandemic and reduces the immediate danger to the global financial system, its intended goal. However, policymakers should be alert to unintended consequences, such as the continued increase in financial vulnerabilities in an environment of easy financial conditions. The fact of expecting continued support from central banks could turn the valuations of already stretched assets into vulnerabilities, particularly in a context where financial systems and the private sector exhausted their reserves during the pandemic”.

Central banks have come to the aid of banks, pension funds and other investors to such an extent that, since the fall in late February, the price of risk assets has rebounded, starting with that of shares. The stock markets are experiencing an unprecedented decoupling between price developments and the reality of economic activity, marked by the fall in GDP and the rapid rise in unemployment. Witness the surge in

US stock market indices and the fall in consumer confidence, two indicators that have historically evolved together, "which raises questions about the sustainability of the rebound if not for the boost from the central bank." [99]

Figure 4. United States: The paths separate, the stock markets and the state of trust are no longer synchronized



The decoupling between the economic situation and the level of shares applies to other countries. Thus, in France, while GDP has already fallen by 8 per cent and unemployment has reached its highest level since 1996, with the destruction of 500,000 jobs in May, the CAC 40 rebounded by 3,755 points on March 18 to 5,198 points on June 6, a recovery of 864 points compared to February 20.

The IMF's treatment of climate change

There is a chapter in the April report that has nothing to do with the pandemic. It is devoted to climate change. [100] Written at the request of the Network for Greening the Financial System. [101], it dramatically shows the IMF's concern for investors. I will therefore quote it at length. The IMF notes that, in light of "climate trends, the financial stability authorities fear that the financial system is not prepared to face this potentially significant increase in physical risk, as well as the risk of transition due to political, technological, legal and market changes that will occur during the transition to a low carbon economy". And to continue, "first of all, a climate risk can turn into a disaster if it occurs in an area where exposure is great and vulnerability is high. Such a disaster affects households, non-financial businesses and the public sector through the loss of physical and human capital, thereby causing economic disruption which can be significant. Companies in the financial

sector are exposed to these shocks through their underwriting activities (insurers), their lending activities (mainly banks) and the portfolios of affected securities (all financial companies).

For their part, financial institutions could also be exposed to operational risks (where their structures, systems and staff are directly affected by an event) or a liquidity risk (if disaster triggers a significant withdrawal of customer deposits). Insurers play a special role in absorbing shocks. The provision of insurance concentrates the impact of the shock on the insurance sector and reduces the impact on other economic agents. Governments generally play an important cushioning role by providing certain forms of insurance, as well as disaster relief and support. The pressure on government balance sheets after a disaster could have an impact on financial stability, given the close links between governments and banks in many economies. (...) Large-scale disasters could expose financial institutions to market risk if they lead to a sharp drop in share prices due to the widespread destruction of assets and the production capacity of companies or a fall in the demand for their products".

Ungovernability of part of the global financial system and markets "uncorrelated"

The article posted on the IMF blog makes the admission, surprising by its frankness, of a "governance system entangled in its contradictions". Indeed, if "the banks have had imposed on them through the international agreement known as Basel III liquidity ratios, capital requirements and even a start to control over their leveraged loans, this has moved the market for leveraged loans to the unregulated sector, made CLOs (Collateralized loan obligations) flourish and boosted the turnover of highly speculative investment funds. The boundaries of the parallel

financial system (that of shadow banking) are even more difficult to trace today than in 2008.

Chapter 2 of the Global Financial Report describes as well as it can "the financial ecosystem of high-risk credit markets lending to companies where the role of non-bank financial institutions has increased and the system has become more complex and opaquer. To give a flavour of the report, here is the first subtitle: "Rapid Growth of Risky Credit has Raised Red Flags". Potential vulnerabilities include "lower credit quality of borrowers, more flexible underwriting standards, liquidity risks in investment funds and increased interconnection". If banks have become safer, we do not know the links that institutional investors maintain with the banking sector and could inflict losses on it in the event of market disruptions. Central banks have "few instruments to deal with credit and liquidity risks in global capital markets", while "risk appetite has even spread to emerging markets. Aggregate portfolio outflows have stabilized and some countries have again experienced modest inflows".

The conclusion belongs to the World Economic Outlook (WEO) published in early July. We can read there that "according to new projections, world GDP should contract by 4.9 per cent in 2020, that is to say by 1.9 percentage points more than what was forecast in the WEOs of April 2020. The Covid-19 pandemic had a greater than expected negative impact on activity in the first half of 2020, and the recovery is expected to be slower than expected. In 2021, global growth is expected to reach 5.4 per cent. Overall, 2021 GDP should therefore be around 6.5 percentage points below the level envisaged by the projections established in January 2020, before the Covid-19 pandemic. The negative impact on low-income households is particularly severe, and could undermine the considerable progress that has been made in reducing extreme poverty in the world since the 1990s". And to drive the point home: "The scale of the recent upturn in the financial markets seems uncorrelated with the evolution of economic perspectives, as indicated in the update of the Report on financial

The Debate in the Left on the Elections in the United States

23 July 2020, by **Dan La Botz**

For the far left, socialists, anarchists, and anti-capitalists—who make up less than one percent of the population—Biden is problematic. The far left joined the progressives in supporting Senator Bernie Sanders, a liberal in the New Deal mold who ran as a “socialist” against the “billionaire class.” But since Sanders dropped out of the race and endorsed Biden, many on the far left have felt they have no candidate.

Biden is aptly characterized as a neoliberal. As a legislator Biden supported Bill Clinton’s reactionary and racist policies reducing social welfare and creating new criminal codes that increased imprisonment of Blacks and Latinx. He also faces an allegation of sexual assault, though it has not much affected his support.

Some say Biden is now moving to the left, and they give two reasons. First, Biden and Sanders created a Unity Task Force that has written a political program, which is at least rhetorically to the left of Biden’s historic positions. Second, the coronavirus crisis and the accompanying economic crisis may force Biden if elected president to adopt large-scale government economic interventions. Yet the Democratic Party platform has seldom

had a significant influence on presidents once they are elected. Nevertheless, most people in the broad left will vote for Biden in November.

Outside of DSA are those who support the Green Party, a left party whose candidates for president and vice-president are Howie Hawkins, a retired truck driver, and Angela Walker, working class activist. The Green Party candidate Ralph Nader was the party’s highest vote getter with 2.7 percent of the vote in 2000, when he was accused of having cost former vice-president Al Gore the presidency by taking votes from the Democrats. In the November election, some will vote for Greens in “safe states” where the Democrats are sure to win, but many will be reluctant to vote for the Green Party in contested states. DSA members are mostly uninterested in the Green Party, which they see as irrelevant and ineffective.

All of this is part of a bigger debate within DSA about the Democratic Party. Historically, from the 1980s to the 2010s, DSA generally supported the Democratic Party nominee. DSA founder and political leader, Michael Harrington, believed the labor unions

and the black movement could take over and “realign” the Democratic Party turning it into a socialist party. A new generation of DSA members in their 20s and 30s supported Bernie Sanders, but opposed the Democratic Party as a whole. The dominant view within DSA is that it is possible for DSA to use the Democratic Party ballot line to run socialist candidates or support other progressive candidates, looking forward to a future when DSA would break away and form a socialist party. A minority wants to create a socialist party now and some of the old guard prefer to focus on making the Democrats a more progressive party.

At the moment, with Sanders out of the race and with Biden the candidate, the debate about the future of the Democratic Party seems abstract. Fundamentally pragmatic, most DSA members will quietly vote for Biden, work to reelect Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio Cortez and other socialist or progressive candidates, and continue their work in the social movements. The question of building a socialist party is postponed. Others on the left will vote Green or ignoring the election, work on the movements.

Source [New Politics](#).

Covid-19: Africa’s crisis deepens

22 July 2020, by **Paul Martial**

The situation in Africa before the Covid-19 epidemic was marked by a

weakening of its economy, a consequence of the collapse of

commodity markets over the period 2014-2015. As a result, the export of

raw materials on which the economy is based in many countries has experienced major crises. This is obviously the case for the oil exporting countries, but also for Zambia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo in relation to copper or Guinea for bauxite. The extreme dependence of these countries on multinationals implies volatility in their income. The crises in rich countries are multiplied in Africa with dramatic consequences for the people in the absence of budgetary room for manoeuvre but also of social protection.

Recession

The Covid-19 crisis obviously only exacerbates this situation. The IMF predicted in April that the growth rate of gross domestic product (GDP) would decline by 1.6% while the World Bank expected higher figures, between 2.1% and 5.1%. The IMF revised its calculation in June and now predicts a 3.2% recession, which is close to the pessimistic forecasts of the World Bank.

The regional director for East Africa of the French development agency, FDA, in a column entitled "East Africa: what must change after Covid-19" says that "intra-continental trade links have been weakened more than international ones". [103] The author holds governments and administrations accountable, which is true, but he does not once ask himself how this situation came about.

Africa's dependence on rich countries is the result of centuries of colonialist and then imperialist policies. Europe has imposed a rent economy on Africa, confining it to a role of simple reserve of raw materials to the detriment of the development of its regional market. Since then, the industrial countries, the USA and China foremost, have benefited from this division of roles on a global scale. We must not count on a change in the policies of the rich countries to

promote the development of a local economy that partially meets the needs of the populations despite the rhetoric that we have heard for years.

In France, the Institute Montaigne, a liberal think tank, has published an analysis of the situation of French companies in Africa. Beyond the clichés that can be found in this type of study, this institute sees the main danger as being that French companies miss the economic recovery: "With the twenty or so companies mobilized for the elaboration of the Institut Montaigne's assessment, we have come to the conclusion that the main risk is missing the resumption of activity: we must go quickly while guaranteeing security." [104]

European companies are already preparing in the food industry. Taking advantage of European subsidies, dairy companies are stocking stock unsold milk in powder form to try to sell it in West Africa. The principle is as follows: "With the milk fats, a certain number of manufacturers produced butter which they sold at very good prices, and the skimmed-milk powder which remained was then re-fattened with palm oil and sold in emerging countries at prices lower than their local milk". A practice that is putting the continent's livestock sector, already hard hit by armed conflicts, in crisis.

The burden of debt

Debt is another example of Africa's economic strangulation. It is true that the heads of African financial or political institutions have had rather a low profile during the Covid-19 crisis. Instead of demanding the cancellation of the debt, the repayment of which affects national budgets, they simply asked for a moratorium, that is to say a temporary suspension of the repayment of the debt, while at the same time the rich countries announced the release of hundreds of billions of euros to revive the

economy, in particular through massive aid to large industries.

In any case such a moratorium would not apply to the entire debt and, as the trade press indicates: "Africa will have to find the means in foreign currency to reimburse the non-bilateral creditors. These are private investors who have made investments in Eurobonds and other bank loans made by the countries of the region". [105] In one of its articles, the CATDM - the committee for the abolition of illegitimate debts - pointed out that the share of debt repayment was on average 7.8% of GDP in the low income countries, whereas health expenditure only accounted for 1.8% of GDP. [106]

As for the food situation, it was already difficult - at the end of 2019, 73 million people were victims of malnutrition. Struck by a massive locust invasion following three years of drought, many of the crops in East Africa have been destroyed, threatening tens of millions of people. For countries like the Central African Republic, South Sudan or Somalia, the situation is also very critical because of the continuing armed conflicts. The Covid-19 virus epidemic has fuelled nutrition problems and created tensions in other regions, hitting the most vulnerable populations. The UN report speaks of hunger in West and Central Africa, where the number of people in a situation of food insecurity has jumped by 135%, as well as in southern Africa, where there is an increase of 90%. [107]

The Covid-19 crisis, in Africa as elsewhere, shows the need to reorient the economy to meet the social needs of populations. Such a change implies political will that is no more present on the agenda of African leaders and rich countries today than it was yesterday. The only solution is the massive eruption of the people onto the political scene.

15 July 2020

Covid-19: Asian contrasts and lessons

21 July 2020, by **Pierre Rousset**

The national dynamics of the epidemic vary considerably within the major groups of South Asia, Southeast Asia and the Far East. In each of these regions, states have contained the pandemic, sometimes remarkably, or have failed, often dramatically. The epidemic is particularly in full development in Indonesia, with 75,699 infections officially listed, though this is an underestimate, and 3,606 deaths, as of 13 July 2020. Why such differences?

Speed of response

A first element of response concerns the speed with which the authorities reacted. The longer the delay, the more virulent the epidemic became. This was obviously the case in China, the initial focus, which opened the door to the pandemic. Beijing has a very heavy responsibility here, but it is not alone. The pandemic first reached Europe, which has long become its main focus. Most European states reacted late, and thanks to this delay, the pandemic spread to other continents with a power multiplied by the density of trade specific to capitalist globalization.

Countries that have taken radical action without delay have been able to contain or even eradicate the epidemic (and have not helped to spread the pandemic). This is particularly the case for Vietnam with 372 cases recorded, no deaths and no new contamination for several weeks. This is also the case for Taiwan with 449 cases identified and 7 deaths. Thailand has 3,220 infected, including 58 deaths; most importantly, there has been no new contamination for more than 45 days.

As for mortality rates in Asia, we have 0.0 per 100,000 inhabitants in Vietnam, 0.03 in Taiwan, 0.08 in Thailand, 0.33 in China, 0.39 in Malaysia, 0.46 in Singapore, 0.56 in

South Korea. In Europe we have 10.50 in Denmark, 10.94 in Germany, 16.09 in Portugal, 23.11 in Switzerland, 35.73 in the Netherlands, 35.97 in Ireland, 44.80 in France, 54.27 in Sweden, 57.83 in Italy, 60.79 in Spain, 67.50 in Great Britain and 85.64 in Belgium. Even taking into account the biases linked to the quality of epidemiological surveys and official information, these figures speak for themselves and the follow-up work carried out by Johns Hopkins University provides references.

Health policy and self-mobilization of the population

Another noteworthy point is the role played by the basic health model. The intensive care capacity of a country like Vietnam is very low and yet, despite the very high risks (trade with neighbouring China), it has the best results. Indeed, basic preventive measures are not complex: tests, isolation of contaminated individuals, monitoring of people with whom they have been in contact, masks, hand washing, disinfection. In Sri Lanka, there have so far been "only" 11 deaths from 2,617 reported infections. This is explained by the fact that a highly developed public health system still exists, unfortunately threatened by neoliberal policies. In countries that have effectively contained the epidemic, public authorities have intervened in a coherent manner, often by mobilizing social networks for the implementation of health policies - whether by governments or administrations acting more or less autonomously of the political authorities, as in the astonishing case of Thailand.

Finally, let us recall the major roles the popular culture of hygiene (Thailand, again) and of epidemic risk,

as well as the self-mobilization of populations, have played. This was particularly the case in Hong Kong, where the inhabitants immediately and spontaneously masked themselves, contrary to the initial positioning of the authorities. In Vietnam, social networks denounced a wealthy woman who tried to escape the compulsory quarantine for anyone returning from abroad. The people called to order those French present in the country, who judged the wearing of the mask useless based on the (false) statements of their government - a government that for weeks advocated the exact opposite of what it should have done, making necessity (a general shortage) into a virtue.

Covid's "magnifying glass effect" and Eurocentrism

The Covid pandemic has a "magnifying glass effect": it highlights realities behind appearances. France is no longer a power, but a dependent imperialist country endowed with an authoritarian regime which refuses to associate representations of the cared for and the caregivers in the development or the implementation of its health policy. More generally, the West is no longer the world's yardstick, including in the medical field. More than ever, a Euro-centric vision leads to disastrous errors of judgment. When did our leaders realize that the pandemic was a danger? When Italy was hit; they remained blind to what was happening in Asia. Have they sought to learn from Asian experiences? They mostly disparaged them.

The problem is not new, as Pascale Brudon, who represented the World

Health Organization in Vietnam during the outbreak of SARS in 2003, notes. At that time, WHO was still playing a role of effective international coordination and many national teams came to help and learn from this crisis ... but almost no one from France. Interviewed by *Mediapart* (6 April, 2020), she said she was “frightened by the way in which public health systems have malfunctioned [in France], when we have already experienced major epidemics. When WHO released the list of country-by-country increases in cases in late January, there was still time to respond. There were really signals that were not heard”. [108]

Borders

Where the epidemic has not been eradicated, the risk of a rebound exists. South Korea has just had the painful experience of this. South Koreans have indeed decided to spend their holidays in their country, rather than traveling abroad ... and the virus has spread again (a warning for France!). It can be reintroduced from abroad, especially since international economic exchanges are once again growing. Until the global pandemic is brought under control and while there is no effective treatment and no long-term protective vaccine, there is a risk of renewed epidemics. Thus, in Vietnam and Thailand, there are currently some new daily cases.

The quarantining of people entering a country (starting with nationals and residents returning home) has been a very effective measure, but we must understand its scope. On 25 March, there were 45,000 quarantined in Vietnam! [109] An initial screening took place in particular at airports: anyone with symptoms (fever and so on) was sent to the hospital, the others were put into quarantine.

The “borders” of an epidemic are above all those of clusters, the foci of infection, which can be located anywhere: in the middle of a country, on either side or even on the edge of a state border (the case of Alsace, in France). Faced with the pandemic, all populations have linked fates. “Health in one country” is not sufficient and intergovernmental cooperation should

make it possible to deploy united policies, but this is not the case. In Asia, as in most regions of the world, national borders still delimit the space in which public health policy is deployed, whether for better or for worse.

In the face of a pandemic, the transcendence of state borders is both a vital necessity and a present impossibility, all the more so since governments pursue health policies that are often contradictory to each other. It is a strategic horizon for which we must fight, but under difficult conditions and relationships of forces.

Health, hostage of the regimes

Asia is obviously hostage to a neoliberal world order which gives exorbitant strength to economic powers, but probably less than the European Union with its rules of “free and undistorted” competition and the deindustrialization of many member states. It also has its Donald Trumps, such as Narendra Modi in India or Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines.

The pandemic is booming in South Asia. With a population of 1.4 billion people, India is the third placed country in terms of highest number of infections: 850,000 and 23,000 deaths recorded (the figures are considered to be very underestimated). The government has paid no attention to the “internal” migrant workforce (Indian and not foreign) who, on returning to their homes, spread the epidemic despite themselves. Note that in Singapore (45,000 infections), the 26 deaths are due to the fact that the authorities had done nothing to protect migrant workers. Even in times of health emergency, the authorities tend to “neglect” (non) citizens of the second zone, which, from an epidemiological (and humanist) viewpoint is an absurd blindness.

Narendra Modi bases his power on a Hindu ultra-nationalism (*Hindutva*). In the middle of the pandemic, he organized a pilgrimage of thousands of devotees to the Amarnath cave,

located 3,900 meters above sea level in Kashmir (Indian side) and dedicated to the god Shiva, observing symbolic sanitary measures. A decision all the more worrying inasmuch as Modi’s nationalism is expansionary and has regional territorial aims.

The fight against the pandemic has also become hostage to the geostrategic conflicts that are woven around the World Health Organization (WHO). It was an effective vehicle for promoting basic health systems and providing reliable health information. The United States (and Big Pharma) has always questioned its operation - voting rights are not measured by financial contributions, but by country. Trump is part of this tradition all the more since, in general, he dynamites international forums for multilateral intergovernmental cooperation in the name of unilateralism. He has just started the process of withdrawing the US from WHO, which will be effective in a year if he wins the next presidential election.

Add to all this the fact that the epicentre of the geopolitical conflict between Beijing and Washington is today located in the Indo-Pacific theatre of operations where each state has to choose sides. Thus, Australia has decided to escalate tensions with China. We are not moving towards more cooperation, but more tension, in Asia in particular. Enough to make the pandemic happy!

Solidarity in times of pandemic

With the generalization of neoliberal policies worldwide, the balance of the dynamics of international solidarity has changed. The weight of the common struggle against universalised policies has increased, in addition to the “traditional” North-South solidarity (which obviously remains relevant).

The “magnifying glass effect” of Covid-19 confirms just how much this is true. In a global pandemic, a common north-south, east-west battle. In all the countries (to my knowledge) where “solidarity from below” is deployed, during lockdown in

particular, similar initiatives have been taken to help isolated people, those who have been forgotten by government measures (undocumented migrants and so on), ensuring the most basic needs: the popular canteens have become a symbol of this solidarity.

In Asia, the sectors of the population affected by “marginality” are very numerous. The popular relief organizations had to redirect their activities to face the emergency: responding to priority needs (food, daily hygiene kits, psychological or educational support and so on). They used their pre-existing solidarity networks for this. To this end, they have sometimes had to suspend

programs designed over several years, because they work in often very difficult conditions which limit their possibilities.

Take the example of the MiHands coalition in Mindanao (in the southern Philippines), which coordinates a network of around 50 associations periodically mobilized to deal with humanitarian disasters of all kinds. The island is under martial law. The police or the army enjoy a veritable presidential immunity. Travelling is complicated and the degree of “tolerance” of the authorities (with whom it is necessary to collaborate to ensure aid) varies according to localities and times. Military conflicts are underway. The ancestral territories of the mountain people

(*Lumad*) are particularly targeted. Companies covet their riches (wood, minerals) while these communities live in symbiosis with the forest. Faced with this situation, aid missions must be coupled with attempts to resolve conflicts, with the support of another progressive coalition. There is no indication that the situation will improve in the future and the activists running these networks are experiencing exhausting stress.

We are fighting a common struggle, but in countries like the Philippines, our partners are continuing it under infinitely more difficult conditions. They deserve our support. [110]

13 July, 2020

Emancipation and science: Ernest Mandel 25 years later

20 July 2020, by **Alex de Jong**

In his intellectual and political work, Mandel's Marxism was simultaneously 'orthodox' and 'open'. He was an orthodox Marxist in the sense he defined in a 1983 article; 'one who 'acts' in the spirit of Marx' and is 'bound by the obligation to resist all inhuman social conditions'. [111] His Marxism was open in the sense that Mandel described in a conversation with German radical Johannes Agnoli, it was 'a task of continuing development, of incorporating new facts and new scientific considerations'; 'it is part of the essential nature of Marxism to examine significant empirical changes'. [112]

Mandel's orthodoxy and his openness were parts of a whole. Struggles against injustice and for emancipation circumstances were for him a motor force in history. As history is partly the product of continuing struggles, its development is radically uncertain. For Mandel, the history of these struggles was older than that of

capitalism, and had its roots in fundamental aspects of human anthropology; in 'the social character of labour, the social origins of communication and the impossibility to withdraw from these without paying a high price'. [113] 'Humanity's wealth', wrote Mandel, 'consists of the wealth of human relations, in other words, of social relations.' [114] With the development of productive forces under capitalism, the struggle against inhuman conditions made socialism a possibility - not more.

History can only be understood, Mandel argued, as a totality that is undergoing constant change, driven by inner contradictions. Hence, Mandel argued that Marxists needed to adopt a 'historical genetic' method to understand social phenomena.

Mandel used the example of the bourgeois state to develop this way of thinking. An 'attempt to derive the character and essence of the bourgeois state directly from the

categories of Marx's Capital - either from "capital in general" or from the exchange and trade relations on the surface of bourgeois society, or from the conditions of valorization of capital - overlooks the fact that the bourgeoisie itself did not make the state in the sense of a state machinery that is disconnected from society and elevated to the status of an autonomous institution. The bourgeoisie limited itself to taking over the state as it existed before it came to power'. [115]

Considering (pre-capitalist) history in this way set Mandel apart from those 'structural' Marxists who attempted to explain social phenomena as the effects of the immutable laws governing capitalism. Mandel's 'reconciliation of theory and history' made him an intellectual free spirit; 'outside mainstream Marxism, outside doctrinaire Althusserianism and outside what Perry Anderson called "Western Marxism", which had turned its back on economic research.' [116]

Side-by-side with the history of class struggles is the history of science and social theory, Mandel wrote. Science follows its own laws and is not at the service of the 'liberation of the proletariat', of 'freedom' or of 'historical progress'. Science is useful to the struggle for liberation when it provides knowledge that helps to make correct political decisions. But it would only be able to do so as science, following its laws, not when it was subjugated to political criteria. Mandel saw in Marxism the combination of the two histories, that of struggles against inhuman conditions and of scientific research.

Mandel's major works in political economy (Marxist Economic Theory (1962) and Europe versus America?: Contradictions of Imperialism (1970); Late Capitalism (1972) and Long Waves of Capitalist Development (1980)), as well as dozens of conjunctural articles, were all written to provide the workers movement and socialists with such tools to understand ongoing developments and make decisions. Late Capitalism in particular can be considered Mandel's master-work. In it, Mandel rescued the theory of long waves in capitalism, a concept that had been used by both Marxist and non-Marxist economists like Kondratieff and Schumpeter, to predict the long downturn that began in the mid-seventies.

In his application of long wave theory, Mandel again combined theoretical concepts with historical research and empirical fact. Mandel argued that with the 'conceptual tools of Marxist economic analysis', it was possible to explain long term developments in capitalism, but only if one considered that several of the key variables of this conceptual 'system' were 'partially autonomous variables'. Partially autonomous, not independent, as they functioned within parameters set by the capitalist system itself. 'Capitalist states and governments' can do many things, Mandel wrote, 'and so can capitalist entrepreneurs and firms. But they cannot abolish money capital and profit as the starting-point and final point of the system's operations, nor can they abolish the operation of market forces, or eliminate the law of value.' [117]

In the 1980s, Mandel formulated ten key 'propositions' to understand capitalism's long-term developments:

- (1) the law of value;
- (2) the law of capital accumulation;
- (3) the law of surplus-value;
- (4) the law of equalization of the rate of profit;
- (5) the law of concentration and centralization of capital;
- (6) the law of the tendency of the organic composition of capital to rise;
- (7) the law of class struggle determination of wages;
- (8) the law of tendency for the average rate of profit to decline;
- (9) the law of the cyclical nature of capitalist production and of the inevitability of crises of over-production;
- (10) the law of the unavoidable collapse of the system (*Zusammenbruchs-theorie*).

His own contribution Marxist economy theory Mandel described as 'an additional time-frame for proposition (9): the "long waves of capitalist development", in which among other things, basic technological revolutions are realized, and the equalization of the rate of profit between non-monopolized and monopolized sectors asserts itself.'

According to Mandel, these 'propositions' would be accepted by most Marxists, 'with the possible exception of proposition 10'. That Mandel considered capitalist collapse to be 'inevitable' did not mean socialism was as well: 'The collapse of capitalism is inevitable [...] After the experience of two world wars, two world economic crises of the magnitude of those of 1929 to 1933 and of the present one, we have little reason to doubt this. But this collapse can lead to two completely opposite results: forward to socialism, or backward to barbarism.'

The ten propositions are essentially 'endogenous' to capitalism from an economic point of view. In other words, they are produced by the structure of the system; 'private ownership of the means of production, primitive accumulation of money capital, creation of a class of wage earners, expanding commodity production, i.e. market economy'. But

apart from these 'endogenous' factors, there are 'exogenous' factors as well since 'the concrete historical process of capitalist development is always the result of an interaction between the system and the environment in which it develops; this environment is never 100 percent capitalist.'

The non-capitalist elements in its environment, as well as the results of pre-capitalist history have an impact on the key variables of capitalism. Although pre-capitalist 'anti-slavery revolts, peasant revolts in the old Asian mode of production, peasant revolts of the late Middle Ages' as well as the 'the rebellious, machine-storming workers of early capitalism' were destined to failure, such struggles also provided 'a tremendous tradition of forms of struggle and organization as well as of revolutionary thoughts, ideals, dreams and hopes from which the proletarian struggle for emancipation draws nourishment'; without such predecessors, the development of the proletarian struggle would be much more difficult. [118]

The long term laws of capitalist accumulation might assert themselves 'behind the backs of the subjects' but its effects are influenced by them, forming together part of the totality. In the long term, Mandel wrote, developments in the class struggle are 'subordinated to the level of development of the productive forces, to the existing relations of production, and to the structures of major social classes'. But such a long term vision was of little help in deciding what to do. A certain level of the development of the productive forces makes possible a range of relations of productions, of frameworks in which the class struggle takes place. And these class struggles can have different outcomes. It is from within these changing conditions that socialists need to make choices and act; 'we stand in the middle of the historical process'. [119]

Every individual has to choose how to relate to this process, a choice that is partially individual, partially socially determined.

Towards the end of his life, Mandel was confronted with a crisis of the

socialist project. Five years before he passed away, Mandel wrote that this crisis was 'above all a crisis of credibility of socialist ideas. Five generations of socialists and three generations of workers were driven by the deep, unshakeable conviction that socialism [was] possible and necessary'; 'the current generation is no longer convinced that it is possible'. [120] This was in essence the outcome of a crisis in 'the praxis of socialists', of the failures and crimes committed in the name of socialism.

Two years later, Mandel argued at a meeting of the Sao Paulo Forum of left parties that 'The practice of socialists and communists must be totally consistent with their principles. We

must not justify any alienating or oppressive practices whatsoever. We must, in practice, realise what Karl Marx called the categorical imperative: to struggle against all conditions in which human beings are alienated and humiliated. If our practice is consistent with this imperative, socialism will once again become a political force that will be invincible.' [121]

Despite the hopes of some bourgeois ideologists, history did not end with the Cold War, and neo-liberalism did not 'abolish boom and bust'. New generations of activists are rediscovering Marxism and anti-capitalism. A quarter of a century after his death, in the midst of

multiple global crises, of health, of ecology, political and economic conditions, Mandel's political and intellectual work in plotting a course way from barbarism, 'towards socialism' is of burning relevance.

This year, the IIRE is working on publishing and translating into English various articles by Ernest Mandel. Articles published so far can be found here: <http://iire.org/taxonomy/term/56>.

We are also working on three volumes of selected essays by Mandel. We are fundraising to help pay for the costs of editing, design and publication. Please consider making a donation here: <http://iire.org/wp/donate/> (mention 'Mandel book project').

The Coronavirus crisis and the struggle for health

19 July 2020, by **Louis Reynolds**

At this stage of the crisis it is crucial to save lives and to prevent the crisis from overwhelming our health system. As the crisis eventually winds down, we must ensure that we come through it with a unitary, equitable national health service that delivers universal health coverage. There must also be a programme that involves all state sectors collaboratively to ensure that everyone has equitable access to the causes of good health.

This article looks at the background to the crisis and its implications for the struggle for people's health.

A crisis-on-a-crisis

This is a crisis on top of a crisis - our long-standing, "normal" health crisis. Even before Covid-19 began to spread, our health outcomes were far worse than those of all other middle income countries at the same level of GDP, as well as those of many poorer countries. This long-standing underlying crisis is rooted in 1996,

when the state adopted neoliberalism with its Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) macro-economic policy. GEAR entrenched and deepened the overall inequality inherited from apartheid. On top of this came corruption at all levels of the state and the private sector.

Against that background, our health crisis arose from two key failures of the state:

- Failure to address inequalities in access to the goods and services we need to be healthy. These are generally known as the social determinants of health (SDH).
- Failure to unite our health services into a single, equitable national health service around a common goal of achieving health for all and building social solidarity.

The SDH include an adequate income as well as socio-economic rights in our constitution: social security, education, adequate housing, safe

environments, adequate food, water and sanitation, good nutrition, freedom of movement [implying safe public transport], and safety and security.

A fragmented health system

Failure to unite our well-resourced but fragmented and inequitable health system has led us to normalise the existence of a large and powerful private sector that uses as much money as the public sector to provide services to a small, elite minority, the healthiest 15% of the population. This an extremely inefficient use of resources. In contrast, the public sector provides health care to the remaining 85% of the population - which also bears the overwhelming share of the disease burden - with the same amount of money. Those who need the most health care have the least access. This inequity is unacceptable in a constitutional

democracy based on human rights and values, social justice and equality. It is incompatible with any attempt to correct the wrongs of our apartheid past. Covid-19: some key issues

How the corona crisis evolves from now on depends fundamentally on a range of key issues:

- The extent to which we “flatten the curve” of the epidemic by minimising spread of the virus through the country.
- Whether the health services combine their human and other resources urgently and unite as one, without an impact on the fiscus.
- How we use the experience of this crisis to build a united, equitable and effective single national health service that provides good quality essential health services to all.
- Whether we prevent social disruption and build social solidarity. The virus reminds us that we’re all in this together. Solidarity is rooted in the principle of “from each according to ability, to each according to need”. It is relevant not only in providing health services, but also in caring for others, including people we don’t know, and acting to relieve their plight.
- Whether we come out of this crisis with a total commitment to address the social determinants of health by mobilising resources and people across sectors.

Why flattening the curve, though difficult, is essential

Flattening the curve is a challenge in crowded working class peri-urban slums, and rural areas. That is where people carry the overwhelming share of the burden of disease and lack access to the SDH. Unemployment is high, the level of trust in the government and the economic system is low, crime is rampant, and many people are disillusioned. People rely on crowded taxis for personal

transport. It is difficult to avoid contact with others who carry the Coronavirus and who feel well. It is practically impossible for many to practice frequent hand-washing with soap and water, and physical distancing.

The challenge of flattening the curve also applies to affluent middle-class environments where many people are not taking the crisis seriously and go on with life as usual. Maybe this is out of sheer ignorance or maybe it is because they believe themselves to be somehow above it and think it doesn’t really apply to them.

The lockdown announced by President Ramaphosa on 23rd March is a critical step. It aims to stop the spread of the virus. It is drastic and will impact heavily on many people, once again most heavily on those most vulnerable. But the consequences for all of us of allowing corona to spread will be catastrophic for everyone—there is no option.

Response from the health sector

How the health sector responds now is critical. The public sector will have to care for the vast majority of people who get sick from the virus. If it has to do this on its own it will be overwhelmed. After decades of having to cope with austerity budgets under GEAR, it is demoralised, understaffed, under equipped and its facilities are crumbling. The Office of Health Standards Compliance’s Annual Inspection Report for 2016/17 found that of the 696 facilities it inspected, only five were fully compliant with National Core Standards, and 412 were unconditionally or critically non-compliant. Yet, when it comes to national health outcomes, the public sector can reach levels of efficiency that can never be achieved by the private sector. For example, in the face of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the public health sector implemented the roll-out of the largest anti-retroviral programme in the world, resulting in a 10 year improvement in life expectancy, a key health indicator, within a decade.

Our private sector is the largest in the world in terms of the proportion of national health spending it consumes. It has an enormous capacity to assist. Though powerful, it faces a crisis of its own. It is fragmented between multiple byzantine and increasingly complex and unaffordable medical schemes, hospitals and competing corporate stakeholders. In its current form it is unsustainable. It has, up to now, managed to immunise itself against our broader health crisis. But it is now critical for both sectors to unite and work together as one to provide care for all who need it — unity is strength.

In his recent speech to the nation, president Ramaphosa mentioned the possibility of “partnering with the private sector” but referred only to the development of “a tracing, tracking and monitoring system for all those affected by Coronavirus”. What about sharing of resources for care? and is it enough should there be a wide-scale outbreak?

The epidemic will almost certainly overwhelm the public sector. Many people, rich and poor, with and without medical scheme membership, will become critically ill. There will not be enough high care and ICU beds for everyone who needs them. It will be essential to involve the private sector fully, bringing both sectors together as one through transparent negotiations to set agreed terms of reference. To address the crisis more effectively, both Spain and Ireland have effectively nationalised their private hospitals, bringing them into the public sector. Why not here? Will the private sector open up its beds and make them available to people who need them, irrespective of social or economic status? Will private and public health professionals work together in solidarity?

It is possible that, even combining private and public sector beds, some people will not find an ICU space. This raises some important ethical questions. Will some people have easier access than others? How will we decide who gets an available bed when more than one patient needs it?

When this crisis winds down and passes, there will be a period of

reflection, of healing, of looking into the future and working out a way forward.

All of us must recognise our enormous debt to those who took risks and acted on the frontline, including health workers at all levels, cleaners, and all the working class people who, because of spatial and structural inequities imposed on them by history, carried an unfair share of the burden.

We must be well prepared for the next pandemic. Given our human-induced ecologic crisis, it is merely a matter of time before another one strikes. Furthermore, regional and local weather-related catastrophes will occur more often than in the past. We must also address our underlying health crisis. Unless we tackle inequality and the SDH with the same vigour with which we are now addressing the Covid-19 crisis, we will repeat history over and over again. We must now renew the struggle towards Health for All. This commits us to three interlinked terrains of struggle.

The struggle for a national health service

This crisis will show starkly how essential it is to pool all available health care resources into a single national health service that follows the Primary Health Care approach (PHC) to build social solidarity and deliver good quality essential health services to all through Universal Health Coverage (UHC). The current fragmentation of health care

resources into two inequitable systems is unacceptable. Community participation is a key principle of primary health care. We must take up the struggle for such a NHS through the campaign for a People's NHI, using a combination of bottom-up and top-down approaches. We can expect that vested interests in the corporate private sector will seek to re-establish a version of the highly profitable status quo by exploiting the corona crisis to perpetuate profiting from disease.

In her important book *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, Naomi Klein shows how neoliberal capitalism thrives on crises and shocks. Crises such as wars, coups, natural disasters and economic downturns become prime opportunities to impose an agenda of privatisation, deregulation, and cuts to social services. The Coronavirus crisis is perfect for disaster capitalism to thrive. We have already seen small-scale "price gouging" as people hoard toilet paper and sanitiser to sell at inflated prices. But the bigger danger is from politicians and large corporate bodies who exploit the crisis for personal gain. President Ramaphosa's commitment to prosecute corrupt individuals who profiteer from the crisis through corruption seems to address only small-scale profiteering. We must ensure that our struggle for a national health service through the NHI prevents disaster capitalism from capturing the health system.

The many struggles for

equitable access to the social determinants of health

Access to the SDH encompasses virtually all state sectors working collaboratively to deliver the goods and services essential for health. The corona lockdown shows how important it is for a broad range of government sectors to work together towards a common goal, in this instance coordinated through the Coronavirus Command Council. Again, full community participation through organised civil society is essential, and we must ensure that civil society and labour are represented there. Meanwhile, a whole range of civil society organisations are involved in campaigns around the SDH, though some might not see the links between their struggles and health clearly. They involve education, housing, transport, water and sanitation, access to information and data, and so on.

The struggle against the global ecologic crisis

The ecologic crisis of global heating is the biggest, most complex, and most difficult threat to health to combat. We must give critical support to progressive struggles to restore our relationships with each other and the earth.

Source [Amandla 69](#).

Capitalist agriculture and Covid-19: a deadly combination

19 July 2020, by Rob Wallace

You have been researching epidemics and their causes for

several years. In your book *Big Farms Make Big Flu* you attempt

to draw these connections between industrial farming practices,

organic farming and viral epidemiology. What are your insights?

The real danger of each new outbreak is the failure, or (better put) the expedient refusal to grasp that each new Covid-19 is no isolated incident. The increased occurrence of viruses is closely linked to food production and the profitability of multinational corporations. Anyone who aims to understand why viruses are becoming more dangerous must investigate the industrial model of agriculture and, more specifically, livestock production. At present, few governments, and few scientists, are prepared to do so. When the new outbreaks spring up, governments, the media, and even most of the medical establishment are so focused on each separate emergency that they dismiss the structural causes that are driving multiple marginalised pathogens into sudden global celebrity, one after the other.

Who is to blame?

I said industrial agriculture, but there's a larger scope to it. Capital is spearheading land grabs into the last of primary forest and smallholderheld farmland worldwide. These investments drive the deforestation and development, leading to disease emergence. The functional diversity and complexity these huge tracts of land represent are being streamlined. This causes previously boxed-in pathogens to spill over into local livestock and human communities. In short, capital centres, such as London, New York, and Hong Kong, should be considered our primary disease hotspots.

For which diseases is this the case?

There are no capital-free pathogens at this point. Even the most remote are affected. Ebola, Zika, the coronaviruses, yellow fever again, a

variety of avian influenzas, and African swine fever in pigs are among the many pathogens making their way out of the most remote hinterlands into peri-urban loops, regional capitals, and ultimately onto the global travel network. From fruit bats in the Congo to killing Miami sunbathers in a few weeks' time.

What is the role of multinational companies in this process?

Planet Earth is largely Planet Farm at this point, in both biomass and land used. Agribusiness is aiming to corner the food market. Nearly all of the neoliberal project is organised around supporting efforts by companies based in the more advanced industrialised countries to steal the land and resources of weaker countries. As a result, many of those new pathogens previously held in check by long-evolved forest ecologies are being sprung free, threatening the whole world.

What effects do the production methods of agribusinesses have on this?

The capital-led agriculture that replaces more natural ecologies offers the exact means by which pathogens can evolve the most virulent and infectious phenotypes. You couldn't design a better system to breed deadly diseases.

How so?

Growing genetic monocultures of domestic animals removes whatever immune firebreaks may be available to slow down transmission. Larger population sizes and densities facilitate greater rates of transmission. Such crowded conditions depress immune response. High throughput, a part of any industrial production, provides a continually renewed supply of susceptible animals. They are the fuel for the virulent diseases. In other words, agribusiness is so focused on

profits that selecting for a virus that might kill a billion people is treated as a worthy risk.

What!?

These companies can just externalise the costs of their epidemiologically dangerous operations on everyone else. From the animals themselves to consumers, farmworkers, local environments, and governments across jurisdictions. The damage is so extensive that, if we were to return those costs onto company balance sheets, agribusiness as we know it would be ended forever. No company could support the costs of the damage it causes.

In many media it is claimed that the starting point of the Coronavirus was an "exotic food market" in Wuhan. Is this description true?

Yes and no. There are spatial clues in favour of the notion. Contact tracing linked infections back to the Hunan Wholesale Sea Food Market in Wuhan, where wild animals were sold. Environmental sampling does appear to pinpoint the west end of the market where wild animals were held. But how far back and how widely should we investigate? When exactly did the emergency really begin? The focus on the market misses the origins of wild agriculture out in the hinterlands and its increasing capitalisation. Globally, and in China, wild food is becoming more formalised as an economic sector. But its relationship with industrial agriculture extends beyond merely sharing the same moneybags. The expansion of industrial production of pigs, poultry, and the like into primary forest places pressure on wild food operators to dredge further into the forest for source populations. This increases the interface with, and spillover of, new pathogens, including Covid-19.

Source [*Climate and Capitalism*](#).

United States of America: Socialism for Big Capital and wild capitalism for the poor

18 July 2020, by **Éric Toussaint**

During a radio programme in February 1968, less than two months before he was murdered by a segregationist, Martin Luther King said: "The problem is that we all too often have socialism for the rich and rugged free enterprise capitalism for the poor."

That characterization of the US's policies is a good description of the measures that have been taken since March 2020 by the Trump administration and by the Federal Reserve under the terms of an agreement between the Republican and Democratic parties - the two major parties that take turns in power yet both defend the fundamental interests of Big Capital.

Flashback on political choices since 2017-2018

As soon as Trump became president, he granted enormous tax gifts to the big corporations and to the richest.

But at the end of 2018, at a session shortly before Christmas, stock prices plummeted by over 10% on Wall Street. The Fed responded at once and helped shareholders as it again lowered the cost of refinancing debts for big private corporations.

Wall Street soon recovered, but from **September** 2019 a crisis broke out on the repo market because banks no longer trusted each other. Within three months **the Fed injected \$1,000 bn onto the interbank** market and speculation has continued on Wall Street, where prices are going up whereas the US economy has considerably slowed down, and is even in recession in some sectors.

Major banks and big US corporations

pay loads of dividends and buy back their own shares, both to keep them artificially bullish and to enrich major shareholders and CEOs when they sell their stock options. [122]

Washington's approach to the coronavirus crisis

With respect to the working classes

From mid-March, when lockdown was gradually imposed in the US, to the end of the first week of June 2020, 44 million residents of the leading global power became unemployed. The official rate of unemployment, which largely underestimates the actual situation, is 13.3% whereas it stood at around 3.5% at the beginning of the year.

The official rate of unemployment reached 13.3 % while it used to be around 3.5% at the beginning of the year

The working classes are severely impacted by this multidimensional crisis: loss of revenue, loss of employment, a high death rate from COVID-19 and difficulty in accessing quality means of protection and treatment, confinement in cramped dwellings, the need to continue working under dangerous conditions to be sure of having an income and keeping their jobs, - including in non-essential areas - and police and racial repression. Working-class women are even more affected than men since they are on the front lines in many essential occupations. In addition they

are subject to patriarchal oppression in their own homes and/or are forced to bear the burden of responsibility for the household and the children alone.

In the context of measures implemented by the US Congress with the support of both Republicans and Democrats, a part of the working classes, and in particular the unemployed, have been granted allowances that are presented as generous. This aid is provided in application of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act - also known as the CARES Act -, a law aimed at dealing with the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States.

The working classes have been deeply affected by this multidimensional crisis

Each taxpayer with an annual income below \$75,000 received a single payment of \$1,200 from the federal government. [123] In addition, unemployment benefits recipients were given a bonus of \$600 per week (called an "unemployment insurance top-off"). This bonus can theoretically be received for a maximum period of four months. Under the CARES Act, this \$600 supplemental unemployment payment will end on 31 July 2020. [124] Indebted persons can also request a postponement of repayment of part of their debts, in particular mortgage debts.

Now in fact, once again, Big Capital has been favoured by the government (see below). The amounts victims receive in the form of public aid actually help companies' accounts (thanks to the public authorities' taking on the burden of partial

unemployment), maintain a level of consumption (thanks to the \$1,200 cheque and the \$600 unemployment-compensation bonus), ensure the survival of poorer citizens (and so the reproduction of the workforce compelled into unemployment), enable them to continue paying their rent or meet mortgage or student-debt payments, and prevent them from rebelling and having no choice but to loot supermarkets. Those allowances granted by the Bi-Party programme are but crumbs from the cake served to the rich. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (known as AOC) was not fooled and was the only member of the Democratic Party in Congress to vote against the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act). [125] She exposed this programme of “anti-crisis” measures as “one of the ‘largest corporate bailouts’ in ‘American history,’ one that only provided ‘crumbs for our families.’” [126]

It must be kept in mind that 39 million people in the United States have no health coverage. Further, when people lose their jobs, they often also lose their health insurance. Lastly, there are an estimated 11 to 12 million undocumented immigrants, who needless to say did not receive the \$1,200 cheque since they are not considered taxpayers (despite the fact that they pay all sorts of taxes).

According to Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the CARES Act is the largest corporate bailout in American history and only provides “crumbs for our families”

Wall Street promptly reacted: several of its prominent figures have tried to prevent AOC from being re-elected to Congress on a Democratic Party list. [127]

David Solomon, president of Goldman Sachs, and Steve Schwarzman, chair of the Blackstone hedge fund, publicly supported Michelle Caruso-Cabrera, AOC's rival, during the Democratic party primary election in New York (14th District, which covers the Bronx and Queens) on 23 June 2020. Elliot

Management, Paul Singer's “vulture” hedge fund, also announced its support for Michelle Caruso-Cabrera to prevent AOC's re-election. The same goes for the Lazard Bank and John Paulson, CEO of the Paulson & Co investment fund that became notorious in 2008 as it largely benefited from the subprime crisis. The list of bankers and business lawyers, among whom certain famous Republicans, who have campaigned against AOC is just as telling about the active part played by Wall Street in the election game. The *Financial Times* published the list of official donors on its paying website. It must be noted that AOC's rival, Caruso-Cabrera, was a member of the Republican party until at least 2015 and in 2010 wrote a book entitled *You Know I'm Right* (which plays on the two meanings of the word “right”) in which she states that Ronald Reagan was her favourite president. AOC's spokeswoman Lauren Hitt told the *New York Post*: “It's not surprising that Republicans would finance the campaign of a life-long Republican in a Democratic primary. While we have pushed against corporate power with policies that favour everyday working Americans, those donors prefer to bankroll a candidate who answers to Wall Street over the needs of our constituents.” [128] In the event the attempt to prevent her re-election failed. On 23 June 2020 Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez received over 73% of the votes cast in the primary. This was a real slap in the face for Wall Street and the Democratic Party establishment, who would have loved to get rid of her since she is clearly on the left and in favour of the working classes.

Note that Bernie Sanders voted in favour of the CARES Act. While he expressed criticism of the programme, he pointed out its positive aspects (see his speech in the Senate at <https://www.c-span.org/video/?470652-19/senators-sanders-sasse-coronavirus-bill-unemployment>). Democratic senator Elizabeth Warren also voted for the CARES Act.

With respect to Big Capital / the 1%

Agreement in Congress between the Democratic Party and the

Republican Party to give more to the very rich.

Among the measures in favour of Big Capital, more than \$500 bn will be given directly to major private corporations, a move Robert Brenner denounces in an article in the *New Left Review* of May-June 2020 entitled “Plunder and Pandemic” <https://newleftreview.org/>).

The *Financial Times* devoted an entire feature article to the provisions of the CARES Act which shows that the very rich will benefit much more from the legislation than the working classes, either in the form of direct aid (without any conditions on how the aid is to be used) or colossal tax gifts. [129] The article sets the amount that will go to major corporations, their major shareholders and the very rich at \$600 bn, to which must be added health-related aid, which will go largely to the shareholders of private hospitals and insurance companies. The title of the *FT*'s article says it all: “Why the US Pandemic Response Risks Widening the Economic Divide.” It points out that the CARES Act changes the tax code in favour of the very rich to give them even more than what Trump and his predecessors had lavished on them. 82% of the beneficiaries of the tax breaks have yearly incomes of over a million dollars, and only 5% earn less than \$200,000 (which includes taxpayers with high incomes). The rich will be able to radically reduce their taxes, including retroactively, qualifying for tax refunds for back losses even though they pay little or no taxes for several years. Speculators who go into debt to acquire companies and strip them of value to repay their creditors will also benefit from the tax cuts enabled by the CARES Act. The loss of tax revenue for the public treasury will be monumental; the tax breaks for big capital amount to more than \$175 bn (according to official estimates, but the loss will surely be much higher). The public deficit and public debt will skyrocket. In the same *Financial Times* feature we learn that the two biggest US airlines, American Airlines and Delta, will be given, respectively, \$5.8 bn and \$5.4 bn in aid even though both are cutting thousands of jobs. [130]

Why the CARES Act makes social inequalities worse

When looked at closely the CARES Act is the trickle-down theory in reverse. It is claimed (by North American Neoliberals and the French president Emmanuel Macron) that giving to the rich is help to the poor who in the long run will receive the benefits of the wealth that trickles down to them. What we see with the CARES Act is a temporary distribution of aid to the popular classes so that they may continue to reimburse their debts, continue to go to work and consume as before and even more to the advantage of the big consumer market-based corporations. In the end, these exceptional cash distributions return to the rich through the companies they possess.

To take this reasoning further, it is clear that the massive and urgent spending of public funds in favour of the rich is going to increase public debts, which are eventually paid by the working classes. The working classes spend a greater part of their incomes in taxes than do the rich, who will see a net reduction of their taxes thanks to measures taken in the context of the CARES Act. Consequently, a large part of public debt may be considered to be illegitimate because it has been contracted in order to favour the interests of a privileged minority.

What's more, the CARES Act claims to help small business, but what we notice is that the vast majority of small businesses do not have access to this help that has been largely grabbed by the big corporations, who go through their small branches to claim the assistance. So far they have got their claws into more than half of the \$350 bn before the real small and medium-size businesses can claim their share before the application deadline. As the aid goes through the banks their presence is further reinforced.

The Fed's intervention in favour of big business

While the Federal Government is spending \$2 trillion [131] on the CARES Act programme, the Fed could well spend much more. Wall Street dived 20% between 17 February and 17 March (before lockdowns started in the US), at the same time the US corporate bond market was imploding. Between the end of March to early June the Fed shelled out \$3 trillion to keep US Big Capital afloat through a monumental financial crisis.

From 17 February 2020, the stock market bubble that had been growing over the last few years deflated at an impressive rate. The collapse began when big shareholders, fearing the looming epidemic might cause a sudden fall, decided to get a head start in selling stocks. Once Wall Street was hit the rest of the markets on the planet followed, losing between 20 to 40% between 17 February and 17 March 2020.

During this time the big banks, being the main dealers, made big money on stock transaction commissions. Their income from this activity increased by 30% in February and March 2020.

Major shareholders also actively intervene in the stock markets by selling at the beginning of a trading session at a relatively high price and later buying back at a lower price when prices start to recuperate. In fact, the price may rise precisely because they start buying back what they sold that morning or the day before.

In April 2020 billionaire Bill Ackman boasted that he had made \$2.6 bn on a falling stock market

Speculators also make profits on falling prices. The billionaire Bill Ackman, boss of the Pershing Square hedge fund, could boast in April 2020

to have made \$2.6 bn [132] from cashing in \$27 million in insurance policies against stock market drops. It is possible for a speculator to take out insurance against loss of value of shares without actually having to buy them. Just as in the 2008 crisis: it's as if you take out fire insurance on your neighbour's house, set it alight and cash in the indemnity. Ackman did this by crying out in alarm over the coming fall in market values knowing that the greater the fall the greater his profits would be. Thanks to this speculative operation he raked in 100 times his original ante.

From 23 March 2020, the Fed weighed in heavily to stop Wall Street falling (which in itself society would not find horrendous) by purchasing, from banks, over three months, \$3 trillion in debt bonds, thus pushing up share indexes. Between 17 March and 5 June Wall Street regained its 17 February position. What happens is that the Fed, who mainly purchases treasury bonds in much greater quantity than corporate bonds, buys a large stock of treasury bonds from banks. The banks may use that money any way they wish: purchasing corporate bonds or lending directly to corporations are among their activities. So, buying bonds from banks, who it is hoped direct the fresh liquidities towards business, was the main way the Fed injected money into the financial markets that favour the banks, investment funds and big business in all sectors. Over recent months the Fed has also started buying private financial instruments: corporate bonds or structured instruments such as CDO, CLO, MBS, CMBS, etc. The Fed chairman clearly stated that it was necessary to prevent the collapse of the corporate bond market: so far so good, wait and see. [133]

Let us keep in mind that a bond is an I.O.U. to the bearer, issued by a corporation that pays annual interest. When it matures in anything up to thirty years, sometimes more, the issuer then reimburses the face value. The bond, in its lifetime may have changed owners ten, hundreds or thousands of times on the corporate bond market.

Thanks to the glut of dollars big

corporations, though in a difficult predicament, were still able to issue bonds and find buyers for them. This applies to major banks such as Citigroup (3rd biggest US bank), Wells Fargo (4th biggest), Morgan Stanley (6th biggest). Citigroup and Wells Fargo issued bonds that come to maturity in 2051. [Northrop Grumman](#), one of the world's biggest arms manufacturers, issued 2050 bonds. [Intel](#), the biggest US semi-conductor company, issued 30-year bonds. Fox, Walt Disney, Coca-Cola and UPS also issued long-term bonds.

These bonds sell well because they offer returns that are high above those of government bonds with interest rates close to 0%. When the big investment funds were finally reassured on the Fed's intentions to do what's necessary to save the corporate bond market they agreed to purchase the recently issued bonds on the second market at prices that were higher than the issue prices.

For instance, bonds sold by Morgan Stanley on 19 March (while the stock market was collapsing) for a total amount of \$2 bn were bought at 50% more on 12 June 2020. To put it simply, a \$100 Morgan Stanley bond issued on 19 March at \$100 was selling on the second market on 12 June for \$148. On the 24th March 2021, when the final bearer presents the bond for reimbursement he can rightfully expect to receive \$100. In the meantime the price of the bond on the market will have varied depending on circumstances. At this moment it is greatly over-valued because of the current bond buying frenzy that has been provoked and encouraged by the Fed.

Know that a speculator (often a big private financial institution, a bank, an investment fund or a hedge fund) who buys a bond valued at 100 for 150, when it entitles the bearer to an annual interest rate of 6%, if he holds on to it until the coupon is repaid will earn 6% on 100. That is a yield of 4% on 150, [\[134\]](#) much better than the 0 to 1% currently earned on government bonds. If the price of the bond drops to 60 then the buyer who still gets 6% per annum on 100 will be getting the same sum which, when bought at 60, is equivalent to 10% yield. What's

more, the speculator can make a profit or a loss at the moment the bond matures. If he purchases at issue at 100, then sells at 150 in a boom period, like now, he makes a profit of 50. If the buyer at 150 is surprised by a fall in prices and wants to sell he will "suffer" a loss. If because he is cash strapped he decides to sell at 120 he will have lost 30.

Intel issued bonds in March 2020 at a price of \$98, which are now selling for \$144 and come to maturity on 25 March 2060. Even more significant are the trash bonds issued by Avis Budget Car Rentals. Though the company is on the verge of bankruptcy, this new issue was bought 15% over its face value one month after its release in May, [\[135\]](#) and nobody knows if the company will exist in five years' time when the bond comes to maturity.

The bonds issued by Ford Motor Company in April 2020, although considered to be junk bonds, were quoted at 19% above their original price in June. Not to mention the Viking cruise line, also on the verge of bankruptcy, which recorded a 15% increase.

This is clear evidence of large-scale pursuit of speculation on the bond market with impressively over-valued security prices

This is clear evidence of large-scale pursuit of speculation on the bond market with impressively over-valued security prices. Markets are expected to be able to assess the solvency ratio of companies making bond issues. However, in fact, the main buyers on the financial markets feel very little concern for the solidity of the companies that are calling for funds, their main concern being for rapid profits, believing they will always be able to resell potentially bad bonds in time before suffering a loss.

While some use the expression "helicopter money for the people" to designate the way the Trump administration and the Fed face the current economic crisis, the

"helicopter money for Wall Street" must be denounced because of the impressive and generous amounts of money made available to American Big Capital.

If the Federal Reserve had not waded in to save Wall Street, big players would have had big losses – hardly a tragedy.

Why talk about "venture capital" if there is no real venture for capitalists?

Why should we talk about "venture capital" when a protective state assures there is no risk by always mopping up losses and passing the cost on to the people? Big Capital can thank the Fed and the leaders of the two main parties not only for relieving their suffering but increasing their share of the cake. Inequality is getting worse and the richest 1% see their privileges, profits and wealth increase.

As the 6% fall on the 11th June shows, a financial accident can again shake Wall Street, which is sitting [on a mountain of private debt](#).

This accident could have been caused by big speculators and/or hedge funds taking their profits from the difference between the price they paid for shares when they were going down or started to go up and the prices they achieved when the indexes were at their highest on Monday 8th June. Those who sold big blocks of shares on the morning of Tuesday 9th June made big profits that they eventually used on the Friday to buy back the same shares which gave them a profit.

Anyway they can count on the good will of the Fed and of the Republicans-Democrats duo that will do what is needed to ensure that Big Capital can carry on carrying on.

And the big banks?

From the middle of the first quarter of 2020, when share prices were taking a

dive and smelled of rats, the banks quickly took to distributing dividends. Where they had declared \$18.5 bn in profits (70% less than the first quarter 2019) shareholders received sums that represented \$32.7 bn, almost double. They also greatly increased provisions for losses; climbing from \$13.9 bn in the first quarter of 2019 to \$52.7 bn for the first quarter of 2020, almost four times as much. Simply, they distributed as much dosh as possible to their shareholders, by substantially increasing provisions for losses the profits were slashed and so taxes were slashed by the same swipe. The Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC), asked some questions. [136] We are permitted to doubt that there will be any reprisals.

The working classes are victims of the debt system

In proportion to their shrinking revenues, the burden of debt weighs much more heavily on working-class households. During the previous crisis that began in 2006-2007, mortgages were their principal problem. Twelve million families were evicted from their homes because they were unable to pay unsustainable premiums.

In the following period it was student debt that increased the most, doubling in ten years to more than \$1,650 bn. It is frequent to see debtors crushed by debts taken on in order to face tuition fees of over \$50,000. The CARES Act contains no relief from student debt; at best a temporary suspension of payments may be granted if asked for nicely.

Consumer debt has also increased, an indication that poorer households have lost purchasing power. Car loans have also increased.

It is remarkable to note that working-class households rarely use the possibility of delaying payments. They prefer to continue paying using a part of their single payment of \$1,200, to which some may add the \$600 unemployment top-off. The banks are happy, the landlords are happy too. The "poor" are good payers.

Lack of consideration of social rights in the response to the health crisis

It is clear these policies have no relation to Franklin Roosevelt's 1933 New Deal, [137] nor to the Keynesian policies of the 1970s. This time round: no progress in social rights; no strict control of banking practices; no effort demanded of the rich, to mention just these few points.

Keynesian policies and US New Deal measures were extended to Western Europe after WW2 under the pressure of a broad social movement. Social rights were very much improved, social safety nets were created. The activities of deposit banks and commercial banks were separated; highest-bracket income tax was up to 80% in the US. Inequalities in incomes and wealth were reduced, whole swathes of the economies were nationalized, public health systems such as the National Health Service in the UK were created and it didn't stop there.

At that time Big Capital was forced to make concessions to the other sectors of the populations who were claiming their rights. The Roosevelt government, which was reforming capitalism in order to save and strengthen it, met with resistance from the US Supreme Court, which tried to abrogate several of its decisions. Roosevelt, under pressure from a radically more left-wing working class, managed to push back and impose some strong measures including allowing unions to develop in the factories and workers to strike in order to gain concessions from employers. It was also under the pressure of unions and strike action that French workers gained paid holidays in 1936 during the Popular Front government. So it was that in France, Italy and Belgium after WW2 the governments made social concessions to the workers to maintain a social truce, develop the economies and avoid the risk of

revolutions by populations who now possessed arms and had learned how to use them in the recent war.

No such socially favourable measures appear in the government's or big employers' programmes. On the contrary, for them this crisis is an opportunity to push ahead faster with their agendas: more precarious employment contracts; decreasing the cost of work by decreasing wages and employers' social contributions; making massive lay-offs and at the same time receiving equally massive State subventions. Both US and European corporations have announced massive restructuring plans involving massive job losses.

Conclusion

Governments and Big Capital will not be deterred from their offensive against the populations unless a vast and determined movement forces them to make concessions.

Among the new attacks that must be resisted are: the acceleration of the automation/robotization of work; the generalization of teleworking where employees are isolated in their homes, have even less control of their time and must themselves assume many more of the costs related to their work tools than if they worked physically in the company; new attacks against public education and a development of distance learning that deepens cultural and social inequalities; the reinforcement of control over private life and over private data; the reinforcement of repression, etc.

The question of public debt remains a central element of social and political struggles. Public debt continues to explode in volume because governments are borrowing massively in order to avoid taxing the rich to pay for the measures taken to resist the COVID-19 epidemic and it will not be a long wait until they continue their austerity offensive. The private illegitimate debt of working people will become an ever greater daily burden. Consequently, the struggle for the abolition of illegitimate debt must gain a renewed vigour.

The struggles that have arisen on

several continents during June 2020, notably massive anti-racist struggles around the Black Lives Matter movement, show that youth and the working classes do not accept a status quo.

We must contribute as much as possible to the rise of a new and powerful social and political movement capable of mustering the social struggles and elaborating a programme that breaks away from capitalism and promotes anti-capitalist, anti-racist, ecological, feminist and socialist visions.

It is fundamental to work towards a **socialization of banks with expropriation of major shareholders; a moratorium of public debt repayment**

while an audit with citizens' participation is carried out to repudiate its illegitimate part; the imposition of a high rate of taxation on the highest assets and incomes; the cancellation of unjust personal debts (student debt, abusive mortgage loans); the closure of stock markets, which are places of speculation; a radical reduction of working hours (without loss of pay) in order to create a large number of socially useful jobs; a radical increase in public expenditure; particularly in health care and education; the socialization of pharmaceutical companies and of the energy sector; the re-localization of as much manufacturing as possible and the development of short supply chains, as well as many other essential

demands.

The author's thanks go to Anne-Sophie Bouvy, Nathan Legrand, Giorgos Mitralias, Brigitte Ponet and Claude Quémar for their suggestions after reading the article and to the translators.

Translated by Snake Arbusto, Mike Krolkowski and Christine Pagnoulle

Source [CADTM](#).

Part 1 **"The Capitalist Pandemic, Coronavirus and the Economic Crisis"**

Part 2 **"The Coronavirus pandemic is part of a multidimensional crisis of capitalism"**

Part 2 **"Covid-19: Likely financial conflagrations to come"**

An invitation to carry forward the Nava Samasamaja tradition

17 July 2020, by **Vame Handa (Left Voice)**

Appearing on the Derana TV channel, dressed in a green shirt [the colour of the bourgeois UNP], he unabashedly opined that one should not be ashamed to change his or her political stance. He repeated this statement to different media and on UNP platforms.

Vikramabahu is contesting the election as a candidate of the UNP. This time, the UNP is contesting the election without entering into an alliance with any other political party. Therefore, instead of allying with the UNP, Vikramabahu is now running in the Kalutara district as a member of the UNP.

Vikramabahu entered politics in the nineteen sixties as a radical Samasamaja (socialist) youth leader. When in 1964 the Lanka Samasamaja Party (LSSP) entered into a coalition with the Sirimavo Bandaranayake government, Vikramabahu was one of the leaders in the party that rose in revolt against this decision.

When in 1978 the Nava Samasamaja Party (NSSP) was formed, the majority of the radical youth of LSSP, as well as political intellectuals and trade unionists in public and private sectors (including the Government Clerical Services Union) joined the new party. Charismatic leaders of the calibre of Vasudava and Vikramabahu gave leadership to the 1980 July general strike and were seen as an inspiration to the people.

Because of this background, Vikramabahu is seen as a political leader engaged in revolutionary politics.

The NSSP under the leadership of 'Bahu' rendered a valuable service in moving forward the left tradition of the LSSP. It fought for a political solution to the national question and stood against the politics of forming coalitions with the bourgeoisie. Now this heritage is wasted, buried at the feet of Ranil Wickramasinghe.

Those who struggled against the bureaucratic leadership of Vikramabahu left the party to form their own political organisations. Comrade Sirirtunga left the party to form the United Socialist Party.

At the time when the identity of the NSSP became seriously eroded a majority of the Central Committee of the political bureau decided to lay the foundation for a political movement to preserve and promote the ideals of the party. In 2012 we organized under the banner of Left Voice to carry on the tradition of the NSSP and to continue to struggle against the anti-left politics of Bahu. Working together comradesly with all left groups our political aim is to mobilize the mass organizations, especially the trade unions, on the basis of a political platform. We also carried out our struggle against the 'theories' of Vikramabahu in the international arena. As Left Voice we were admitted to membership of the Fourth International and its secretariat officially rejected the

political line of Vikramabahu. This is another victory for our struggle.

During the past few years Bahu has been advancing a false political analysis and argued that the leader of the UNP, Ranil Wikramasing, is a 'liberal Social Democrat' fighting racialism, religious bigotry, and fascism. Bahu has wholeheartedly embraced him. The final episode of this charade is Bahu obtaining the membership of UNP and standing for election in the Kalutara district under the symbol of the UNP symbol, the elephant. Now it is crystal clear. When Bahu is contesting the elections under the UNP banner, is this not a good reason to be heart stricken? Will this sight not stir the consciousness of those who sympathized with the anti-racialist politics of the NSSP? How many sympathizers of the NSSP can wholeheartedly support this decision of Bahu?

In the past, labour movement leaders Vasudeva who became frustrated with the weakening of the movement, joined the camp of so-called progressives like then president Chandrika Kumaratunga. At the time, Vasudeva said that Chandrika Kumaratunga was a Social Democrat and a left-leaning leader who stood for national unity in opposing racialism and religious bigotry. To realize these goals, he reasoned, we should cooperate with her. Back then, Vikramabahu stood unequivocally against such politics of coalitions with capitalist forces. Back then, he stood resolutely to protect the identity of the

party.

Today, Bahu is following in the footsteps of Vasudeva. Since about 2012, he has unashamedly refurbished the theory of Vasudeva. Bahu introduced into the NSSP a project a supporting UNP leader Ranil Wikramasinghe, and painted him as a Social Democrat opposing racialism and religious bigotry.

It is true that a few leaders of the NSSP waged a long struggle against such trends within the party. Still others supported Bahu in a sincere belief they could move forward the illustrious history of the party and its struggle for a political solution to the national question. Initially such people said they would not compromise their politics. They said they were allying with capitalist parties not as partners of governance but only as partners in the struggle against the fascistic forces.

The comrades who formed as Left Voice warned that this erroneous political path would end in an abominable capitulation. But even they did not believe that this prediction would come true so soon.

Dear comrades, Vikramabahu has not only joined the UNP but also agreed to contest the election under their name. He has committed a shameful political capitulation.

We know that some left-wing leaders joined hands with the UNP. Notably the late Philip Goonawardane, a founding member of the LSSP, joined

hands with the UNP in an agreement to become a coalition partner. We know leaders of LSSP joined with the SLFP to sign an agreement with some proposals and conditions of interest to the working class. And to preserve his political identity, Vasudeva entered into his partnership with Chandrika under a hurriedly set up contraption of a party.

All those were nothing more than outright capitulations. Vikramabahu once styled himself as an outstanding internationalist Trotskyist. By obtaining the membership of the reactionary UNP, Vikramabahu has committed a similar capitulation and exposed his political bankruptcy.

Dear comrades,

Please take cognizance of our stand as Left Voice. We have shouldered the responsibility of advancing the political tradition of the Samasamajists. We nurture and promote the political vision of our martyrs, of the comrades who opposed so-called patriotism and in the name of the party dedicated their lives to justice for the Tamil people.

In brotherhood,

Linus Jayathilaka -071 209 6867
Neil Wijethilaka 0777 922 323
Gerard Gamage 071 808 5663
Dharmasiri Lankapeli 077 364 1111
Chamil Jayanetti 077 252 2312
(Former members of the political bureau of the NSSP)
For more information please call us.
05th July 2020

Statement (Mindanao): Anti-Terrorism Act cannot win against terrorism!

16 July 2020, by **MindanaOne**

It was either to let it lapse into law or sign. Duterte preferred to sign it last 3 July 2020. To veto is not his option.

The passage of the ATA or Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020 (Republic Act

11479) and signing it into law have just spoken who and what this administration really is and intends to do - sow terror and stifle the voices of the dissent, a tyrant.

Proven in the past administrations, war and attack to the democratic demands and criticisms only heightened rebellions and resistance. The neglect to the democratic

demands of the peoples and communities have provided a space for the extreme and violent tendencies. And the new Anti-Terrorism law is a desperate answer to these from the very start.

We believe that the new ATA is a systemic assault to silent the democratic demands of the peoples for a meaningful, democratic, just, pro-people, pro-environment, pro-human rights governance and society. This is in fact an institutionalization of the militarist framework in dealing with social and democratic aspirations of the peoples and sectors, criticisms and dissents. This can also be weaponized against the massive clamor for accountability in the government's COVID-19 pandemic response that is maligned with corruption and abuse of authority issues. Of the same extent, it could be used against the political oppositions in the upcoming 2022 National elections for a mere 'suspicion' of being affiliates and supporter of terrorist groups.

Mindanao in most cases have been a witness and even destroyed by the Anti-Terrorism campaign of the world that for most cases, have targeted

BangsaMoro and Indigenous Peoples asserting for their Right to Self-Determination and Ancestral Domains; the peasant, fisherfolks and rural populations aspiring for land reform and tenure; the social and political activists struggling for their respective rights and welfare; and the rest of the populations resisting development aggression by the collaborating multinational agribusiness, mining corporations and political lords. The prevalent connivance of the political oligarchs, capitalists and corrupt law enforcers to repress peoples' and community's democratic assertions could even be justified using ATA.

The Duterte administration and its allies in the Lower House, the Senate and the security sector should be reminded that the 1987 Philippine Constitution remains the highest law of the country. In fact, this 1987 Philippine Constitution (that the current Duterte administration keeps on undermining) is a product of that historic people's resistance in the country that toppled down the tyrant Marcos.

We demand to the Supreme Court to automatically declare Republic Act 11479 or ATA unconstitutional.

We call on all justice, peace, democracy and human rights loving individuals, organizations and movements to stand and resist by all necessary means all forms of abuse and repressions.

While we stand against all forms of violence and terrorism, we cannot gamble our inherent rights as persons, peoples and communities. Further let us demand foods, medicines and wellness – a community and people-centered pandemic response and NOT threats, bullets and lies in this trying times.

Let us be of full vigilance and don't lost a sight to the fight for a democratic, sustainable, ecological and pro-peoples socio-economic and political future.

Let us overcome the CoVID-19 pandemic and the threats to democracy and human dignity together.

MindanaOne
katipunanmindanao@gmail.com
July 4, 2020

Source [MindanaOne Movement](#).

The struggle against authoritarian liberalism is more urgent than ever.

15 July 2020, by **Ana Podvrs?ic?, Jas?a Veselinovic?**

Rarely given any space in international media, Slovenia has recently been filling the (web)pages of newspapers like *Le Monde*, *The Guardian*, *Courrier International* and the BBC. Reports were about thousands of people protesting on bicycles against the new right-wing government, led by Janez Jans?a and his Slovenska demokratska stranka (SDS - Slovenian Democratic Party). They are known internationally for their ideological, political and financial links to Viktor Orba?n's Fidesz. Under the guise of fighting the coronavirus, the Slovenian

government combined strict public health measures (broadly supported by the public) with a vicious attack on public institutions, journalists, NGOs and practices of formal democracy.

Such developments might come as a surprise to many who considered this small country on the Eurozone's industrialized periphery as a neo-corporatist (South-)Eastern European exception whose recent political trajectory was in addition characterized by the emergence of and entering into the Parliament of (radical) left-oriented Left Party

(Levica) in 2014. The predominant media reaction to the current events in Slovenia has been limited to warnings against Slovenia's turn away from "European values" towards the illiberal Visegra?d four, while socio-economic aspect and class power relations SDS is defending have been ignored. Instead of considering SDS as something external to the European integration project, it would be more correct and politically productive to contextualise the rise and policymaking of yet another far-right party on the European industrial periphery within the European

authoritarian liberal state project and its contradictions.

Authoritarian liberalism and its European manifestations

The ongoing tensions between democracy and liberalism, between political and economic rights, are far from being unique to contemporary developments, let alone post-Yugoslav Slovenia. They are immanent to the establishment and reproduction of a liberal market economy based on private ownership and world market, i.e. capitalism, as such. Unsurprisingly, it is in the debates that flourished in the core European regions in interwar years, a period of intensive struggles over the extent of democratic participation of the masses and the sanctity of property rights, that we can find productive insights for reflecting upon the current situation. The reinterpretation of Carl Schmitt's project of an 'authoritarian state' by his contemporary and SPD member Hermann Heller is especially illuminating (Mastnak 2015, Chamayou 2018).

Schmitt was a member of the Nazi Party who devoted his juristic knowledge and skills to theorising, legalising and legitimatising the ascendancy of Nazi regime (Gowan 1994). For Schmitt, the key problems of the economic crisis of the Weimar Republic were of political character and related to the incapacities of the Weimar system of "pluralist democracy" to govern or discipline popular aspirations and pressures from below. He called for the restoration of a "strong state" that would act as an independent instance of authoritative decision-making. This call was heeded by the government in late Weimar which elevated the "catchphrase of the 'authoritarian state' ... to the level of a governmental programme" (Heller, 2015, p. 295). For Heller, Schmitt's authoritarian state as realized in Weimar remained in its essence a liberal one. He coined the concept of "authoritarian liberalism" to "denigrate the attempts

of the German state in alliance with big business [that] bypassed parliamentary democracy, using presidential decrees under cover of emergency, in order to impose austerity and defend the social relations of capitalism and economic liberalism - competition, the profit motive, accumulation, private property, and social inequality". (Wilkinson, 2018, p. 12)

Thus, Heller urged to consider how the proponents of political liberalism position themselves towards the economic order and how political liberalism - insisting on a strict and substantive separation between the political and the economic - disregards the question of economic power and domination. This is crucial because market liberties and their consequences i.e. commodification, competition, profit motives, individualisation, lead to social fragmentation, dislocation and the undermining of societal links and solidarity, necessary for any meaningful democratic participation to thrive (Polanyi 2008, Wilkinson 2018).

Schmitt's warnings about democratic processes potentially curtailing economic liberties inspired many debates within the then emerging neoliberal economic thought. In the post-war period, these "lessons of Weimar" also played a historically important role in thinking about and constructing what became the European Union. They guided the then predominant European Christian Democrats who were working closely with (German) ordoliberals. In contrast to classical liberalism, ordoliberal economic thought gives the state with its rules-based system of law and regulations a central place in the improvement of market conditions. Strong public authority, constitutional and institutional checks, technocratic rules and expertise are seen as necessary means to prevent or block any distortion of market forces, especially in the field of competition. Aiming to institutionalise "a system ensuring that competition in the common market is not distorted", the Treaty of Rome (Art.3, Part one) not only did not bear practically no sign of what is normally understood as Keynesian welfare, but also created a

supranational institutional channel for the European competition policy and its gatekeepers - the European Commission (EC) and its the Directorate General for Competition (Wigger 2015, 119).

The anti-social and anti-democratic character of the European integration has been further deepening since the mid-1980s (cf. Moknik 2006, 116). Friedrich Hayek's vision of European interstate federalism, claiming that supranational rule-based authority would most efficiently protect free markets in as much as it would depoliticize economic relations, limit national macroeconomic sovereignty and discourage solidarity between popular masses, became the main inspiration for the forthcoming Maastricht Treaty establishing the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) (Gowan 2009). Through the EMU, single market rules forbidding any state-led strategic industrial policy, were complemented with fiscal restrictions, liberalisation of financial markets and the creation of the centralised supranational monetary authority prevented from acting as the lender of last resort to Member states in financial difficulties and focusing exclusively on price stability. With small and inflexible European budget, such institutional architecture prioritises competition, monetary and financial issues at the expense of social ones and subordinates the concerns for secure employment and social equality to the interests of capital, especially to the leading European fractions from export-oriented and financial sectors. In this regard, it is noteworthy that the concept of social market economy, advanced by Alfred Müller-Armack, ordoliberal adviser to German Minister for Economic Affairs, in the post-war period, figures in 2009 Lisbon Treaty (Art 3(3)).

Bringing the key macroeconomic decision-making under the control of the European Central Bank (ECB) and the EC, the two key supranational and non-elected institutions, liberated from direct democratic pressures from local constituencies, the EMU "inscribed the neoliberal policy of market freedom associated with Hayek through the creation of European supranational institutional

devices that check expansionary responses to labour conflict" (Bonefeld 2002, 132-33). During the Eurozone crisis, European authoritarian liberalism loomed large in the political empowerment of the informal Eurogroup meetings and the interventionism of the European central banking authority, all in the name of protecting the interests of financial and export-oriented capital (Keucheyan and Durand, 2015). Streeck (2015, 369) even draws parallels between the ECB and Schmitt's conception of the sovereign, "entitled and proves himself as such in being able to suspend the law and use whatever means available, legal or extra-legal, to secure the survival of the community".

During the recent epidemic, the EC decided to activate the "general escape clause" and suspend the State Aid and Stability and Growth Pact restrictions to allow the member states to exceed the spending ceilings put on public finance. While this decision indeed helped the governments to mitigate the effects of the health crisis, it did not in itself provide for any greater democratic participation and integration of subaltern social classes into the policy-making – be it on local or supranational level. Much like in the financial storm that followed the Lehman Brothers bankruptcy, the non-elected EC and the ECB remain the key, "sovereign" actors of the European current policy-making. Although the outbreak of the epidemic and the shocks to public health and social systems revealed the failures of the austerity-focused European semester cycles, the authoritarian liberal construction of the European integration project remains intact.

The short review of debates on authoritarian liberalism and its embeddedness in the EU's functioning allows us to understand the anti-democratic tendencies of the socio-political system within which the recent ascendancy of the Slovenian far-right took place. As an Eurozone member since 2007, the Slovenian state and its macroeconomic policy-making were much reshaped by the European architecture. The ambition to selectively curb the participation of subordinated social forces in state

decision-making with institutional barriers and technocratic norm-based rules is not only a property of the European economic and financial architecture. As will be shown below, it emerged as a particularly powerful response of the Slovenian ruling classes to the crisis of peripheral capitalism as triggered by the 2007/08 global financial and later the Eurozone crisis. In fact, the strengthening of the far-right parties and movements in the EU in the recent years is much related to the strategy of the European centre parties, on the periphery in particular, of transferring the costs of the crisis onto workers and middle classes. This was done by relying on and reinforcing European authoritarian liberalism and thereby compensating for the structural weaknesses of the EMU design. In response to this strategy and its socio-economic outcomes, an important current arose within the contemporary Right, which SDS is also inspired by. This current, most prominently represented by Hungary's Viktor Orbán, is challenging the (de)politicized character of the European state project and the core-periphery divide on which it is premised (Becker and Smet, 2018). The transformation of SDS from traditional right to the radical right in the last decade should also be understood against the background of these crises of the European integration project and authoritarian liberalism.

The far right as a reaction to the crisis of the Eurozone peripheral capitalism in Slovenia

Since the turn of 2010s, SDS has become the most financially, socially and ideologically powerful voice on the Right and later on far-Right in Slovenia. Like Fidesz, SDS was formed in the late 1980s and has a solid social base, well-established network of

cross-generational and cross-regional activists, as well as a powerful "ideological" apparatus, including media (generously co-financed by people close to Fidesz) and a smaller network of intellectuals based predominantly in private higher education. In addition, the Party was already in power twice, during Slovenia's integration into Eurozone (2004-2008) and the Eurozone crisis (2012-13). Nowadays' SDS is, however, much more radicalised version of its pre-crisis self. In fact, similar to its Italian peers in Salvini's Lega, SDS has turned social media into a powerful tool for inciting its social base with xenophobic lies about the omnipotent Soros and the refugees, especially after 2015 refugee "crisis", as well as for the personal discreditation of opponents in media, politics, or public life (Reporters Without Borders, 2020). Due to its powerful party apparatus, this Party of the "traditional Right" could not be challenged by any new right-wing formation, often classified as "populist", as was the case in some other European countries.

SDS enjoys loyal electoral support and ranked second and first in the parliamentary elections in 2014 and 2018, when they obtained 20% and 25% of votes, respectively. However, this stable support, which persists despite the fact that its leader Jans?a was accused of (and briefly imprisoned for) corruption, is also related to the historical crisis of peripheral capitalism in Slovenia and the political failure to elaborate any meaningful alternative developmental project. In the run-up to the crisis, Slovenian economy became deeply integrated in the German-led production and the European circuits of financial capital and subordinated to the non-elected EC and the ECB with regards to state aid and monetary issues. The Slovenian economy was hard hit by the 2007-08 global financial and the Eurozone crises. GDP recovered to its 2008 level almost ten year later in 2017 (SI-STAT), mainly because of the harsh austerity drive and the prolongation of the crisis related to the Eurozone turmoil. In addition to the crisis of dependent export manufacturing in 2008/09, Slovenia experienced a severe sovereign debt crisis, resulting from

the public budget being forced to shoulder the costs of the restructuring of indebted domestic banking-corporate sectors.

During the Eurozone crisis, the unemployment rate more than doubled and began to slowly fall only with the restoration of economic growth in 2014 (SI-STAT). Successive governments used the European integration and the pressures from international competition as a handy cover to liberalise social and employment arrangements. While social pressures and struggles, often led by trade unions, succeeded to somewhat slow-down the dismantling of public welfare, this was not the case for wage and working conditions which became the main element of the regular trade-offs between the institutional social partners. Due to restrictive wage policy, the 1989 average real wage level was restored only in 2006 (Podkaminer, 2013: 17, tab.13a). Since 2002, Slovenia has recorded the highest shares of temporary employment among the youth in the EU, standing at 63% of total employment in 2008 (Eurostat). Then years later, Slovenia ranked the second among the EU state regarding the share of temporary contracts in the employment of youth, behind Spain (67.1), but before Portugal (61.1) (Eurostat).

During this profound social and financial crisis, the strategy of gradual neoliberalisation, led by neo-corporatist coalition between pro-European state leaders, managers and trade unions from export-oriented industry, simply broke down. Between 2009-2013, the country became the arena of on-going strikes, protests, and mass demonstrations characterised by a wholesale rejection of the old parties and the predominance of anti-corruption slogans (Stanojevic, Kanjua Mrcela, and Breznik 2016). These were partially appeased only through economic recovery. The intensification of social conflicts and struggles was related not only to the economic and financial crisis, but also to the evermore visible interventions of European authoritarian liberalism. The regular EU-level supervision of the macroeconomic policy within the excessive deficit procedures already

narrowed the manoeuvring space for Slovenian policy-makers. But the EC and the ECB also directly intervened into the domestic policy-making and institutional setup regarding the restructuring and recapitalisation of the banking sector at the height of the crisis. During the fiscal coordination cycle in mid-2013, the EC halted procedures and, together with the ECB, requested a new asset quality review of bank portfolios. The new review arrived at a much higher estimation of the total capital needs of the banks than the initial calculations. The overall banking rescuing operation exceeded 10% of GDP and further fuelled the rise in public debt (Breznik and Furlan, 2015). In addition, due to single market state aid provisions, the Slovenian governments were obliged to enact an unprecedented privatization of the banking sector under a strict supervision of the EC (Piroska and Podvrsic, 2019). The overall result of this orchestrated state rescue of banks was the stabilisation of the banking system and restoration of profits at the expense of deepening social fragmentation and insecurity. In 2018, the newly-privatised main banking group, NLB recorded over 200 million of net profits (Sovdat, 2020).

The political vacuum that emerged within this major crisis of Eurozone peripheral capitalism in Slovenia was mainly filled by political newcomers which could hardly fit the classical definition of a political party. After 2013 pragmatically built alliances of political opportunists of pro-business orientation whose main virtue was often that they were not Janez Jansa led the ruling coalitions. These personalized parties quickly gained voters' confidence with their "new face" discourse, but lost it just as rapidly. Since 2008, six different governments have been in power and all of them resigned before the end of their term. Once in power, the nominally centre-left governments were faced with increasingly right-wing SDS as the main opposition party and continued with neoliberal policies that had increasingly anti-participatory and (far-)right wing characteristics. The on-going austerity, a far-reaching foreign-led privatization of enterprises and banks,

the constitutionalisation of the fiscal rule, the restriction of public referenda on fiscal issues, international treaties and matters of national security, installing barbed wire on the borders and militarization of refugee crisis, deportations of asylum-seekers, the appointment of an openly xenophobic and racist security expert to the post of state secretary, and the recognition of Juan Guaido as a temporary president of Venezuela are among the main "achievements" of the recent ruling coalitions, whose leaders consider themselves as representatives of the "moderate centre".

But the political weakness of advancing an alternative developmental project should also be understood in relation to the gradual de-radicalisation of the Left. Now already in their second parliamentary mandate, the Left's origins lay in the 2012-2013 mass protests (Robertson 2014). Mixing anti-austerity and anti-corruption demands against the then Jansa government (2012-2013), the protests were the birthplace of the (radical) left Inicijativa za demokraticen socializem (IDS - Initiative for Democratic Socialism). To the extent that it gave rise to the strong social movement on the left which opened the questions of alternatives, socialism, and democratic policy-making, the crisis of peripheral capitalism in Slovenia was politically productive - at least initially. Forming an alliance with two other parties and some small civil society organizations, the Left, then still called the Združena Levica (United Left), entered the 2014 parliamentary elections with an anti-privatisation programme and a strong emphasis on fighting austerity both within and outside the parliament (Toplisek 2019). Yet, once elected, the party increasingly focused on parliamentary activities. This came at the expense of grass-roots and local, branch organising as well as building of alliances with labour representatives, and led to the centralisation of power in the parliamentary group with privileged access to media and resources.

In 2016, a major internal dispute took place when about one third of active members (including entire local

branches) left the party because of their disagreement with the (parliamentary) core cadre's ambition for political power. The Left, which was established in order to defend exploited working classes and run against the neoliberal "There is no alternative!", steadily transformed into the representative of an urban, educated middle-class and rather young population, often reactively defending social welfare state and building on a rhetoric of socio-cultural liberties. Although strongly supportive of strikes and other concrete fights for workers' rights, it plays no role in actually (co-)organising them. Consequently, the Left lost the support from many radical left activists and movements, and increasingly addressed and attracted – as well as felt the pressures from – the disappointed voters of centrist liberal parties. This is how in 2018 elections, its electoral support increased from 6% in 2014 to 9,3% (Jerele et. al 2018). Modelling itself on the "Portuguese example", the Left decided to provide external support to the minority government of the latest in the series of centrist "new faces" – the former comedian and small-town mayor Marjan Šarec. The Left conditioned this move with a signing of a "Memorandum" containing a timeline with several pro-social measures to be implemented throughout the government's mandate. However, the ruling coalition had no intention of realizing the agreement. After a hard fought (and ultimately successful) battle for the previously agreed upon minimum wage increase, the Left officially cancelled its external support for the government.

After additional tensions within the fraught coalition, prime minister Marjan Šarec, hoping to provoke yet another early election, resigned in January 2020, just as the danger of a world-wide spread of coronavirus from China entered into the public debate spotlight. Contrary to Šarec's calculation, new elections did not materialise. Jans' SDS relatively smoothly signed a coalition agreement with two smaller centrist parties with low public support and another right-wing party, the New Slovenia, which aspires to the image of respectable conservatives akin to the German

CDU. The political weakness of Jans'a's coalition partners and the fact that most of them owe their political survival to SDS, means that the new government is under almost total control of its most powerful party.

Epidemic as a cover for a further authoritarian neoliberalisation with a party state project

The new far-right government took power in mid-March just when the epidemic was officially declared. Since then, its governing was focused on four core activities: a) the adoption of three intervention packages, amounting to almost 12% of GDP, which provided state subventions especially for middle classes (Breznik 2020), relatively modest liquidity provisions for small and medium capital, and some aid to tourist sector and restaurant business; b) curtailing the independence of public health experts and epidemiologists by immediately replacing the leadership of National Institute for Public Health and centralizing the pandemic-related policy-making in the government; c) emphasizing the role of the police in enforcing social-distancing measures, attempting to expand the powers of the army patrolling the refugee-frequented southern border d) attacking critical segments of civil society and limiting their formal inclusion in the policy-making processes. By the end of May, the government implemented most of the measures in a relatively exclusionary way, with a practical ignorance of institutional social partners as well as minimal consideration of the parliamentary opposition. Regarding socio-economic measures, the government mostly relies on the advice of a new, government-appointed, advisory group with no legal basis, composed mainly of neoliberal economists often running their own private businesses, state functionaries from SDS' previous

stints in government, and representatives of domestic exporters. Fast-tracked decision-making, with minimal space for the parliamentary debates, predominated. In fact, at the outbreak of the epidemic, the parliament gave the government full discretion in the use of budget funds approved for purposes not deemed part of obligatory expenditures. For up to three months after the official end of epidemic, the government thus has full control over the budget and only has to present to the MPs the fait accompli report of how the money was spent once a month.

Using replacement of cadres and the establishment of ad hoc "crisis groups" as its favourite policy tools, SDS has evidently used the epidemic as a cover to advance its state project where the practices of representative democracy and social bargaining are to be subordinated to the ruling party's political and socio-economic ambitions. As the first in the EU, the government declared the end of the epidemic in the mid-May in order to prevent the automatic prolongation of the (selective) social measures, adopted in the initial packages, beyond May. Instead, a third package was adopted at the end of May to provide legal basis for the EU-subsidized Kurzarbeit schemes, but also to secure the return to neoliberal economic normality under the guise of economic recovery plan. The attempts to further reduce workers' rights gained first legal grounds with the adoption of the first intervention package which allowed for the possibility that workers temporarily sent home for waiting for work are forced to undertake low-paid seasonal work (Breznik, 2020). In the discussion regarding labour market provisions for the economic recovery period, the flexicurity concept, advanced by the government advisory group, sparked public debate. While labour market reforms are currently put aside, the government is leading a far-reaching attack on anyone that could slow down or block the construction projects, which are deemed essential for the post-crisis recovery. At the same time, only minimal extra resources were dedicated to the public healthcare sector, although the latter had experienced chronic financial

difficulties already before the epidemic. And the government decided for this move only very reluctantly and after the State Council threatened to veto the whole intervention package. Last but not least, the government liberalized the existing construction regulations with plenty of new legislative restrictions which excluded environmental NGOs and other “unpleasant” civil society organizations from challenging new construction permits on environmentalist grounds (Petkovic?, 2020). With this supreme act of authoritarian (neo)liberal ruling, where state public power is used to fend off democratic-political “intrusion”, the Ministry of Environment completely appropriated the political space and subordinated the “public interest” regarding environmental issues to top state functionaries and capital, especially the private one (Gantar, 2020). Commenting the preparation of state investment program, Andrej Vizjak, the Minister of Environment, clearly said that when the choice will have to be made between two construction projects, the priority will be given to the one financed with private resources. (Hrescak, 2020).

That said, when speaking about SDS governance, a further qualification is in place. Much in contrast to, let’s say, ordoliberalism for whom economic policy should be “freed” from politics and placed in the hands of technocratic bodies and norm-based policy-following, the currently ruling party in Slovenia is known for its aggressive and systematic replacements of top personnel in defence structures, managers in state owned enterprises, and attempts to privatize the “(remaining) big monopolies” (public healthcare, education, and radio-television), into the hands of SDS-loyalists. During the epidemic, this construction of the party state reached previously unseen extent and included the replacement of the director of the Slovenian Statistical Office, who acted according to legislation and refused to provide protected raw data to the above-mentioned government advisory group (Cirman and Vukovic?, 2020). The government also changed the non-executive directors of the Bank Assets Management Company (BAMC, the so-

called “bad bank”), established in 2013 to restructure bad loans and indebted companies and whose assets amounted to over 700 million € in January 2020 (Šimac and Božin, 2020). Note that this took place together with the change of nomination procedures. The government changed the BAMC statute which circumvented previously required expert evaluation of candidates and put the process exclusively into the hands of the Slovenian executive (Finance.Live, 2020). These steps towards repoliticization of state bureaucracy and economic policy from the right are in line with SDS’s long-time ambition to establish so-called Second republic. Janez Jansa is regularly claiming that “protracted liberalization” of the Slovenian economy and the absence of any systematic lustration of the state apparatuses are the main barrier to Slovenia’s capitalist success story. Supposed remnants of communist nomenklatura running the hostile deep state can only be overcome through a wide-ranging constitutional and societal reform, thus establishing the Second Republic, finalizing the transition and reaching “true independence” once and for all. As we’ll see below it is especially this aspect of SDS ruling that sparks the revolt among the Slovenian population.

Despite the short period of SDS in power, one can nevertheless attempt to decipher the first contours of the party’s societal project and place it on the map of far-right parties in the region (Becker and Smet 2018). Curbing the influence of civil society and restricting the parliamentary debate and empowering the executive without doubt loom large. Another important element of SDS’s programme is the ambition to gain control over key state apparatuses and the media. According to SDS, reforms are especially urgent in judiciary, where they have long been advocating an end to life tenure of judges. In all these aspects of the party state project, SDS is close to Polish Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS – Law and Justice) and especially Fidesz. Indeed, SDS’s leader, declaring at the beginning of April that “[w]e can rely only on our self and our friends in the region” (24ur.com, 2020), does not

hide his sympathies for the Visegrád group and their critical stance towards the EU’s initial inaction in corona crisis and Western Europe’s supposedly pro-migrant policies. Yet, when socio-economic policies are considered, there are also important differences. Both PiS and Fidesz, consider the reorganisation of banking sectors in favour of domestic financial capital as a crucial step and have strategically reduced the share and market powers of foreign subsidiaries. Both parties, but especially PiS, are inspired by national-conservative economic thought to defend pronounced state role in the economy and develop strategies to counter or mitigate against the subordinated position of their economies within the European division of labour (Becker and Smet 2018). Regarding Fidesz, it is noteworthy that in line with the Party’s selective economic nationalism, an increase of taxes on foreign multinationals from retail and financial sector were at the core of the initial measures during the epidemic (Podvrsnik et al., forthcoming). In other words, Fidesz and PiS are both trying to shift inter-class power relations between foreign and domestic capital by selectively supporting the emergence or strengthening of domestic bourgeoisie.

In contrast, SDS seems to defend “(economic) business as usual”, meaning securing neoliberal liberties for (international) capital and markets and further commodifying and commercialising the existing welfare provisions. Contrary to PiS and partially to Fidesz, no sign of challenging the predominant European core-periphery relations can be found in SDS. In this regard, SDS is close to the Czech Občanská demokratická strana (ODS – Civic Democratic Party) and the Slovak Sloboda a Solidarita (SaS – Freedom and Solidarity), which both exhibit strong neo-liberal orientation and do not try to subvert the alliance/subordination of domestic ruling classes to the interest of leading European fractions from financial and export industry (Becker and Smet 2018). That said, although Slovenia, Poland and Hungary are all part of the European industrial periphery dependent on

manufacturing exports and foreign capital, there are clear differences in structural constraints these countries face. Among the three, only Slovenian state adopted the common currency and became part of the Eurozone industrial periphery. It can neither use currency devaluation to counteract fluctuations in foreign demand nor rely on its own central banking authority to support its fiscal policy and state projects. Without monetary sovereignty the Slovenian state is much more dependent on the European macroeconomic policy-making than its regional counterparts which can also rely on large(r) domestic markets, as is especially the case for Poland. Current Slovenian government does not question the predominance of international capital and accepts the subordinated position of the Slovenian economy in the Eurozone division of labour. During the initial debates about the "European response" to the epidemic Slovenian government was among the original proponents of the coronabonds (Michalopoulos, 2020).

Regarding its anti-democratic drive, the current Slovenian government thus combines a mix of elements of authoritarian liberalism and more conservative party state project. Whereas for the first it could find a solid inspiration (and institutional basis) in the European integration, the second is closer to the strategies of the state leaders from the European industrial periphery who claim and/or seek, in a more or less consistent manner, to formulate an alternative to the European core-periphery divides, but without a radical transformation of domestic class power relations and structures. Consequently, an opposition to Jans?a's SDS can be politically productive and socially emancipatory only if it addresses all these elements.

The limits and potential of anti-government contestation

This year's mobilisations against the future Jans?a's government began as

soon as it became clear that he is about the form a coalition. Initially, the mobilisation of social groups with great intellectual and social capital was especially strong and enjoyed media support. A month before SDS managed to secure parliamentary majority, a group of more than 150 academics co-signed an open letter, broadcasting their concern about the country's future if Jans?a's third government in Slovenia's history was to materialize (Alternativna akademija 2020). During the epidemic, another letter was published – now joined by even more signatories – stating that Slovenia is making big strides in a dangerous direction and is gradually joining "the group of EU member states which are blacklisted as violators of fundamental principles of protecting democracy, rule of law, independence of media, and human rights." The letter ends with a call for protests, where "we will win back the previously taken-for-granted state of democracy" (Forum za demokracijo 2020). The weekly protests on bicycles indeed rapidly grew after some explosive whistle-blowing about corruption in public procurement of personal protective equipment – medical masks, was added atop of government's authoritarian handling of the crisis and vicious attacks on journalists. Bringing more than ten thousand people on their bicycles into the streets of Ljubljana and more than a dozen other cities every Friday evening around the country, these mass gatherings evolved from small protest actions that had took place at the beginning of the government's mandate.

The currently predominant media discourse and a rapid mobilisation from below against the government can be partly explained by the fact that SDS did not assume the current government as a consequence of elections, but because of the unravelling of government parties. For those familiar with social and political struggles in Slovenia this response is far from surprising. In fact, each time when SDS was in power mass protests took places – in 2005 against the neoliberal reform package and in 2012/13 against austerity and corruption. This "anti-Jans?a reflex" is partly related to the polarizing policies pursued by SDS but also to the fact

that the Slovenian society, comparatively to, let's say, Hungarian and Polish one, is much less conservative. Ever since the first Jans?a government (2004-2008), the Slovenian civil society – universities and intelligentsia, judiciary, public sector officials, trade unions, journalists, and many NGOs – have been perceived by the right wing as the bastions of left-leaning politics. As such, they are under constant attack both in the forms of cuts to financing (when SDS was in power) as well as persistent personal abuse. Scandalizing over Jans?a's "attacks on the institutions" or the threats to the "rule of law" are therefore powered by both an honest concern for liberal ideals and the fear of Jans?a's policies undermining the social standing and well-being of this left-oriented stratum of the Slovenian society.

Main arguments in the predominant "anti-Jans?a" discourse can be broken down along two axis – the threat of an authoritarian drift on the one hand, and on the other, the complementary move away from "European values" and towards Hungary and other Visegrad states. Accordingly, the current protests started out with relatively narrow demands limited to the political sphere, while socio-economic issues have only recently come more to the fore. The main demand is government's resignation, followed by calls for an end to corruption, more transparency, respect for expertise and public institutions, and more decency. These demands are highly fixated on the figure of Janez Jans?a and his party. It is true that Jans?a possesses considerable political power and a very divisive personality, but the personalizing and moralizing line of argument tends to narrow down the space for political debate, instead of opening it. A striking example of this anti-political tendency has been the common slogan "Thiefs!". It should be, however, noted that the struggle of various environmentalist NGOs against the above-mentioned construction legislation change has attracted relatively solid support from otherwise politically fragmented protestors.

The Left's response so far, has been very much within the coordinates laid

out by the moralising problematization of SDS's leader and outcries against the government's staff changes within the state apparatuses. On the one hand, the Left has been by far the most vocal political force with regards to socially unjust aspects of some of the purportedly anti-Covid-19 measures. It was instrumental in pointing out "overlooked" social groups and can be credited with achieving their inclusion in subsequent corona stimulus packages. But on the other hand, it has adopted the political line laid out above, which has a further benefit of being easily embraced by the media. The Left's leader Luka Mesec (2020), for example, sees current Jans' government as "grossly abusing its authorities" trying to get rid of liberal democracy. Although the Left's emphasis in these matters is different and their language is full of references to the workers and the poor, they have not managed to articulate a comprehensive alternative to the prevailing "anti-Jans'ism".

By overly personalizing the current political situation, the predominant anti-Jans' argument is overlooking important historical trends and has a very limited political potential. As we have shown, the checks on genuine democratic policy-making are not only characteristics of the Central Eastern state leaders but are built into the constitutional setup of the European Union. Thus, with no major change in the political content and demands, the current social and media mobilisation against the Slovenian government could lead to another round of the vicious circle reproducing the existing political and socio-economic constellation with its danse macabre where Jans' government is toppled by a protest movement hoping for little more than "decent politicians" and instead getting an evermore neoliberal and right-wing though nominally centrist government. Warnings against the attack on however idealized (pre-SDS government) formal democracy are in itself valuable. But limiting the political debate to this argument precludes any questioning of the prevailing socioeconomic order and does not offer any productive grounds for discussing alternatives capable of envisioning a society where

democracy and social equality will rule over markets and not vice-versa, as is currently the case be it through (European) norm-based rules or the politicization of the economy from the right.

To address the burning problems of social precarisation, shrinking public sector services, insecurity and fear, as well as the looming climate collapse and external dependency of the Slovenian economy and its ruling classes, it would be much more productive to contextualize the current Slovenian government's policy-making within the non-resolved crisis of peripheral capitalism and class-power relations that sustain it. There is potential within the current mobilization wave in Slovenia to bring these issues at the forefront of social struggles. In mid-May, first general assembly of various social initiatives and movements took place, where three of them started to collaborate to advance not only an anti-government, but also anti-(capitalist)system agenda. The current joint actions of the cultural workers, environmentalists and the anti-capitalist group, as well as the coming recession, exposing once again the social weaknesses and class nature of the existing socio-political system, present themselves as a good opportunity for articulating an alternative development project and rallying mass support behind it.

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Elections see emergence of first left pole since country's independence from

Yugoslavia

14 July 2020, by **Vladimir Unkovski-Korica**

Despite this, the ruling conservative party won handsomely. That was unexpected. Polls had been tight in the run-up to the election. Green-Left Coalition

But, with almost 97 percent of the vote counted, the ruling centre-right Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) won 66 seats out of 151. This contrasts with the centre-left's 41.

Since the two sides had been neck-and-neck in the last elections, this represents an unexpected triumph for the centre-right. It gained seats, while the centre-left lost seats.

The centre-right's success can partly be explained by the fact that Croatia has so far weathered the coronavirus comparatively well – officially, just 3,151 cases and 113 deaths – which compares favourably with countries like the US and the UK.

The centre-left's lack of transformative vision must also be part of the equation. Its technocratic and social liberal offering hardly excites. The centre-right Bridge (Most) also lost seats, gaining only eight.

By contrast, Croatia saw the rise of a right and left wing in politics. The

nationalist Homeland Movement came in third with 16 seats.

Led by hardliner folk singer Miroslav Škoro, the movement is characterised by a right-wing agenda: unfriendliness towards Croatia's Serb minority; a revisionist approach to the Second World War-era, fascist Independent State of Croatia; and its vocal anti-abortion stance.

Worryingly, the Homeland Movement may prove to be a king-maker in the new parliament, as the HDZ does not have enough seats to rule by itself. Whether or not it manages to enter government, it will remain a worrying opposition force.

Thankfully, the election also saw the emergence of a left pole in politics in Croatia for the first time since the country's independence from Yugoslavia in 1991.

The green-left coalition won seven seats, exceeding expectations. It performed spectacularly well in the city of Zagreb and very well in several other regions, including in the traditionally left-leaning Istria.

Emerging from various civic and left-leaning initiatives and movements, especially in the capital city, the

coalition was able to point to both a record of activism in the past and a transformative, left wing vision for the future.

This will be a boost to movements which will challenge the dominance of the neo-liberal and nationalist right in Croatia.

It will not be plain sailing, however. There were tensions within the coalition between its left-liberal and openly anti-capitalist components during the campaign, which represent a real contradiction going forward. It is unclear how cohesive the new coalition will prove to be.

Nevertheless, the election of an openly anti-capitalist MP, Katarina Peović of the Workers' Front, offers the far left a bridgehead in Croatia and the region.

The group's ability to use this bridgehead to raise the sights of working-class militants, strengthen extra-parliamentary campaigns, and crystallise a revolutionary socialist component in the labour movement in the coming period will be critical.

Source: [LeftEast](#). Note from [LeftEast](#) editors: We post this article in cooperation with Counterfire.

Palestinian members of Israeli parliament call on Democrats to oppose annexation

13 July 2020, by **Michael Arria**

"We, members of the Joint List, the third most supported Party in recent elections, representing the Palestinian minority in Israel as well as

progressive Jews, are writing to share our concerns regarding the impending plans advanced by the Israeli government, and supported by the US

administration, to annex parts of the Occupied Palestinian West Bank. According to the agreements within the Israeli governing coalition, acts of

annexation could commence in the coming days,” begins the letter.

The Trump administration’s Middle East team has been meeting this week to determine how to address the Israel government’s proposed annexation plans. Many observers think they will effectively give Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu a green light, although they were reportedly unable to reach a decision this week. [138]

In addition to calling on congressional Democrats to fight against annexation and the Trump administration’s “peace plan”, the Joint List letter also calls on the Biden administration to take a strong stance on the matter if he wins the election in November: “We urge you to take a firm stand

against this action and use all the tools at your disposal, legislative and public, to stop it.”

Although he publicly opposes Israel’s annexation plans, Biden has referred to the concept of conditioning military aid to the country as a “gigantic mistake” and “absolutely outrageous.” [139]

“The third-largest political party in the Israeli Knesset is now directly asking Congress to take action and set consequences. Democrats have a decision to make. Will they keep wringing their hands and expressing ‘concern,’ or are they going to do something about it? Either they will listen and finally protect Palestinian rights, or they will go down in history

as being complicit in 21st-century apartheid,” Jewish Voice for Peace Action Government Affairs Manager Beth Miller told *Mondoweiss*.

House Democrats are currently circulating a letter opposing annexation, but its wording is based around concerns for Israel’s security and there’s no mention of holding the country accountable for any of its actions towards Palestinians. [140] A letter developed by Senate Democrats earlier this year implied that the United States/Israel relationship could be threatened by annexation, but any mention of this possibility was quickly removed. [141]

26 June 2020

Source: *Mondoweiss*.

Clinic Defense and Abolition

12 July 2020, by **Emily Janakiram**

At 7:00 AM, the antis, none of whom were wearing masks, attempted to rush the clinic; when they were forced back, they attempted to block the doors and forcibly remove the barricades around the clinic, meanwhile hurling racist abuse at East Asian and South Asian comrades. Planned Parenthood, against NYCFAR’s wishes, called the police to remove them. Predictably, this maneuver only demonstrated what we have known all along, that the cops, as enforcers of the capitalist state which depends on gestational labor to sustain itself, have no interest in defending women or marginalized people. Though the antis’ actions were in violation of the FACE Act, a federal law prohibiting the obstruction of healthcare facilities or the use of intimidation, threats, or force against those seeking reproductive health services, the police made Planned Parenthood remove their own barricades and left the antis alone, retreating to their van across the street for the entirety of the action, as the antis continued to physically push clinic defenders and Planned

Parenthood staff and intimidate patients trying to enter the building.

This particular clinic is no stranger to anti-choice demonstrations. A contingent from Basilica of St. Patrick’s Old Cathedral, a nearby Catholic Church, marches there regularly, and Love Life has staged protests there before. These past demonstrations, which can turn out hundreds of protestors, including trained “sidewalk counselors” to manipulate patients to try to keep them from following through with their abortions, they have for the most part refrained from trying to physically obstruct the clinic.

In this context the clinic defenders have historically had a somewhat tense relationship with Planned Parenthood, some of whose staff feel that the actions of the defenders are needlessly disruptive, politicizing a terrain which is and should remain apolitical. But abortion clinics are an inherently political terrain, as reproductive justice is an inherently political issue, something which the antis have always recognized, and are

continuing to mobilize around. A Planned Parenthood worker said, “I’ve been doing this for thirty years, and this feels like we’re back in the 90s. I thought things were getting better.” The antis’ own rhetoric reinforced this: “We’re not the kumbaya Christians, we’re warriors of Christ,” and openly expressing their goal to keep patients from entering the clinic while making racist and homophobic remarks to clinic defenders and Planned Parenthood escorts.

Learning that the antis planned to demonstrate outside of the clinic on Saturday, June 20, New York City for Abortion Rights planned a counter-demonstration. After antis showed up at Planned Parenthood on Friday, June 19 with aggressive tactics that threatened patient access to the clinic, Planned Parenthood encouraged NYCFAR to bring as many people as possible on Saturday to engage and distract the antis enough to allow patients to enter, a strategy that was ultimately successful.

There are several lessons to be drawn from Saturday’s events, and many

complex and thorny dynamics at work. The antis involved in yesterday's demonstration were mostly Black, though Flip Benham and many of these organizations' leaders are white, while the clinic defenders were mostly white, and much of the antis' rhetoric focused on the vile racism of Planned Parenthood's founder, Margaret Sanger. While we recognize that Planned Parenthood is an important ally doing valuable clinical work, we also condemn Sanger's advocacy for racist eugenics.

The racial disparity evident at Saturday's demonstration is not something that can be ignored or dismissed, but neither can we accept a superficial identitarian critique that ignores the actual material conditions behind the racial dynamics of the current anti-choice movement. As Marxist feminists, we recognize that both eugenicists and forced birthers are working towards the same goal, control by state and capital over gestational labor for its own ends, to both reduce "undesirables" and quash insurrections, as well as to swell the workforce and the military.

Instead of addressing the structural poverty which compels many Black women who might otherwise choose to have a child to obtain abortions, the anti-abortion movement is instead concerned with stripping bodily autonomy under the facade of "protecting lives in the womb," condemning Black women to continue to perform reproductive labor in

dangerous conditions with little to no material support. It is no accident that evangelical ministries have poured money and resources into organizing in Black and immigrant communities, cynically appropriating the rhetoric of Black liberation and racial justice for its own ends, and erasing the Black radical feminists who have continually fought for the rights of Black women to control their bodies, against the efforts of those who seek to both force and deny parenthood to them. For instance, in 1994, a group of Black women in Chicago, recognizing that there was no space in the current women's rights movement for women of color, marginalized women, and trans people, formed Women of African Descent for Reproductive Justice, and pioneered the Reproductive Justice movement and published a full-page statement in the Washington Post and Roll Call. Three years later, SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective was established to fight for reproductive justice, defined as "the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities."

It is also glaringly obvious, especially during the recent movement to defund and abolish the police, to abolish the carceral state altogether, that we cannot turn to laws or the police to protect ourselves or grant us liberation. Roe V. Wade was not a

benevolent recognition of "a woman's right to choose," but an attempt to suppress militant left-wing feminist organizing and re-route this power into a liberal framework of "privacy" and "rights of the individual." The Democratic establishment, positioning abortion as an individual right to privacy while continuing to actively quash any working-class organizing to materially improve the lives of all people who can become pregnant, and demanding that we work within the confines of regressive laws and the carceral system to defend our rights, are not our allies. On Saturday, we saw tangible evidence of this. The NYPD must be stripped of funding, and those funds be redirected not only to providing free abortions, but also to other essential aspects of reproductive justice: free healthcare, free housing, free childcare, free education. Free abortion on demand, as well as the right to give birth and raise a child in safe, healthy, supportive, and dignified conditions.

We cannot turn to the law, the police, the ostensibly "pro-choice" Democrats, or the non-profit complex to ensure these rights, but must militantly seize them for ourselves, on the streets, and in front of the clinic. The antis have made it very clear that they have no regard for "civility," "legality," or "safe, legal, and rare." Neither should we.

June 25, 2020

Source [Spectre](#).

Abolish the police?

11 July 2020, by **Julien Salingue**

"Disempower, disarm, disband"

In the United States, the slogan of the abolition of the police is actually built around a triptych: "disempower, disarm, disband". It is a thoughtful strategy, advocated in particular by

the collective "A World Without Police", a programme of actions and demands which tries to take into account the contradictions within the demand for the abolition of the police and the main objections which can be made against it. [142]

Disempowering the police means opposing the construction of new

police stations, the creation of new units, the extension of prerogatives and areas of police intervention, recruitment campaigns and so on. The "offensive" slogan to "Defund the Police" is increasingly taken up in demonstrations, as is that of the exclusion of police unions from the AFL-CIO trade union federation, which

would also participate in a dynamic of disempowering.

Disarming the police means addressing concretely, and correlatively with the slogan of disempowering, the question of police over-equipment, the processes of militarization of law enforcement and, beyond this, the responsibilities of the police in the extension of the violence of social relationships. It is to point out the fact that, contrary to the legend cleverly maintained by the guarantors of the established order, the weapons of the police are not used to pacify social relations but, on the contrary, contribute to generating ever more violence.

Disbanding the police, finally, means demanding the abolition of the police force because it oppresses the population it claims to “protect”. A claim that is not seen in the United States as the culmination of a process that would first pass through disempowering and disarming, but as being articulated with these two slogans. A demand that confronts “the” problematic question: get rid of the police, but what would you put in its place? Or, in another version: the police are certainly problematic, but wouldn’t there be more problems if they were removed?

Doing without the police?

These questions, and the “classic” answers which are made to them (namely: a society cannot do without the police) are polluted by postulates well anchored in mentalities. We are talking here in particular about what Engels called “a superstitious reverence for the state and everything connected with it, which takes roots the more readily as people from their childhood are accustomed to imagine that the affairs and interests common to the whole of society could not be looked after otherwise than as they have been looked after in the past, that is, through the state and its well-paid officials”. [143] Any resemblance to the declarations of Jean-Luc Mélenchon before the demonstration of 13 June (“We have the right to dream of a society without police, it is

a beautiful dream, but it is only a dream. We need a police force, thoughtful, organized, obedient to the republican state and as disarmed as possible”) is purely coincidental...

One of these assumptions is that the police are irreplaceable in their (claimed) mission to “protect” the population and are an essential element in conflict management. Is it not the body to which we turn when we are attacked, robbed, threatened and so on? This state of affairs, if it seems indisputable, should not however be taken as a timeless social fact. In other times and/or under other skies, these functions could, and still can, be exerted by other structures, issued directly from the population and/or without subordination to the state. Due to the constraints of this article, we will not go into the details of these various experiences, and we will only insist on this point: it is necessary to focus and consider that “the police” as we know it (and experience it) in societies shaped by capitalism is a social construction which, like any construction, can be destroyed.

In short, it is important to get rid of the idea that problematic situations that may arise within a given society or community could only be resolved by the intervention of an autonomous and separate body. This is the meaning of the various initiatives (training in conflict management, support for victims of violence, constitution of neighbourhood or building collectives and so on) pursuing the objective of strengthening social ties so that people can collectively manage most problems without “needing” to call the police. We are obviously not talking here about “vigilante groups” and other militias who think of themselves as assisting the police and reproduce, often in a worse form, police behaviour, but rather of self-organized groups whose objective is the resolution of conflicts of low and medium intensity, which actually represent the bulk of police interventions.

A strategic horizon

By posing the question of the abolition of the police, and therefore of their indispensable character or absence of it, we are thus tackling a certain confusion of genres, linked to its multiple attributions. The police are both the body that citizens have been used to turning to in many problematic situations, but also the body that the state uses to quell social protest. However, it is not from the latter function that the police obtain their legitimacy in the eyes of the greatest number, but indeed from the former. It is on this confusion of genres that the powers that be play, trying to conceal the fundamentally repressive role of the police behind its alleged role of “public service”.

Does this mean that we could dismantle the police, guarantor of an unjust order, without dismantling the order itself? In other words: can we get rid of the police without getting rid of capitalism? The answer is obviously no, as it plays a functional role in the maintenance of capitalism. It is in this sense that the demand for the abolition of the police should be seen as a strategic horizon, a compass, and not as a slogan that can be met here and now. In 2016, *Chicago Reader* journalist Maya Duksamova published an investigation of Chicago groups trying to put abolitionist slogans into practice, in which one witness said: “I think that you have to view it as a strategy and a goal rather than something that can be implemented tomorrow... When I listen to the abolitionists, what I hear is that it is possible to build a world without prisons or policing”. [144]

Campaigns against the police and the establishment of “counter-institutions” rendering their interventions useless come up against this major obstacle: the central place of the police in the system of capitalist domination gives them a position which remains essential for those who face, in particular, situations of serious violence. To advocate the disappearance “here and now” of the police is to ignore this difficulty, and it is one of the worst means of combating the illusions according to which one could build a global

alternative to the police force without posing the question of the abolition of the state. In this sense, it is important to articulate immediate demands to weaken the police and fight against

their violence, alternative practices tending to demonstrate that the police are not a “necessary evil”, and an overall political project of overthrowing capitalism.

17 updated 26 June 2020

Translated by **International Viewpoint** from *l'Anticapitaliste*.

White Supremacy Symbols Falling

10 July 2020, by **Malik Miah**

A Senate committee is reviewing if Confederate statues at the U.S. Capitol should be removed. Previous attempts have failed. Activists and some city governments aren't waiting for official action.

A statue of Confederate President Jefferson Davis along Richmond, Virginia's famed Monument Avenue was torn down by activists. Demonstrators beheaded four Confederate statues before pulling one down using a tow rope at the Portsmouth, Virginia Confederate monument as police watched.

Alabama's flagship state university took down memorials to Confederate soldiers. The University of Alabama removed plaques honoring students who served in the Confederate Army and student cadet corps.

Two of Alabama's largest cities — Birmingham and Mobile — took down Confederate monuments that were focal points for civil unrest. Defying a state law intended to protect such memorials, Birmingham dismantled a massive obelisk dedicated to Confederate soldiers and sailors in a downtown park.

Mobile took down a statue of a Confederate naval officer that had been vandalized. Mobile Mayor Sandy Stimpson said on Twitter the move was not an attempt to rewrite history but intended to remove “a potential distraction” in order to focus on the future of the Gulf coast city.

Pressure is mounting in Mississippi over the state flag. Adopted in 1894, the design incorporates the Confederate battle flag — a red background with a blue X lined with white stars. In 2001, Mississippi voted to keep it. Now Republican Governor Tate Reeves says it is not up to elected leaders to change it.

Jefferson Davis and his legacy departed Kentucky's Capitol Rotunda after a 12-foot marble statue commemorating the lone president of the Confederate States of America was removed June 12.

Ten military bases are named after Confederate generals who are properly seen as traitors by African Americans and many whites. Fort Bragg in North Carolina and Fort Hood in Texas are two examples.

These bases are in former slave states in the South. They were all named some 50 to 80 years after the Civil War. Why then? It represented the emphatic victory of white nationalism over Black civil rights.

Donald Trump, the white nationalist-in-chief says not on his watch. “These Monumental and very Powerful Bases have become part of a Great American Heritage, and a history of Winning, Victory and Freedom.”

Like other defenders of these dishonorable men, he argues that it reflects “Southern heritage and culture.” They mean white culture even though the wealth of the southern economy was built by slave labor.

Blacks ask: Where are the monuments to former slaves who fought in the army and militias for freedom?

The Marine Corps recently banned displays of the Confederate flag (with an exception for Mississippi's contested flag). So has NASCAR! Amid the rising anti-racist groundswell in the country, the times are changing.

July-August 2020, [ATC 207](#).

U.S. Erupts with Mass Protests

10 July 2020, by **Malik Miah**

MASS PROTESTS ACROSS the United States — and beyond — exploded after

four cops murdered an unarmed Black man, George Floyd, 46, in

Minneapolis, Minnesota, on May 25. The white cop, Derek Chauvin, 44, for

nearly nine minutes, put his knee on Floyd's neck.

Floyd gasped out, "I can't breathe" and called for his "mama." After six minutes his body went limp, but Chauvin kept his knee on his neck for an additional two minutes and 46 seconds to make sure he was no longer breathing. Two other cops held Floyd's arms and legs pinned down as a fourth cop stood guard so bystanders could not intervene.

Bystanders videotaped the intentional murder, yelling at the cops killing the man who offered no resistance. His hands had been handcuffed behind his back. One person said, "He was treated like a roach."

Chauvin and his three cop associates acted with murderous intent. The cell phone videos showed that Floyd waited for the cops to arrest him after a clerk at a store alleged that he used a counterfeit \$20 bill to buy cigarettes.

The cops came to his car, guns drawn, and pulled him out and put him in handcuffs. He was then walked to the police car across the street. He did not resist arrest. Whether or not Chauvin proceeded because he knew Floyd is irrelevant. What he knew was that Floyd was a Black man — and did not deserve life.

How anyone with eyes or a conscience could not see this for what it was, a white terrorist lynching, is complicit in the crime. It is outrageous. Black lives do matter.

Four Cops Fired

Some 24 hours later, the mayor of Minneapolis said the four murdering cops were fired from the police force. None were immediately arrested or charged with murder. That night mass street protests demanding "No Justice, No peace" ensued.

The family demanded arrests of the killer cops. The County District Attorney ((DA) incredibly said it was likely that "more evidence" would show no crime was committed. Laws in the United States allow cops to assert they are doing their job always

in fear, to avoid arrest and prosecution for murder or police violence.

Extreme anger rose in Minneapolis and the next-door city of St Paul, the state capital. Blacks and other residents demanded, "No Justice, No Peace" and "Black Lives Matter." Some violence did occur, including the burning of the 3rd police precinct where the four cops worked, even as the police pushed back.

Two more days of mass protest led the same DA to reverse course and announce a charge of third-degree murder and manslaughter for one cop, Chauvin. The other three remained at home until finally charged June 3 with "aiding and abetting murder."

On May 30, the new progressive Minnesota Attorney General, Keith Ellison, took overall charge of the case. He upgraded the charge against Chauvin to second-degree murder and charged the other three killers. Ellison was the first Muslim elected to Congress, prior to being elected attorney general.

Blood and Violence on their Hands

Blood and street destruction are on the hands of the cops and the criminal justice system. Even when a cop is fired and charged for the crime of murder, the "justice" system is tilted to let him off.

The Minnesota National Guard, city police and state troopers applied maximum force to push out democratic protesters in Minneapolis and St Paul on May 29. Curfews in Minnesota and other states were also imposed. The authorities' aggressive tactics included indiscriminate shooting of teargas canisters and rubber bullets at peaceful protesters and reporters.

Some of the properties burned were well-known community centers and popular sites. Significantly, infiltrators were present including white nationalist provocateurs, promoted by the dark web and other social media, elements who heard the dog whistle coming from the White House and Justice Department seeking to use the Floyd murder to advance their anti-Black and anti-progressive agenda.

So-called police "unions" (which actually operate like a criminal cartel to protect thuggish violent actions by police) routinely defend the cops' criminal actions and attacks community activists as "anti-cop."

Two Americas

Justice for George Floyd is a central demand for national protests. But the underlying reason is the inequalities rooted in a capitalist system based on systemic discrimination. The multiracial demonstrators have raised this issue of the pandemic of racism that has no solution under the current system of national oppression of African Americans.

Blacks, who are 13% of the U.S. population, make up nearly 50% of deaths by cops and suffer mass incarceration. Many liberals see the issue as "excessive" police use of force; Blacks know otherwise. We live in two Americas — one white majority, one Black minority

Why is this important? Too many whites in the modern day still refuse to understand that democracy is not real unless all peoples are treated as equals and respected as humans.

The concept of "Two Americas" is a recognition that Blacks, Latinos, Asians and indigenous peoples as well as immigrants (legal and undocumented) were never included by the white male Founding Fathers as "citizens." Every fight for social change leads white status quo forces to organize counter legal and extralegal actions seeking to reverse those gains.

The white-led backlash after the first Black president, Barack Obama, put the white supremacist, Donald Trump, in the White House. Any illusions that a colorblind America was on the horizon were quickly shattered. It is why a vast majority of African Americans see the 2020 presidential election as life-threatening.

Whites continue to see most things in racial terms even as they deny doing so. It's why a liberal white woman in Central Park, New York City, recently played the "race call" in telling the

police by 911 that an “African American man was threatening her)” (he’s a birdwatcher) because he asked her to leash her dog.

Ahmad Aubery, a Black man jogging in Georgia, is murdered by three white vigilantes believing that they as white citizens could do so. Breonna Taylor, an essential worker emergency medical technician, is killed by plainclothes cops bursting into her apartment in Louisville, Kentucky.

The only person arrested for attempted murder was her boyfriend, who grabbed his legally registered gun to shoot at the intruders who did not identify themselves.

Dual Pandemics

How to fight the twin pandemics of coronavirus and racism inequalities?

The health crisis is much simpler to combat than racism. Social distancing and wearing masks works until a vaccine or cocktail is created. Racism of 400 years requires a change of the capitalist system, and enacting laws to enforce equality.

Most Black street protesters wore masks because of the coronavirus. Blacks have disproportionally high numbers of cases and deaths. Most Trump MAGA supporters did not care.

The majority white public generally tries to avoid honestly discussing U.S. history honestly. Racism is seen as a Black people issue, something not taught in schools.

Seeing the protests in Minnesota, New York, Los Angeles, Louisville and dozens of other cities show them demanding more than justice for George Floyd. The white nationalist in chief, President Donald Trump, urged violence against protesters.

He invoked a racist comment from the white Miami police chief in 1977 saying “that when the looting starts, the shooting starts,” He added that he would use “vicious dogs” against Black rebellions.

Trump did not condemn the killer cops and failing justice system. He asked his Justice Department to blame

violence on “left wing agitators” and said he’d declare — without evidence, or legal authority to do so — the antifascist group “antifa” a terrorist organization, while not naming a single white supremacist organization or the armed vigilantes that have murdered innocent Blacks and Jews.

Antifa has responded to these groups’ actions, as in the violent racist invasion of Charlottesville. (It is a violation of U.S. law to label a group “terrorist” because you disagree with it. Crimes are based on illegal actions, not speech or goals.)

History of Revolt

The United States was founded on mass disobedience and alleged violation of unjust laws. The most famous was the December, 1773 Boston Tea Party, anti-tax protest.

Slave revolts and runaways, however, were illegal before and after U.S. independence. Labor strikes were infiltrated and attacked by employers’ agents (Pinkertons) and cops. Strikes were declared “illegal” until victory was won.

Without civil disobedience and struggle against corrupt rulers and police, no progress can be made.

What has been most positive about the current explosions is that young whites and other minorities joined with African Americans. A true multiracial coalition emerged where many have stood up to the police and demanded justice.

The difficult forging of unity with oppressed people is necessary to launch mass revolutionary movements for fundamental change. African Americans are an oppressed national minority without full citizenship — deserving self-determination.

Marx and Engels made this analysis about oppressed peoples in the 19th century. Elaborated on by the Russian revolutionary leaders Lenin and Trotsky, it remains valid today:

“No nation can be free if it oppresses other nations.” (Friedrich Engels)

“The nation that oppresses another

nation forges its own chains.” (Karl Marx)

“Right of self-determination for all nations included within the bounds of the state.” (Article 9, Program of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party, 1903)

Martin Luther King Jr., the most prominent leader of the mass civil rights movement in the 1960s and advocate of nonviolent protest:

“We adopt the means of nonviolence because our end is a community at peace with itself. We will try to persuade with our words, but if our words fail, we will try to persuade with our acts.”

King also said, “Oppressed people cannot remain oppressed forever. The yearning for freedom eventually manifests itself.”

In 1967 speech, the “Other America,” King said about “riots:”

“In the final analysis, a riot is the language of the unheard. And what is it that America has failed to hear?”

A Minneapolis Black Lives Matter leader put it clearly: the police force needs to be disinvested and resources put into the Black, brown and native peoples communities.

The occupying force should be dissolved, replaced by community control with strong regulations that the new police force must live in the community they patrol and be accountable to that same community.

But on June 1 Donald Trump held a Rose Garden gathering of white mainly male staffers to threaten the invocation of the rarely used Insurrection Act of 1807. He said if the governors do not “dominate” protesters with force he would do so by sending in the armed forces.

His reality show of the presidency was orchestrated for the cameras. He spoke to his white nationalist supporters and the FOX news media. He issued his claim of being a “Law and Order” president, then walked to a nearby famous church where he waved a Bible (upside-down) for the cameras, and left. Peaceful and legal

protesters had been cleared away by massive teargassing and police assault.

The president can invoke the Insurrection Act only if requested by a

state's governor. The law was written specifically to prevent dictatorial actions by the president; Trump's threat is in violation of the law. Since then leading military figures have openly denounced the threat.

Meanwhile the marches continue.

No Justice! No Peace!

Source: July-August 2020, [ATC 207](#).

"We want to live"

9 July 2020, by **Joseph Daher**

Events

Since 7 June, popular demonstrations have broken out in the regions of Sweida and Daraa as well as on the outskirts of the capital Damascus, in the city of Jaramana. They denounce the high cost of living and demand the fall of the Assad regime and the departure of its allies, Russia and Iran. The main slogan of the demonstrators is "We want to live", as a call for more social justice and democracy.

To try to minimize the impact of these protests, the Syrian regime launched counter-protests denouncing the US sanctions. The police also violently repressed and arrested demonstrators in the town of Sweida.

The conditions that led to the popular

uprisings still exist. The regime has not only been unable to resolve them but has exacerbated them. Despite all the support of its foreign allies and despite its resilience, the Assad regime faces insoluble problems. Its failure to resolve the serious socio-economic problems of the country, combined with its relentless repression, has provoked criticism and further protests.

Complicated horizon

However, these conditions do not automatically translate into new political opportunities, especially after more than nine years of a destructive and deadly war. The absence of a

structured, independent, democratic, progressive and inclusive Syrian political opposition makes it difficult to unite the diverse popular classes. This convergence will be necessary to challenge the regime again at the national level.

This is the main challenge. Despite the difficult conditions engendered by repression, impoverishment and social dislocation, a progressive political alternative must be organized within the local expression of these resistances.

Damascus and other regional capitals believe they can maintain their despotic rule by constantly resorting to massive violence against their populations. This is doomed to failure, as the explosions of regional popular protests continue to demonstrate.

Sisi government the most repressive in Egyptian history

9 July 2020, by **Hoda Ahmed**

Since then, the repression has not stopped: following others like Lina Attallah, editor-in-chief of *Madamasr*, Nora Younès, editor-in-chief of the online site *Al Manassa*, was arrested on 24 June, then released on bail 26 hours later. The reasons are always the same: spreading false news, endangering state security,

membership of a terrorist organization (implicitly the Muslim Brotherhood).

Activists and their

families targeted

The day before, for the same reasons, the sister of the famous activist Alaa Abdel Fattah, Sanaa Seif, was arrested the day after performing a sit-in with her mother Layla Soueif and her sister Mona outside the prison where Alaa is

incarcerated. They were beaten and robbed by “hooligan” women under the indifferent eye of the guards. It is a usual technique of the regime: not content with attacking activists, it is all their relatives who are under threat. In the most emblematic case, five cousins of Mohamed Soltan, an Egyptian-American human rights activist living in the United States after having spent two years in prison in Egypt, disappeared for two days to be found in preventive imprisonment for the same reasons of spreading false news and belonging to a terrorist group. Soltan’s crime was to have sued former Prime Minister El Beblawi, the current Executive Director of the IMF, in the US, as being responsible for ill-treatment and torture between 2013 and 2015.

An arrest in Egypt means guaranteed ill-treatment: crowded cells, no natural light, insufficient or no food, no drinking water in a country where summer temperatures easily reach 40°C, no care (the cause of the death of ex-President Morsi) and systematic torture: beatings, electrocutions and rapes. On the international day of

support for victims of torture. 26 June, three Egyptian human rights organizations launched a campaign “Against torture, no torture in Egypt” which provides, among other things, for the publication of names of torture perpetrators.

Doctors also targeted

It might be thought that only activists or their relatives are threatened, but in the midst of the Covid crisis, even doctors who rebel against their disastrous working conditions are victims of arbitrary arrests on the pretext of spreading false news on the health situation or belonging to a terrorist plot. Media close to the government accuse them of treason and demand the death penalty for them. The health system is failing badly, when not absent, in whole swathes of the country and, since the beginning of the pandemic, many doctors have been infected for lack of sufficient protective equipment. The doctors’ union accuses the

government of transferring overly talkative doctors to hospitals treating Covid patients or to distant governorates as punishment.

Even influencers of the TikTok application are being sued for spreading immoral ideas and undermining Egyptian family values. Despite all these abuses which the regime does not even hide, the international community and particularly the arms-selling countries say nothing, France in the lead since its chief sales representative Le Drian has visited eight times to sell Mirage jets, corvettes, frigates and so on. Italy is ignoring the assassination of Giulio Regeni, found dead on the side of a fast lane, victim of a fight between information services because he was working on a thesis on independent unions resulting from the 2011 revolution, to focus on a sales contract that would in its first phase be worth 8 to 9 billion dollars. It’s the contract of the century according to Italy but the shame of the century according to Amnesty International since Egypt has never really cooperated with Italian justice.

Protests Against Racism; LBGTQ Pride; Continuing Crisis; Trump’s Decline

8 July 2020, by **Dan La Botz**

The rainbow banners flew this year in the midst of signs saying “defund the police.” The Pride marches began in June of 1970, but over the years as the LGBTQ movement became more successful, corporations began to sponsor the marches, which often cooperated with the police. This year, with the Reclaim Pride movement, LGBTQ spokespeople talked of breaking with corporate sponsorship going back to the roots of the movement that began with the fight at the Stonewall bar against police harassment.

While the protests over racial injustice have largely subsided, many activists

turned their attention to taking down statues of generals and politicians of the Confederacy, the government of the states that seceded to support slavery during the American Civil War. Many statues have been either taken down by state and local government or torn down by protestors. In response, Trump signed an executive order to protect monuments emphasizing that those who do tear them down could face ten years in prison.

All of this took place in the midst of the continuing pandemic and economic crisis. The United States has suffered 125,000 COVID-19 deaths and tens of millions remain

unemployed. After three months of a national lockdown from March to May, President Donald Trump and Republican governors in several Sunbelt states—arguing that the pandemic was all but over—had rushed to reopen the economy, leading to a resurgence of the virus and forcing Texas and Florida and many counties in California to close down again, while eight other states paused their re-openings.

In the meantime, Trump has asked the Supreme Court to strike down the Affordable Care Act (ACA), popularly known as Obamacare, which would leave 23 million Americans without

health insurance. Because most Americans get their health insurance through their employers, the economic crisis has already stripped millions of their health coverage and 450,000 have sought insurance through the ACA since the crisis began. While health insurance under Obamacare remains in the hands of private enterprise and for profit, Trump and the Republicans argue that it is a first step to government control and socialism.

The Cares Act signed on March 27, which provided the jobless with an additional \$600 per week in unemployment benefits will end on

July 26, though tens of millions remain unemployed and the U.S. economy is predicted by the International Monetary Fund to shrink by 8 percent. This would leave most of the unemployed with an average of only \$378 per week, not enough to support most workers. The Republicans have opposed an extension of the unemployment supplement on the ground that it will encourage workers to stay home rather than going back to work. Many workers fear going back to work, as long as the pandemic persists.

With the pandemic and the economic depression continuing, and the

movement against racism having shifted American opinion on that issue to the left, Donald Trump's support has dramatically eroded. In six key contested states—Michigan, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Florida, Arizona, and North Carolina—Biden now leads by between 7 and 11 percentage points. Trump's support has eroded among older voters, among voters without a college education, and in some states among white voters. He looks likely to lose, but it is five months until the election.

28 June 2020

Source [New Politics](#).

July 4 speech signals new stage in Trump's race war

8 July 2020, by **Malik Miah**

"America in crisis" is a reality.

The US is experiencing twin pandemics: a health and economic crisis due to COVID-19; and a race crisis due to state violence against Black and Brown lives. There is no national governmental leadership to fight both.

The "American Spring" of protests is changing that. The 50-state upsurge, declaring Black lives matter as much as white lives, has led millions of whites to look themselves in the mirror and begin to reject the revisionist history taught in schools and institutions.

The movement has also provoked Trump and his white nationalist supporters to go on the offensive. Many shout "White Power", and Trump embraces them as "patriots".

At the same time, many Democratic Party mayors have retreated from taking on the criminal cops, even as they continue to beat and kill innocent people of colour. Most police reforms proposed by liberals are modest and

can easily be ignored or reversed.

As the Trump regime downplays medical science and states that COVID-19 will eventually fade away, the facts say otherwise. The US population is 4.25% of the world but 25% of those infected by COVID-19 and 25% of deaths, impacting disproportionately on African American lives.

Trump's race war

At a July 3 speech in front of four dead presidents carved on sacred indigenous people land in South Dakota, Trump went all in on his race war agenda.

He attacked the BLM movement as advocates of "far left fascism". Trump defended Confederate monuments as "American Heritage" and defended his Executive Order making it a felony to vandalise such symbols.

Trump called BLM a "symbol of hate". Former New York City Mayor and Trump lawyer Rudolph Giuliani said

BLM is "a Marxist organisation".

Indigenous people protested outside the July 3 "Mount Rushmore" race war event. Secret Service and police pushed demonstrators back and arrested some, as pro-Trump white extremists shouted at Native peoples to "go back home". Only anti-Indian, anti-Black bigots could attend what was called a public White House event.

Trump has positioned himself as the political heir of segregationist (and former governor of Alabama) George Wallace, said Douglas Brinkley, a presidential historian at Rice University in Houston. Brinkley told the *Los Angeles Times* that Wallace and former Senator Strom Thurmond of South Carolina both failed in their attempts to win the presidency on openly white supremacist platforms. [145]

"History will look at the Trump years as being a reactionary right-wing movement that saw America was becoming 60% nonwhite and panicked," Brinkley said.

"When the economy crashed and George Floyd was murdered, Trump had cement feet. He went back to a tired old playbook, and he lost the centre in America. If you were a conservative, centre-right voter, you're now looking to get rid of him."

Only 35% of voters have confidence in Trump's ability to "effectively handle race relations" and only 15% are "very confident", according to a Pew Research survey released on June 30.

A majority of those polled – 55% – also said Trump had "changed the tone of political debate in the US for the worse". Just 25% said he had changed it for the better and 19% saw not much change, either way.

Yet, it is not clear Trump will lose in November. Racism and defence of white grievance is his strategy to win and he doubled-down on white grievance in his July 4 speech at the White House.

Trump is threatening to veto the US\$740-billion Defence Authorisation Act, should it include a measure to rename military installations that honour Confederate figures.

Trump's defence of police "unions" (which are, in fact, cop cartels) and threats to deploy the National Guard against peaceful protesters are pressuring Democratic mayors and governors to weaken the mass movement.

Trump believes his white "silent majority" will win the election, stop the Democrats and the Black-led movement.

Many establishment liberals, while giving lip service in support of BLM demands, are retreating on the issue of defunding the police and moves to bring about fundamental changes.

There are four months until the presidential election. In politics, that is a lifetime.

Three examples of cities led by liberal Democratic mayors shows this. It was only six weeks ago on May 25 that George Floyd was murdered by Minneapolis cops.

1. Occupy New York City Hall

In late June, activists in New York City pushed the City Council to cut the largest police budget in the country by US\$1 billion, and to redirect the funds to other socially needed programs. Mayor Bill de Blasio pretended support, but then deployed the cops to shut down the week-long protest and occupation.

"Shortly before 3am on Wednesday [June 1]," reported *The Nation*, "several hundred protesters gathered in the plaza directly east of City Hall Park in downtown Manhattan. [146]

"A few were new faces, but many had been there on and off for a week, when activists set up an encampment and declared that they were occupying the space as part of the nationwide movement against racism and policing.

"The protesters had a lot going against them. Less than 24 hours earlier, the New York Police Department had staged a violent raid at the outskirts of the encampment, injuring several people. [147]

"Just hours before, those in the [protest] encampment **watched** as local legislators, while negotiating and voting on the city budget for the next fiscal year, brushed off their calls to defund the police."

De Blasio was elected in 2014 as a police force critic. Since then, he has solidly supported the cops in their anti-Black and violent actions. He preaches there are only a few "bad apples".

The Occupy City Hall campaign was aimed at defunding the police and making other fundamental changes as the city discussed its new budget. The new budget, however, turned out to be a sleight of hand.

For example, about \$400 million of the \$1 billion the city is said to be cutting from the Police Department's \$6 billion budget will be achieved by moving school safety officers under the Department of Education. But according to the city's Independent

Budget Office, the Education Department already sends the Police Department \$300 million a year to operate the school safety program.

Activists are continuing their fight for real cuts in the police budget and transfer of funds to other programs.

2. Minneapolis mayor retreats

In Minneapolis, where George Floyd died after a police officer knelt on his neck for nearly nine minutes, the City Council — with a veto-proof majority — immediately pledged to defund the police department there. [148]

Amid a massive crowd of protesters, Mayor Jacob Frey was pressed on whether he would commit to defund the police. When he said he would not support the full abolition of the police, he was booed with chants of "Go home, Jacob!" and "Shame!". [149]

In an interview with National Public Radio, Frey expressed support for major structural reform, but reaffirmed his opposition to disbanding the police.

"We need to entirely shift the culture that has for years failed Black and Brown people. We need a full structural revamp," he told NPR. "But, abolishing the police department? No, I think that's a bad idea."

Leaders of the Minneapolis BLM movement are determined to keep pressing the City Council to move forward. As in most cities, the activist Black leadership has pursued this demand for years. Frey and the establishment liberals hope the mass upsurge will die down, but are willing to challenge it anyway.

3. Seattle's mayor sides with cops

According to local media, heavily armed cops swept into Seattle's police-free "autonomous zone" on July 1 and arrested dozens of people, after Mayor Jenny Durkan issued an overnight emergency order declaring the weeks-long gathering an "unlawful

assembly”.

The move to disband the Capitol Hill Occupied Protest (CHOP) and reclaim an abandoned police precinct nearby followed a series of violent crimes that included the fatal shootings of two teenagers. None involved peaceful demonstrators.

Durkan’s order to clear the occupied protest area remains in effect. Customers and residents must check in with police as they enter and exit the cordoned-off areas. Many are waved through without delay. Others have reported run-ins with police and, especially at night, intimidation by heavily-armed police in ready mode for continued protests.

Durkan has also called for an investigation into socialist city council member Kshama Sawant, for allegedly violating her office. Sawant has been active in the protest movement.

Vanguard

leadership by Blacks

The history of the US is one of thievery and national oppression. Whites rarely know the truth about the history.

The Black leadership of the current upsurge and the BLM organisations know the truth. Their vanguard political role has inspired other oppressed peoples to stand up.

The white backlash, led by Trump, is seeking to use more violence to suppress the movement and encourage liberals to protect the police institutions. In the past, that “law and order” message has worked.

History shows that Democratic elected officials and establishment liberals, including Africa Americans, have supported the police, the “law and order” agenda and mass incarceration. Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden has already declared he will increase police

budgets if he is elected president.

What next?

This is why the left wing of the protest movement is not shifting their focus away from peaceful street action to campaign for Joe Biden. The gains won so far are due to mass struggle and must continue no matter who is president and which party rules Congress.

The American crises cannot be solved by liberalism and electoralism.

Trump’s race-war strategy can only win if the movement leaves the streets. As the examples in New York City, Minneapolis and Seattle show, protests will continue so long as killer cops are not prosecuted and put in prisons.

A Third Radical Reconstruction (Revolution) is needed now.

7 July 2020

Source [Green Left](#).

Retail, aviation, pork, viruses and profits

7 July 2020, by **Michelle Verdier**

Originally, there was the discovery of a “cluster” or “hotspot” as had already been declared several times in these slaughterhouses or rather industrial charcuteries. This time at Tönnies, named after its family owners, a place of slaughter but also of meat processing where 1,553 employees are infected, and 7,000 in total quarantined. The company has 16,500 employees worldwide, it is the largest European “pork producer”, directed by a family who might be called “absolute pigs”: 70 to 80% of the staff are subcontracted, the workforce is mainly made up of employees from central and eastern Europe (Romania, Poland, Bulgaria), housed in filthy homes at the rate of 8 to 10 per room and almost without sanitary facilities, and forced to work without protection

for 12 to 14 hours a day while being paid for 8 hours. At work as at home, promiscuity.

This is what Jonas Bohl, the head of the NGG union in the industry, describes in the media, saying he is helpless in the face of the situation due to language problems and extreme exploitation and precariousness. Land leaders (CDU) as well as federal officials roll their eyes but are content with promises of improvement which they do not believe (“pretty much zero” confidence, says the German Federal Minister for Labour!). The Tönnies family or mafia even refused to give the names of the contaminated employees, having less regard for them than cattle. One thing is certain,

if the virus is there, profits are too.

Bosses hit the headlines

At the same time, the news is marked by reports about other big names of the German capitalist planet, in the automobile industry and quite recently in large-scale distribution and aviation. The department store chain “Galeria Karstadt Kaufhof” and its subsidiary “Karstadt Sports” have just obtained from a court and restructuring experts a plan allowing them to close 62 of their 172 sites, hence the elimination of nearly 6,000 jobs. The losses linked to the slowdown in activity for coronavirus

provide a convenient scapegoat, because these restructurings and cuts in the workforce succeed others. Big distribution, having already cleaned up its profits by layoffs, is only seizing the opportunity of the coronavirus for pursue them. The boss of the firm, Austrian René Benko, is a self-made man described as the quintessential shark, master in purchases and buyouts in the Germany-Austria-Switzerland area for over twenty years, at the head of an opaque empire backed by the hinterland of the countries of the East (but also the Arab world and South Africa), on good terms moreover with high-ranking

political notables.

Lufthansa and Covid profits

Obviously, the planes remained grounded, but Lufthansa has made a total of more than 9 billion in profits during the past five years (among other things, through layoffs which had given rise to strikes). This time, it won these 9 billion from the state in the form of credits and the purchase of shares (the state will hold 20% of

the company's shares) without anything in return: no right to monitor compliance with ecological measures, no control over employment policy - Lufthansa already claims an "overcapacity" of 22,000 jobs, including 11,000 in Germany. Or one job in six cut.

Europe's largest capitalist power announces the most ambitious plans for its big profiteers. Normal! Its political leaders even reserve for them, in money allocated for dismissals, a "special favour" ... what is called in German "Extrawurst", or "sausage of choice" ...

After the Deluge

6 July 2020, by **Dianne Feeley**

And perhaps they didn't think that the floodwater would rush as far as the Dow Chemical plant, where it would mix with the water from the company's containment ponds.

Originally designed for flood control, the two dams are more than 90 years old. For over twenty years the first of the four, at Edenville, had been generating hydropower for Consumer Energy. Licensed by the Federal Emergency Regulatory Commission, the dam had just two spillways. Over a 14-year period, the commission demanded its owner, Boyce Hydro, build additional spillways to withstand heavy rains. The company maintained they didn't have the money for repairs. Two years ago, the FERC revoked Boyce Hydro's license and regulation reverted to the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy. The state environmental agency negotiated the sale, remediation, and transfer of all four dams to a multi-county trust no later than 2024.

Why didn't either the federal or state agency move quickly to make sure these dams were structurally sound? This is particularly important in Michigan where there has been a 10%

increase in precipitation over the last 50 years. Because of violent storms, four of the five Great Lakes and many of the state's rivers are at higher water levels and three of them touch Michigan's shoreline, which is fast eroding.

EGLE oversees regulating the quality of the state's lakes and rivers, including overseeing 1,061 dams. (FERC remains in charge of 99 Michigan dams that generate hydropower.) While dams are typically designed for a 50-year life, within five years 80% of the Michigan dams will older than that. Two hundred and seventy-one were built before 1900!

Seventy percent of these dams are privately owned, some by a lake association created by the dam or a group of homeowners. The owners are responsible for inspecting and maintaining their property, but frequently have difficulty in doing so. Yet the budget for Michigan's dam safety unit is only \$400,000 a year; its staff consists of a supervisor and two inspectors. While state inspectors are largely dependent on reviewing the owner's reports, in 2018 they received only 83% of the reports scheduled for the high-hazard dams. They might

inspect a few high-hazard dams, as well as 40-80 sites owned by state or local governments. Generally state and federal agencies encourage compliance, and do not issue an emergency order or take legal action.

Why Are Dams Built?

The reasons for building dams vary, but generally are justified as bringing water to population areas that need it, providing electricity or bringing irrigation to industrial agriculture. In the case of Michigan, there is a fourth reason: recreation and tourism. The lakes created by the dams provide for fishing, boating, beaches, and parks along with enhanced residential developments.

According to the American Society of Civil Engineer's 2017 Infrastructure Report Card, the United States has 90,580 dams; their average age is 56 years. Of the total, 15,500 are classified as "high hazard," meaning that if breached, would result in loss of life. Another 11,882 have "significant hazard potential." While they may not result in loss of life, they would certainly involve economic loss.

When the report was updated in 2018, the report gave Michigan a C-. The average state spends \$695 per dam on yearly safety regulation, Michigan spends \$375.

More than half of the country's dams are privately owned! The federal government owns 3,381, the ones most likely to be inspected. However few states devote sufficient regulation and resources — nationally each state employee is responsible, on the average, for 205 dams! Some states such as "California, Colorado, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania have less than 135 dams per staff member (the California Division of Safety of Dams, a robust state dam safety program with regulatory oversight over many of the nation's most consequential dams, has only 20 dams per staff member)." Alabama is the only state without a dam safety regulatory program, yet it has 676 high-hazard and significant hazard dams. Only 50 even have an emergency action plan in place.

Yet even in California, where inspection is on the high end, in February 2017 rain caused the lake on the Oroville dam to overflow and release water to its spillways. This forced 180,000 people out of their homes. As the tallest U.S. dam it could have sent a 30-foot wall of water into the Feather River below, flooding communities downstream. The collapse of a concrete weir never occurred, but the main spillway suffered significant damage. Records revealed that the dam was not inspected on a yearly basis.

Currently 77% of the high-hazard dams have Emergency Action Programs in case of dam failure or the uncontrolled release of water. However the report does not examine how climate change has already impacted dams. In both Houston and New Orleans, homes were built in areas where it was clear that dams could breach. Yet developers made

money by building in watershed areas.

In 2017 Hurricane Harvey flooded Houston, a city with no zoning rules. In order to prevent two dams from collapsing, there was a "controlled release" into nearby communities built in the watershed areas. Every petrochemical plant in the area was breached, sending chemical seepage to join with raw sewerage. Hurricane Harvey will impact on the air, water, and land for years to come. [150].

On the first anniversary of Hurricane Harvey, the New York Times carried a featured story on how those living in the poorest neighborhoods were not living in safe conditions. [151] In fact, given that four out of five homeowners had no insurance, investors are able to sweep in and buy up the damaged homes for resale. [152]

While the ASCE recommendations about dams call for more money to be allotted to regulation and repair, there is little attention to a) examining dam infrastructure in an era of climate change, and making decisions about which are needed and which should be decommissioned; and b) ending the private ownership of dams. Dam projects are expensive even when the social and environmental costs are not considered. Instead we need water security through regulation and coordination of groundwater use and a policy of recharging depleted aquifers. In this process, it is necessary to get rid of "plantation: agriculture that sucks up so much water. Industrial agriculture, described by Carey McWilliams's 1939 *Factories in the Fields*, is profitable for the few while impoverishing and poisoning its workers.

Dams as a Development Strategy

Building dams was a strategy used by the World Bank to foster development in poor countries. As Patrick McCully, director of International Rivers Network in the United Kingdom, pointed out, the combination of corruption in such large-scale construction projects combined with the power of the big-dam lobby produces feasibility studies that underestimates costs and exaggerates benefits.

Currently 400 dams are planned or under construction in Bhutan, India, Nepal, and Pakistan with at least 100 more in Tibet. Yet dam building becomes a zero-sum game as one set of users who have water loses out to another set. This is an even larger problem across national borders, as one country captures water that was more equitably distributed along the river.

Second, the region transformed by the construction usually means displacement of indigenous and rural populations. In India alone, the displacement is estimated at somewhere between 16-40 million people. Biodiversity is also threatened with the submersion of forests and the animals that are displaced.

Third, dam projects have their own problems, whether from potential collapse from earthquakes or floods, significant leakages, and silting. Climate change will intensify these issues. [153]

Both nationally and internationally, building, maintaining, or replacing dams needs to be carefully considered. Structurally and politically they are not a wise investment but a source of corruption that reinforces inequality and even more dangerous given climate change.

June 26, 2020

Source [Solidarity](#).

Source: [Solidarity](#).

Undocumented Farmworkers Are Refusing COVID Tests for Fear of Losing Their Jobs

5 July 2020, by **Arun Gupta, Michelle Fawcett**

As states reopen for business, the coronavirus is exploding among America's 2.5 million farmworkers, imperiling efforts to contain the spread of the disease and keep food on the shelves just as peak harvest gets underway. [154]

The figures are stark. The number of COVID-19 cases tripled in Lanier County, Ga., after one day of testing farmworkers. All 200 workers on a single farm in Evensville, Tenn., tested positive. [155] Yakima County, Wash., the site of recent farmworker strikes at apple-packing facilities, now boasts the highest per capita infection rate on the West Coast. [156] Among migrant workers in Immokalee, Fla. — who just finished picking tomatoes and are on their way north to harvest other crops — 1,000 people are infected. [157]

The growing numbers reflect the lack of safety guidelines for workers who labor shoulder to shoulder in the fields, travel side by side in vans, and sleep by the dozens in bunks and barracks. On June 2, the CDC and OSHA announced recommendations to help protect agricultural workers, following in the footsteps of Washington, Oregon and California. [158] But there is still no nationally coordinated, mandatory response or tracking of the disease among farmworkers.

The spike in cases is, in part, a result of increased testing. But that points to a new danger emerging that could make outbreaks even harder to contain: Some farmworkers are refusing to be tested for COVID-19.

Eva Galvez is a physician at the Virginia Garcia Memorial Health Center, a clinic that serves 52,000 mostly Latino patients in the agricultural regions that cradle Portland, Ore. When the clinic

discovered in April that Latinos were testing positive for COVID-19 at twenty times the rate of other patients, Galvez pinpointed farmworker communities as one of the hotspots. So she worked with the Oregon Law Center to secure statewide hygiene and social distancing rules. (The rules are set to expire October 24.) Provisions include enhancing safety in employer-provided housing, which *In These Times* has found is fueling outbreaks among farmworkers nationwide. [159]

But Galvez has other worries now. "Although our clinic has plenty of capacity to test, many people won't want to be tested," she says. "Because if they're positive they can't go to work."

"The virus is a scarlet letter," says Reyna Lopez, executive director of Pineros y Campesinos Unidos de Noroeste (PCUN). The 7,000-member farmworker union is based in Marion County, Ore., which ranks third in the state for coronavirus cases per capita. [160]

"Not only is there no paid leave [if you can't work], but no job," Lopez says. "That tells farmworkers they don't have an incentive to tell people that they are feeling sick. The biggest fear is not necessarily the virus itself; it's [not] being able to provide for family."

It is an undeniable crisis. But America is reaping what it has sown. Decades of anti-immigrant policies will make the coronavirus extraordinarily difficult to contain for a vulnerable population which has been forced deep in the shadows.

As workers in an industry with few unions, a lack of basic worker protections, and a workforce that is estimated to be at least 48% undocumented immigrants,

farmworkers have many reasons to fear losing their jobs. [161] Most lack health insurance, sick leave, unemployment insurance, and legal status, and they support extended families here and abroad on poverty wages. Testing and social distancing guidelines may help prevent illness, but cannot prevent job loss. Personal protection is no substitute for social protections.

Trump administration policies have exacerbated the situation. Irene de Barraicua of *Li?deres Campesinas*, a California-based farmworker organization for women, says some farmworkers are not seeking health care because of the "public charge" rule that threatens to deny green cards to those who rely on public services. [162] H2A workers, who comprise over a quarter million workers whose temporary visas are tied to their employers, could be deported if they lose their jobs. Even the "essential worker" letters that some farmers provided to undocumented workers to show ICE in the hope of preventing arrests during the pandemic have backfired, Irene says. [163] Workers interpreted the letter as a sign that raids would increase.

Now the coronavirus has upended agricultural production in ways that further threaten jobs.

The Salinas Valley in California is nicknamed "America's Salad Bowl" for its 1.4 million acres of farmland that grow everything from artichokes to zucchini. [164] But this year lettuce, strawberries, cauliflower, and spinach are rotting in fields as agribusinesses unable to pivot from institutional to consumer sales cut their losses by cutting workers.

Sinthia, 40, whose last name is being withheld to protect herself, her family

and her job, is from Guanajuato, Mexico, and supports two children, her mother, a quadriplegic sister, and a brother who is deaf, mute and blind. Before COVID-19, Sinthia, who is a member of LÃderes Campesinas, packed boxes of broccoli for up to 62 hours a week in Monterey County. Now her hours have been sliced in half. The restaurants and schools that purchased produce from her employer, PGM Packing, are shuttered due to the coronavirus. [165] "There is no market, no place to sell, no orders," Sinthia says.

One hundred miles to the southeast, it is the workforce that has been halved at a vineyard in Kern County, where Paola, 30, works. Twenty of 40 workers were fired in order to meet social distancing guidelines. "There is more pressure to get the work done now," Paola says. A former teacher from Sinaloa, Mexico, Paola says her pay is the same but her expenses have increased. Her two school-aged children eat all their meals at home now and she has to support her recently unemployed parents. Out of fear of infecting them, Paola quit her second, night-shift job at a pistachio packing facility when a co-worker tested positive. "It was worrisome,

scary, stressful," Paola says.

"It's a very desperate situation. They don't have food. Many are being laid off," says de Barraicua. "Farmers are deciding to let their crops rot. They're also letting the workers rot."

Farmworkers also fear they could be stigmatized by co-workers and that bosses could fire their entire crew, which often includes family and friends from their hometown.

"We are hearing from advocates that workers would enter 'death pacts' where if they become sick they keep it to themselves because the entire camp will shut down," says Lori Johnson, managing attorney at the farmworker unit of Legal Aid of North Carolina.

Rebeca Velazquez is a former farmworker and an organizer with Mujeres Luchadores Progresistas, an organization for women farmworkers based in Woodburn, Ore. One member, she says, was having a coughing fit at work when the owner of the farm walked by and told her to leave. Her supervisor said she needed to get tested for COVID-19. Two days later he told her not to bother: the entire crew of 30 workers had been laid off because of her. Another

woman, Rebeca says, was shunned by co-workers upon returning to the workplace after being very ill with COVID-19. She left to work elsewhere and is keeping her illness a secret out of fear of discrimination.

Luis Jimenez, 38, a dairy worker in Avon, New York, says workers are in a bind. They have been told if they get sick and don't say anything they will get fired. But if they do say something they may still lose their job. "The [bosses] don't have a plan if workers get infected," says Luis. "No plan to quarantine, no plan to feed them, no plan to take them to the hospital."

An explosion in cases among vulnerable farmworkers could overwhelm rural healthcare facilities and threaten the national food supply. The thin plastic line now separating workers in the fields is not enough to halt a pandemic or cure a diseased system. Increased protections for workers — including paid sick leave, unemployment compensation, and affordable housing and healthcare — are essential if the spread of COVID-19 is to be curbed.

19 June 2020

Source [In These Times](#).

Class, Race, and Radicalism in the 20th Century US South

4 July 2020, by **Charlie Post**

Michael Goldfield is Professor Emeritus of Political Science and currently Research Fellow at the Fraser Center for Workplace Issues at Wayne State University. A former labor union and civil rights activist, Goldfield's books include *The Decline of Organized Labor in the United States* (1987), *The Color of Politics: Race and the Mainsprings of American Politics* (1997), and *The Southern Key* (2020).

Why did you decide to write yet

another book on labor organizing in the US South in the 1930s and 1940s—a field that has been researched by many other scholars?

Well, I originally planned to write a book on the failure of Operation Dixie, the Congress of Industrial Organization's (CIO) attempt after World War II to organize the South. I saw this failure as a major turning point in U.S. history. There was very little written on it at the time, much of it quite "lightweight." I was also

inspired by a thesis by William Regensburger that claimed that those who relied on oral history (especially interviewing so-called CIO liberals who held union positions in the South) had it all wrong. As I began doing archival work on Operation Dixie, I was struck by how racially obtuse and incompetent these so-called liberals were—that Operation Dixie itself, contrary to my initial assumption, was not a serious attempt to organize, thus not a major turning point. It was a coda to a series of deeper failures,

whose roots lay elsewhere.

In addition, there are thousands of in-depth, detailed, and often interesting studies of southern labor, mostly of union locals or towns, occasionally studies of whole unions. However, there were few studies that looked at the broader issues and terrain of southern labor organizing in the period, and none that looked at international comparisons, which I believed was a prerequisite for understanding the deeper issues at stake. A good example of this problem is the many hundreds of studies of the southern textile industry. The overwhelming majority of these studies attribute the difficulty of organizing textile workers to the alleged culture of paternalism, southern workers' lack of militancy, and the types of repression in the South.

I found these explanations unconvincing because textile workers were highly militant, and southern coal miners had a similar culture and faced much of the same sort of repression while successfully organizing. I spent a good bit of time studying textile workers in all the major textile-producing countries over the past few centuries (a book in itself), only a brief summary of which is in the book. I concluded that textile struggles everywhere (with highly varied cultures) had the same problems, with a few exceptions, based on the economics of the industry and the lack of structural power that textile workers had, especially compared to coal miners.

In The Southern Key, you focus on several key industries—coal mining, steel production, lumbering, and textiles. Why did you choose these industries and how did they pose different opportunities and challenges for industrial unionism in the 1930s and 1940s?

Well, first I studied and did research on union organizing in virtually every industry in the country, especially all those active in the South. To write about all of these would have led to a book of many thousands of pages, which as I suggest in my preface, would have been of no interest to any

publisher, and perhaps a few of my friends. So, I anguished about leaving out longshore, oil, and some of the left-wing unions like Mine Mill, which was so central to the story in Alabama. In the end, I decided to focus on the two largest industries in the South, textile and wood, both of which were mostly unorganized. I also decided to focus on two major unions that were successful in the South. Foremost were the coal miners, who were successful in the South, as well as the nation as a whole. Although not a left-wing union, they were progressive to an extent on racial issues, and were the vanguard (contrary to the claims often made that it was auto workers) of the whole upsurge and organizing during the 1930s and 1940s. I was interested in their trajectory as a whole; including how and why they eventually degenerated into such a backward union.

As with textile workers, economic factors were central. The steel workers were another important case, originally organized largely by members of the Communist Party (CP), who ceded control to Philip Murray and the CIO liberals. The Steelworkers' union, never very democratic, but initially ostensibly anti-racist, quickly degenerated into a racist, authoritarian, and brutal union—contrary to the claims of virtually all writers, who tended to whitewash Murray. It was also another union where, evidence to the contrary, most commentators denied the historic militancy of steelworkers.

Wood was also especially interesting for a number of reasons. First, it had several hundred thousand workers in the South, at least half of whom were African-American. They had considerable structural power and appeared even to the CIO liberals to be easily organizable. They were not organized, largely because of the right-wing leadership of the union, who even the CIO liberals saw as incompetent. Yet, the union originally had a popular left-wing CP leadership which was committed to organizing southern woodworkers. Yet, the CIO national office led an eventually successful campaign to oust the left-wingers and install the incompetents in 1939 and 1940. This story is important for several reasons. First, it

belies the generally accepted view that the anti-communist purges did not begin until after World War II. Second, it raises the question of why the CIO leaders, who were generally committed to organizing the South, would install a leadership group that did not share this commitment and who they knew to be incompetent.

What was the strategy of the “center” leadership of the Congress of Industrial Organization (CIO), in particular John L. Lewis, Sidney Hillman and Phillip Murray, for organizing two of the key southern industries, lumber and textiles, before World War II? How did their strategy shape the CIO’s attempt to organize the South after the war—“Operation Dixie”?

Let us step back a bit and explore one of the main theses of my book. That is, what gives various groups of workers power in society, power to organize, to better their conditions, to inspire other workers, and ultimately to lead in the taking of power in society? I argue, drawing on and modifying the seminal work of sociologists Beverly Silver and Erik Olin Wright, that there are two types of power that workers have. First, is their structural power, which has several components. Can they be easily replaced? Partly that depends on the state of the labor market. Coal miners, e.g., when they strike could not be easily replaced by anyone other than skilled coal miners.

No one in their right mind goes into a coal mine, often hundreds of feet below the surface, using dynamite to loosen coal, unless they know what they are doing. So, during large-scale coal union strikes, coal miners could not be replaced. As their picket signs proclaimed when troops came to take over the mines, “You can’t mine coal with bayonets.” During the 1970 postal workers’ strike, the Nixon administration found they could not move the mail (essential for Wall Street at the time) by calling in the National Guard, and had to capitulate. When workers don’t stick together (as in the 1981 air traffic controllers’ strike) and there are replacements available (military controllers), strikes can be broken.

Centrality to a business or the economy is also important for structural leverage. That is why college professors, who may have irreplaceable skills, have little leverage when they strike, since they do minimal harm to their universities or the economy. On the other hand, even workers who are replaceable, when the labor market is extremely tight, as during the world wars, have more leverage.

Now, all workers benefit from outside support, what I call associative power. This was especially evident during the 1930s, and was one of the reasons that the strike and organizing waves were distinctive from other periods. The massive movements of the unemployed, farmers, civil rights groups, students, and others, often provided important support to workers' struggles. As we know, this was critical to the struggles of 1934, the Toledo Auto-lite workers, the San Francisco longshore general strike, and the Trotskyist-led Teamster strikes in Minneapolis.

Yet, some groups of workers need this outside support, associative power, far more than other groups. So, textile workers, a low skill (easily replaceable) group in a moveable, low capital, cheap start-up industry (today we see textile mills moving from the US to China to even cheaper pastures), could not succeed without mobilizing powerful allies. Textile workers in Alabama, supported by a strong labor movement led by the coal miners, were more successful than in the rest of the South. Mainstream labor leaders did not understand this. They distanced themselves from potential allies. They thought they could convince textile company owners that they would benefit from "responsible" unions. This was especially true of Sidney Hillman, the leader of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, and the head of the 1937 drive to organize the textile industry. He downplayed organizing workers and gaining allies in support of organizing drives, at first appealing to the non-existent "cooperative mill owners" who would embrace unions as partners in promoting productivity. He then tried to rely on his friends in the Roosevelt administration help, all to no avail.

The CIO "center" refused to acknowledge how associative power was crucial to successful textile worker organizing the world over. In India, textile workers in Bombay, the early center of the industry, had success when they were allied with the Independence movement. When the Indian Congress Party, after independence, made its peace with Indian capitalists, and undermined radical textile unions, textile workers had little leverage. In South Korea, despite the heroic struggles in the 1970s of brave, militant, female textile workers, they were only successful in their organizing in the 1980s when they were allied with the emerging student movement and workers in heavy industry.

In the end, Operation Dixie was a primer on how not to organize. It was controlled by the most bureaucratic of the right-wingers (their own term) in the CIO national office. They chose textile as their focus, probably a mistake. They eschewed allies. They first tried the Gompersque approach of trying to sweet talk the employers. They groveled before the most racist of southern politicians, often alienating pro-union constituencies in the South, especially Black workers. Relying on "public relations" rather than substance, they chose inexperienced, southern-born, male veterans as organizers (thinking incorrectly that this would blunt anti-communist attacks), eliminated leftists (who had been the most successful southern organizers), and appointed virtually no women to organize an industry that had a high percentage of female workers.

The Communist Party (CP) was the most important socialist organization active in the CIO in this period. What was their strategy for organizing in the South? Why were they unable to pose an alternative to the "center" leadership of the CIO?

The CP especially in the 1930s played a heroic role in the South. First, they unequivocally championed the rights of Black workers, even when African-Americans were a small minority of the workforce. In Gastonia, North Carolina in 1929, they led a famous union drive, placing equality for

Blacks as a central demand, even though the main plant was virtually all white. In 1931, in Harlan County, Kentucky, under murderously repressive conditions, they refused to allow the struggle to proceed until white workers agreed to interracial dining in soup kitchens. In contrast to virtually all other left groups, they pushed demands for equality in every venue in which they were active—meat packing industry, farm equipment, auto, and many others.

They promoted Black leadership in numerous unions where they held leadership positions—longshore in San Francisco, farm equipment in Louisville, Mine Mill in Alabama, and nationally among seamen in the National Maritime Union—and elected a Black female executive board member in the Food and Tobacco Workers of America (FTA). They used broad associative power to gain support for union organizing drives in a variety of industries, including the oil industry, largely located in the South. In steel, they provided the crucial organizers throughout the industry, as I document in my book, including the majority of African-American organizers.

Yet, they lost significant influence, eventually capitulating to the racist, and class-collaborationist leaders of the CIO, which in the end did not protect them. In short, they were not very good in engaging in united front tactics. During the sectarian "third period" of 1928-1933, whose complexities I discuss in detail in the book, they often unnecessarily alienated potential allies and destroyed promising alliances. Even so, their radical dynamism enabled them to grow much more quickly than the Socialist Party and other left groups, suggesting their potential for even greater growth. After 1935, their politics began to shift, largely under directives from Moscow.

By 1937, with the turn to the Popular Front at least at the national level, they sycophantically bowed and scraped before liberals and reactionaries. They changed from being critics of the New Deal, to apologizing for Roosevelt's failure to oppose the fascists in the civil war in Spain and his unwillingness to support

anti-lynching legislation in the U.S. Within the labor movement, they gave up all semblance of independence, subordinating themselves to the bidding of mainstream CIO leaders. Contrary to the liberal myths that the CP often secretly attempted to take over unions where they had little support, the national leadership of the party undermined the support of popular left-wing cadre who enjoyed majority support.

This was most disastrous in the auto workers' union (UAW) where the CP leaders (at the bidding of Murray, Lewis, and other mainstream CIO leaders) prevented the popular Wyndham Mortimer-led faction from establishing their leadership of the union in both 1936 and 1939. This paved the way for the authoritarian, racially obtuse Reuther group, much lauded in liberal hagiography, to take over the UAW. There is much debate, of course, about the degree to which the Popular Front strategy was supported by rank and file CP members. Some argue that they were happy to be in the mainstream of a broader popular movement, which led to a flourishing of left-wing cultural activity. While there may be a grain of truth to these claims, I argue that the strategy ultimately led to disaster.

How did the failure to organize southern workers in the 1930s and 1940s shape US politics in the rest of the 20th and 21st centuries? What political and strategic lessons does this history provide socialists and radicals today?

The failure to organize the South during the 1930s and 1940s turned out to determine the fate of American politics and society from the post-World War II period, up to the

present. I argue that the possibilities for organizing were manifold and not at all predetermined, contrary to most scholarship. The strategies of both the mainstream CIO leaders and the CP ultimately contributed to this failure.

In places where interracial, especially left-led, unionism was strong, unions proceeded to engage in labor-based civil rights activities which were often successful, and not easily defeated by local reactionaries. This phenomenon existed in isolated venues around the country, suggesting the potential for labor-based civil rights activity on a wider scale.

Yet, the failures of interracial unionism, including the failure to organize the over 300,000 strong woodworkers, left a vacuum in the South. When the civil rights movement emerged in full force in the 1960s, there was little union support, especially for the most militant forms of activity. Individual anti-racist whites were easily isolated and repressed, both economically and by violence, which would have been less likely to be effective against organized workers. This situation fueled the so-called white backlash, leading to unchallenged white resistance.

I trace the attempts by the Republican Party to appeal to racism to win whites in the South to the GOP, beginning with Barry Goldwater in 1964. The Republican openly embraced the "Southern Strategy" (to which the Democrats were not immune) formulated by Nixon and his chief aide Kevin Phillips, after the strong performance of racist Alabama Governor, George Wallace, in the 1964 and 1968 Presidential elections. This strategy continues with the now-rehabilitated Ronald Reagan, who

campaigns against "crime in the street" and "welfare queens," and began his 1984 reelection campaign in Philadelphia, Mississippi, the site of the 1964 brutal murders of civil rights martyrs, James Cheney, Michael Schwerner, and Andrew Goodman. It continued with the (also rehabilitated) Bush I's racist 1988 Willie Horton ads. Put simply there is a straight line from earlier Republican attempts to appeal to white racism, to the open racist, misogynist, anti-immigrant, egocentric Donald Trump—he is no anomaly in the post-war period.

The lessons for socialists and radicals today are manifold. First, we must build mass movements independently of capitalist parties and politicians, including even those connected to the so-called left-wing of the Democratic Party. At the same time, we must have an understanding of how to engage in united front activity with various groups with which we share limited goals. Second, the issues of confronting white supremacy in all its various forms, and the subordination of women, and other excluded groups, both domestically and internationally, are a prerequisite for solidaristic struggle, and for the labor movement to become a "tribune of the people." Third, there are many issues of how to organize effectively, including understanding the structural power that various groups of workers may have, and how to mobilize effective supportive and associative power. This list is not exhaustive and can be amplified in further discussion. We need to learn from our defeats and failures. As Che Guevara used to say, *Hasta la victoria siempre!*

May 10, 2020

Source [Spectre](#).

After the epidemic in China: crises and changes?

3 July 2020, by [Myriam Rana](#)

In China, the confinement coincided with the New Year period, during which hundreds of millions of Chinese men and women returned to their provinces of origin. Among them were a good part of the 290 million "Mingong" or migrant workers. Two-thirds of them come from the countryside to coastal cities to work in textile, logistics, construction or electronics companies. These workers rarely benefit from an employment contract and do not have a "Hukou" residence permit, which prevents them from accessing social benefits, including health and education. With the gradual lifting of containment, crowded trains and specially chartered buses repatriated the Mingong to coastal factories.

Millions witnessed the catastrophic management of the health crisis by the authorities: an unbearable reality despite the cosmetic efforts of state propaganda. The anger triggered by the death of Doctor Li Wenliang, who had raised the alarm about a probable epidemic and the high popularity of the daily blog of the journalist Fang Fang, who criticized the health situation in Wuhan, are significant.

Diplomacy and exports

Beijing is, however, carrying out a vast campaign on its "impeccable"

management of the health crisis. This is accompanied by the sending of medical equipment or health delegations to African countries (and to Italy). For their part, the leaders of the Western countries have not ceased to deplore the centrality of China in the world production chain, regretting, in words at least, their dependence on basic Chinese products. Trump, for his part, has been more offensive by talking about "Kung-Flu" and increasing the fake news on the dubious origin of the virus, which he attributes to a Chinese laboratory in Wuhan.

All this is taking place against the backdrop of the trade war with the United States, unleashed in 2018, which led to a first agreement in January 2020. The deal on the Chinese side being to increase its imports of American products by \$200 billion from now to 2022. On the French side, the Ministry of Health and the Economy announced on June 18 the first measures for the relocation in France of health production chains, such as paracetamol, of which 50 per cent is produced in China (and 30 per cent in India).

Economic and social crisis

Over the past few weeks, Xi Jinping has announced that the priority is to

turn production towards the domestic market. His Prime Minister Li Keqiang had only one expression in his mouth during the annual National People's Assembly, which was held for ten days at the end of May: priority to employment. He subsequently specified that what he meant by that was: "new forms of 'jobs and activity [through] the odd-job economy", in other words developing the informal economy of street sellers

. The Chinese investment bank Zhongtai Securities estimates the unemployment rate at 20 per cent (nearly 70 million workers) while the declared rate is 5-6 per cent. According to official statements in April 2020, the government has only granted unemployment insurance to 2.3 million people, including only 67,000 migrant workers. For many, overtime (widely used to supplement poverty wages) is no longer enough to earn a living wage. Wage cuts are becoming commonplace. Not to mention those who are not paid at all.

According to the *China Labour Bulletin*, protest movements over wage arrears affect the service and transportation sectors. This was the case in a Beijing fast-food chain, in a private hospital in Zibo (Shandong), in a mask factory in Kunshan (Jiangsu) and at the delivery giant Meituan in Tonghua (Jilin), whose employees demanded payment of several months' wages.

Statement on upcoming elections in Sri Lanka

2 July 2020, by **Fourth International Bureau**

In the upcoming Sri Lankan elections of August 5, Vikramabahu "Bahu" Karunaratne, chairperson of the NSSP, will be a candidate in the Kalutara district for the United National Party (UNP), in support of former prime-minister and UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe. It is clear that the UNP is a bourgeois party, a right-

wing party and traditionally one of the ruling parties of Sri Lanka.

The NSSP is one of two organizations in Sri Lanka associated with the Fourth International but electoral candidacy on the list of a party like the UNP is in clear contradiction with the principles of the Fourth International.

We cannot agree with the NSSP's explanation that Bahu's candidacy is an example of an "united front" with social-democrats as the UNP is not a social-democratic party. Rather, it is a bourgeois party of the capitalist class, a full member of the International Democrat Union, sitting alongside the US Republicans, the British

Conservatives and Narendra Modi's BJP.

We call on progressive forces in Sri

Lanka not to support the UNP, nor the SLPP or any other bourgeois party but instead strengthen the social and

political organizations of the working class and of socialism.

30 June 2020

Reactionary school law passed in Greece, but the fight continues

2 July 2020, by **Andreas Sartzekis**

We discuss here the two axes of the right's offensive against state schooling and its staff. First the terrifying imposition of a device introducing cameras in classrooms, to continue to offer lessons to absent students, and this in the name of equal opportunities obviously. Without falling into the trap, despite illusions on the left about the alleged benefits of distance education, teachers and many students demanded the withdrawal of this device, and the ultra-conservative Minister of Education, Niki Kerameos, was thus nicknamed Cameraos in the demonstrations. The anger was so strong that there was a U-turn, in words at least: this device would be offered only under certain specific conditions, there would be no camera but lightweight devices. These reversals were obtained by the movement: 91% of teachers say they are against recording and broadcasting courses, for 81% the objective is the control of teachers, and 62% believe that this measure is in the service of private interests! Nevertheless, the device, adopted as an amendment in the context of an unrelated law, now exists, and given the "Orbanesque" style of the right in power, it poses a threat to educational freedom but also to democratic rights in the face of the use of data: during "distance courses", teachers' data were communicated to a private company by a department of the ministry.

Social selection and permanent control

Pedagogical freedoms are more generally attacked in the second axis of the offensive, a law concocted during lockdown but coming as no surprise to teachers in view of what Kerameos had announced last summer. Let us recall its very violent characteristics: very strong deepening of social selection, with the aim of limiting access to university, pushing technical students towards short term private training, establishment of competition between institutions, with the ultimate goal being to close a number of the latter (hence the interest in "distance learning"), with the threat, for tens of thousands of substitute teachers, of no longer being able to find posts in the near future.

A key device is the evaluation of teachers and institutions, a measure that the Greek bourgeoisie has been trying to impose for years, each time coming up against the resistance of staff. And, as a symbol of the perfectly reactionary reality of capitalism under Koulis (the nickname of the Prime Minister, a member of a family of very right wing politicians which operates in the manner of a clan), control is exerted not only over teachers but also students, by establishing permanent cramming (exams for all classes) but also by a noting of behaviour which will appear on the Apolytirion leaving certificate: a beautiful illustration of the famous

"skills" demanded by employers' organisation, the SEV.

Employers in heaven

The employers thus obtained what they have wanted for a long time: a school under orders (and without critical spirit, with for example the disappearance of sociology, replaced by Latin for the university entrance examination), but also granting favours to private institutions - the association of private school owners is the only structure to have approved the bill, with the private teachers' union fully participating in the mobilizations against Kerameos. But other private sectors are rubbing their hands, such as the vampire-like "frontistiria" crammer evening classes that have existed for a very long time. And the law also opens the door to questioning article 16 of the Constitution, which guarantees free education: lessons in foreign languages will now be allowed for the first years of university, with paid registration.

Failure of the mobilization?

When we see everything that the law entails, we are tempted to speak of a great victory for the right, and therefore of the failure of the mobilization. Fortunately, however, things are more complex. Kerameos took advantage of the lockdown to

table her law, concocted without any negotiation but presented as the fruit of broad consultation. The goal was, we suspect, to avoid any mobilization, especially as the tendency currently governing the (only) secondary school union, OLME, is linked to the government right. However, even in full lockdown, mobilization has greatly developed, with demonstrations called by OLME, DOE (a primary school union), OIELE (private teachers), parents of students, and also high school students. Following the big demonstrations of 13 May, other demonstrations have taken place, called by the same organizations and each time attracting between 6,000 and 8,000 demonstrators in Athens, with also on 9 May a 24-hour strike in secondary education. Given the circumstances, we can only speak of successful mobilizations, especially since they were generally quite combative! The few concession from Kerameos (on cameras and on an age limit for entering technical college, for example) were obtained by the force of the movement, which the government did not seem to expect.

Union strategies

The problem is therefore elsewhere, and it is twofold: first, given the period, the movement did not succeed in broadening, a prolonged strike did not seem very credible in this difficult phase and, suddenly, we had instead a repetition of demonstrations which were certainly broad, but not of a magnitude to make the right yield. And what was also visibly lacking was overall cohesion which could advance

the conviction that it was possible to prevent the law from being passed. The reformist union leaderships (or even those linked to the right) did nothing more or less than pursue other mobilizations, calling for protests to the end: the minimum expected from a national trade union leadership, without having to openly betray the movement as all currents of OLME had done in 2013, from the right to Syriza, except the radical left. The trade union current of the KKE (Communist Party), PAME, seems to have had the objective of appearing with many flags, like a force which counts, but without the will to push beyond. Ditto for the Communist Youth, combative, but without perspective.

As far as the currents of the radical and revolutionary left are concerned, apart from the “classic” fragmentation, we could see as a strong tendency to the denunciation of the union leaderships, those of the “government-employer union majorities of DOE and OLME”. [166] The objective being, for some, autonomous initiatives from the rank and file unions: “It is necessary to build a new combative trade union force which puts forward the immediate problems of the workers and their demands and which links them solidly to another path on which the country must engage in the interests of workers”. [167] This closely resembles the approach of PAME, promoted by the very sectarian KKE, rather than that, shared and practiced by many during the movement, of activating the rank and

file structures of the DOE and OLME unions, knowing that it was their strength that led the national leaderships to call for demonstrations.

The challenge of youth mobilization

This is a very important debate in the near future for struggles in Greece! But already, we can only agree with Argyris Papathanasiou, a member of the radical tendency (Paremvasis, Kinisis, Syspirosis) in DOE, interviewed in *Prin* on 14 June: “From today, the Education movement fights for the repeal of this law, as on numerous occasions in the past it succeeded in cancelling in practice laws which had been voted through”. And among the priorities: blocking the transfer of students to prevent the increase in the number of students per class and ensure the maintenance of the number of positions; cancelling the self-evaluation of institutions; and an increase in salaries and the number of permanent positions.

But what will be decisive for the coming months will be a massive participation of young people in schools, the main victim of the Kerameos law which offers them only submission and unemployment. Present on the demonstrations, although limited in numbers, and also present in the recent anti-racist demonstrations, their mobilization to reject an ever darker future and to link up with the teaching mobilizations is determinant in defeating Ms. Caméraos and the government.

Defend the Hong Kong Democracy Movement!

1 July 2020, by **Solidarity National Committee**

These laws severely circumvent the city’s existing autonomy, mandating the establishment of Beijing-appointed security bureaus and more police to

clamp down on individuals suspected of breaching ‘national security’ — defined very broadly and up to Beijing’s authority. [168] The laws

even threaten to target Hong Kong permanent residents living outside of Hong Kong.

The details of these laws were scant to Hongkongers until after the bill was officially passed on Tuesday, including to Hong Kong's highest officials: even the Chief Executive and Secretary of Justice have no say in the process to shape the bill.

Many legal experts and activists have noted that these laws effectively spell the end of the "One Country, Two Systems" as the city knows it. These laws reflect Beijing's eagerness to prioritize authoritarian state control at the expense of its constituencies' right to determine their own political future. It is no coincidence that devotees of Nazi statecraft, like Jiang Shigong, have been increasingly appointed to influential positions in Beijing's policymaking structures for Hong Kong. [169]

International socialists must stand with the people of Hong Kong's struggle against Beijing's state repression. The movement is extremely diverse, containing a number of different ideological elements, including pro-U.S. and left-wing factions. [170] We condemn the Chinese government's efforts to stoke up nationalist divisions to neutralize Hong Kong's attempts at building links of solidarity with people in the Mainland and beyond. We also strongly oppose the xenophobia some in the movement exhibit toward Mainland Chinese people.

Hong Kong's movement is not one of national independence — a position that remains a minority in the movement — though undoubtedly one for self-determination, trying to stake its own voice in the inter-imperial rivalry between the U.S. and China.

This new Cold War dynamic between Washington and Beijing covers up the real division of power in today's world: between the capitalist state elites and the international working-class. China's miraculous economic growth in the past decades has depended on super-exploiting its own working-class, and perpetuating the extraction of resources from the global South to provide low-cost commodities to the global North. [171]

Beijing's accusation of Hong Kong protestors being backed by "foreign interference" is also hypocritical. It falsely generalizes the movement's association with U.S. regime-change outfits like the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), while pro-Beijing groups have long had their own NED connections. [172] The regime is more than happy to court U.S. surveillance and riot control technology firms — many of the same ones used to assist the murder of Black people and protestors against police brutality in the United States today — to assist its repressive campaigns in Hong Kong and Xinjiang. [173]

U.S. political elites' response has been ineffectual and self-serving: the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act offered no substantial support for the movement, while insidiously implicating the movement in support of the U.S.'s inhuman sanctions on Iran and North Korea. [174] On the other hand, the "Protect Hong Kong Act," which would have prevented some U.S. firms from supplying teargas and other weaponry to the Hong Kong Police Force, has been stalled in the Senate.

In addition, the Trump administration has shown that even the smallest gestural support for dissidents in Hong Kong, the Mainland, and Xinjiang takes a backseat to the interests of economic elites in the volatile U.S.-China trade relationship. [175] With the interdependence of the U.S. and Chinese markets, Hong Kong would only be trapped in a vicious geopolitical bond; finding a third way is the city's own chance of liberation.

We condemn the U.S. political establishment from intervening in Hong Kong's affairs for its own imperial designs. But we also recognize that links between the United States and a small minority of protestors do not delegitimize an entire mass movement's fight against one of the most exploitative governments today. As Lenin writes [176]:

the fact that the struggle for national liberation against one imperialist power may, under certain circumstances, be utilized by another 'Great' Power in its equally imperialist interests should have no more weight in inducing Social Democracy to renounce its recognition of the right of nations to self-determination than the numerous case of the bourgeoisie utilizing republican slogans for the purpose of political deception and financial robbery.

As the Hong Kong people enter an even darker phase of the struggle with these security laws, we call for other socialists to continue forging lines of support from below to support and empower the progressive elements of the movement.

One immediate obstacle for solidarity comes directly from elements from the Western left, those who have spread disinformation to whitewash the Chinese government's crimes in the name of "anti-imperialism." These efforts are especially shocking in the midst of a global movement against policing, just as China continues to quietly learn from and adopt U.S. counter-insurgency and policing methods. [177] The left must vigilantly combat these narratives to truly build an effective mass movement against all imperialisms.

Lastly, we invite unions, community organizations, and other mass movement organizations to show Hongkongers that there are practical alternatives to lobbying the U.S. government for support. Just as anti-democratic governments from the U.S. to China continue to work in tandem to suppress people's voices and rights for capitalist profit, mass movements must reach beyond national borders toward building a democratic, revolutionary and socialist future.

June 30, 2020

Source [Solidarity](#).