



## IV547 - August 2020

# After the Beirut Explosion, Disaster Capitalism Has Lebanon in Its Sights

31 August 2020, by **Joseph Daher**

On August 4, 2020, an explosion of unprecedented magnitude in Lebanon's history occurred in the port of Beirut. It left more than 180 people dead, including Lebanese, Syrians, and other nationalities; more than 6,500 injured and 300,000 homeless. Dozens of people also remain missing, and entire districts of the Lebanese capital have been devastated.

The explosion devastated large parts of the port of Beirut, which received more than 70 percent of the value of the country's imported goods in 2019. It also destroyed Lebanon's strategic grain reserve. The material damage amounts to billions of dollars: the Lebanese authorities have put forward an estimate of \$15 billion.

## A Deepening Crisis

The explosion has made an already dire socio-economic situation unimaginably worse, after the economic crisis which developed in October 2019 and the effects of the pandemic. The pandemic drove the poverty rate to around 55 percent and increased unemployment to over 35 percent.

At the same time, the value of the Lebanese currency has been in free fall for several months, leading to inflation of over 400 percent. The

purchasing power of the popular working classes has diminished massively.

The depreciation of the currency hit especially hard in a country that imports much of what it consumes from abroad: in 2019, Lebanon's trade deficit was in excess of \$16 billion, with imports more than five times greater than exports. Prices have been soaring and goods disappearing.

Many international and regional heads of state announced their support for the Lebanese people following the August 4 criminal accident. However, as we know from previous crises, states and international financial institutions (IFIs) see these moments as an opportunity to promote and deepen neoliberalism, including the extension of the market economy to various economic sectors hitherto dominated by the state.

## Macron's Shock Doctrine

A videoconference on Lebanon was held a few days after the explosion at the initiative of French president Emmanuel Macron. It brought together representatives of around thirty countries, Western and Arab, and officials of the International

Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the European Investment Bank.

They agreed to provide emergency assistance to Lebanon for a total of €252.7 million. The same actors also promised billions of dollars of financial support, but on the condition that Lebanon implement "institutional reforms."

Macron, who made a high-profile visit to Lebanon a few hours after the tragedy, has insisted on the formation of a government capable of carrying out "reforms." The managing director of the IMF, Kristalina Georgieva, declared that it was "essential" to "break the deadlock" over discussions between Lebanon and the IMF, which began several months ago, through the implementation of "reforms."

The IMF made implementation of these "reforms" a prerequisite for any release of financial aid. So did the participants in the Paris conference held in April 2018 — "Conférence économique pour le développement, par les réformes et avec les entreprises," known as the CEDRE — which pledged more than \$11 billion in loans and grants for Lebanon. In return for these funds, the Lebanese government must commit to developing public-private

partnerships, reducing debt levels, and imposing austerity measures.

The dominant sectarian and bourgeois political parties agree with these measures, despite their rivalries. The Lebanese national unity government was composed of all these parties and led by former prime minister Saad Hariri, before his resignation following the outbreak of the protest movement in October 2019.

Its 2020 budget plan included the merging or abolition of several public institutions and the privatization of the state-run power sector, all of which met the requirements of the World Bank, the IMF, and the CEDRE agreement. Such policies will merely exacerbate the neoliberal disaster into which Lebanon has been plunged since the 1990s and the end of the country's civil war.

## Neoliberalism and the Middle East

After the Lebanese civil war, the country embarked on the path of economic liberalization that had been pursued elsewhere in the Middle East since the 1980s, with an emphasis on deeper integration into the global economy and private-sector growth. These neoliberal policies strengthened the long-established characteristics of the Lebanese economy: a development model oriented to finance and services, in which social inequalities and regional disparities were very pronounced.

Lebanon has one of the most unequal wealth distributions in the region and the world, and one of the highest concentrations of billionaires per capita. In 2019, the top 10 percent of adults owned 70.6 percent of the country's wealth.

In the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region, the privatization of public goods began with the neoliberal policies of the early 1990s — mainly in the industrial, real estate and financial sectors. In recent years, the IFIs have promoted public-private partnerships (PPPs) around the world as a new tool for privatization and the management of public goods by private entities. The

MENA region is no exception.

A clear example is the activity of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) after the beginning of the Arab popular uprisings in 2011. One of the EBRD's main objectives has been the promotion of infrastructure PPPs. PPP models aim in particular to foster private management of public infrastructure (especially in the fields of telecommunications, electricity, and health). IFIs such as the EBRD have very often insisted on the necessity of privatizing such infrastructure as a condition for the provision of loans.

## “Saudi Thatcherism”

At the same time, several Middle Eastern countries have adopted PPP legislation in order to double down on privatizations of public services and state infrastructure. In Saudi Arabia, PPPs have become a fundamental element in the economic and political strategy of Vision 2030 promoted by Prince Mohammad Bin Salman. The 2020 National Transformation Program, presented after the 2030 Vision, details the economic policies of the new Saudi leadership team and places private capital at the center of the future Saudi economy.

The Saudi government has stated its plans to organize PPPs for many government services, including sectors such as education, housing, and health. The Financial Times described the plans as “Saudi Thatcherism.”

The Saudi kingdom has also used the COVID-19 crisis to impose cuts in subsidies, with the elimination of the cost-of-living allowance, and a sharp increase in VAT from 5 to 15 percent. Meanwhile, the kingdom's sovereign wealth fund has invested more than \$8 billion since the start of the pandemic in behemoths of the global economy such as Boeing and Facebook.

In similar fashion, the Syrian regime accelerated its neoliberal policies following the 2011 uprising and the increasing militarization of the conflict from 2012 onwards. It passed a PPP

law in January 2016, six years after the law had first been drafted. The legislation authorizes the private sector to manage and develop state assets in all sectors of the economy, with the exception of oil. The “new economic strategy” known as the National Partnership, launched a month later in February 2016, cited the PPP law as a reference point.

These regional dynamics have unfolded in times of economic crisis, war, and now during the current pandemic. They are not pragmatic or “technocratic” measures, as the regimes enacting them have often claimed. Rather, they should be seen as a way to transform the general conditions for capital accumulation and empower economic networks linked to these regimes.

## The Cost of the Crisis

The main Lebanese parties and different fractions of the bourgeoisie have exploited privatization schemes and their domination of ministries to strengthen networks of patronage, nepotism, and corruption, while the majority of Lebanon's population, both foreign and native-born, has suffered poverty and indignity. Although the parties all agree on the IMF and CEDRE conference measures discussed above, there is a dispute between them arising from the economic crisis of October 2019.

That dispute concerns the scale of the losses that should be taken into account as a basis for restructuring the public debt, which amounted to \$93.1 billion at the end of May 2020 (more than 180 percent of Lebanese GDP). The Lebanese banks have been running a kind of Ponzi scheme since the early 1990s, offering high interest rates to attract US dollar deposits and then lending the money to the government — until the deposits ran out. However, the banks and the Central Bank of Lebanon (CBL) now do not want to take any responsibility for the losses assigned to them by the economic recovery plan of Hassan Diab's government.

They are supported in this position by

parties like the Future Movement of Saad Hariri (who is also the owner of a bank), and Nabih Berri's Amal party. Under the government plan, the capital of Lebanon's banking sector would be written off, with a full bail in of shareholders. The plan calls for bank recapitalization; institutions that are unable to raise fresh capital could be forced out of business.

The banks also reject the proposal for a forensic audit of the CBL's accounts, which would trace the source of transactions recorded on its balance sheets, or the adoption of a law formalizing the de facto capital controls that have been imposed by banks on account holders for almost a year.

With support from some politicians, Lebanon's banking elite is resisting any such law. Wealthy Lebanese citizens have continued to shift their assets offshore, while the majority of the country's people face restrictions on how much they can withdraw from their bank accounts.

The banks and their political allies also refused to allow the previous government to default on its debt in Lebanese pounds, as recommended by the IMF. Lebanese banks hold 28.8 percent of total public debt, which is equivalent to \$16.3 billion in US treasury bills and \$10.5 billion in

Eurobonds (debt securities denominated in foreign currencies).

Lebanon's bankers have rejected any responsibility for their major role in the country's economic crisis. In response, protesters have targeted financial institutions over the past few months, ransacking head offices and bank branches in different regions of the country. But the appointment of a new government of national unity in the near future, especially one which might be headed by Saad Hariri, would strengthen the position of the banks.

## **"All Means All!"**

In this framework, Emmanuel Macron's call for a united national government bringing together all the dominant political forces can only help preserve the existing sectarian and neoliberal political system, and the social status of its elites. This solution has the support of many countries in the region and the wider world, and would allow for the deepening of neoliberal "reforms."

This political formula is also the option of choice for the sectarian, bourgeois parties after the resignation of Hassan Diab's government on August 10 in response to massive popular protests. Some of these parties are also calling

for legislative elections within the established sectarian political system.

In this context, the call for early elections within that framework is a trap for popular forces demanding radical change and for the protest movement more generally. The parties of the sectarian old guard are the best organized forces, and the ones most deeply entrenched within state institutions and Lebanese society.

Some of these parties have also received massive support from foreign powers: Hezbollah from Iran, the Future Movement and (to a lesser extent) the Lebanese Forces from the Saudis. They are clearly in the best position to win new legislative elections if the protest movement does not become more structured, and if a left-wing, progressive force is not able to offer an alternative to the popular classes in Lebanon.

Along with these sectarian parties in Lebanon itself, the imperialist powers, regional states, and international financial institutions pose a major threat to the Lebanese people through their efforts to take advantage of the latest crisis. They are all enemies of the Lebanese protest movement: as the uprising's main slogan puts it, "all means all!"

Source [\*Jacobin\*](#).

# **Why Salvini could become Prime Minister of Italy**

**30 August 2020, by Dave Kellaway**

"There's no left anymore" - Nicola, retired lorry driver; "there is just a deep sorrow and hurt among many, many people who see themselves as left" - Franca, teacher; "they are all the same the only one who can sort it out is Salvini"- Giuseppe, driver who worked in Germany for several years."; "The Democratic Party (PD) is actually the preferred party of the rational sectors of the bourgeoisie" -

Antonello, comrade from Naples.

These are all comments I have heard in the last month or so in Italy. David Broder's book helps us understand why such statements are made in a country where the working class movement won a tremendous number of material reforms following the mass actions of the Italian Hot Autumn in 69, where a reformist communist

party several million strong dominated culture and civil society for decades.

Even the hopes of Rifondazione, the party formed by dissident communist party members and the radical left when the PCI formally renounced anti-capitalism in 1991, came to nothing in less than ten years - despite winning over 8% of the votes in elections and having 100,000 plus members.

# Salvini's successful reorientation of the Lega

Today Salvini's Lega is the biggest party at around 30% in the polls and with the current unity of the right wing coalition has an evens chance of winning the next general election. [1] Yet in 2013 the Lega Nord as it was then called at the time only got 4.3%, with its historic leader Bossi mired in corruption while the new centrist populists on the block, the Five Star Movement (M5S), were beginning to make serious headway. [2]

Under Salvini's leadership, the Lega Nord has been transformed from a party wanting independence for a region into one aspiring to national government. He has achieved this without splits and has even rebranded the party as the **Lega for Salvini Premier**. Despite some rumblings, he has total control and has largely eaten up the right wing base of Berlusconi's Forza Italia party and even won some former M5S MPs and supporters.

There are numerous quotes of Salvini abusing people living in the South; e.g. saying even the dogs run away because they smell, using the abusive term, *terroni* (of the earth, often used to mean of darker complexion in a racist manner), and wishing that Vesuvius or Etna would explode and sweep them all away. But today he is campaigning throughout the south, essentially taking over Berlusconi's base replete with mafia complicit cadre.

At a campaign rally just the other day in the town I am staying in his campaign posters stated: "Campanian people first" (*Primi i campani*). Obviously a key reason for being able to manage such a 360 degree turn is his use of continual dog whistle racism against migrants. He links their presence to increased crime and these days to Covid infections too.

While Salvini has undoubtedly managed his party well and fed astutely off the confusion and disarray of Italian politics there are a number

of contingent and objective factors that explains his rise, as Broder explains coherently in his book.

## Six factors that made it all possible

- Much British commentary on Italy revels in its supposed volatility looking at the number of governments it has had since 1945 but this fails to see that up to the 1980s:

there was a bipolar stability of a broad tent Christian Democracy and a moderate left PCI and the economy and living standards had developed... to the extent that Italy overtook the UK on certain economic indicators.

(chap.1)

It was becoming increasingly difficult for the centre right parties to use the bogeyman of the communist threat and this made it easier for the corrupt running of the political parties to be exposed - leading to Tangentopoli (Bribesville) where state prosecutors played a big role. Christian Democracy and the Socialist Party collapsed and this led the way to first of a new breed of populist political leaders, with Berlusconi. Broder shows how Salvini fits into this new form of politics. After Berlusconi we had the technocrat Monti and then the PD leader Renzi who all claimed to be national leaders saving Italy from economic chaos.

- Broder situates the rise of Lega into this new political set up:

it corresponded to a changing approach to public life, less defined by unifying cultural visions or even collective material demands as by a **transactional relationship between the atomized citizen and the state**. This shift has a particular class basis - enabled the Lega to broaden support from small

businessmen and their employees to wider demographics in those areas where it is strong.

- All this is connected to the **defeats of the workers movement**, particularly its bastions in the car industry like Fiat or Pirelli. The shop floor delegate structures melted away, the union bureaucracy took back control and worked closely with the rightward moving PD. Living standards consequently fell and those who have lost out turn their anger onto migrants.

The so-called centre left has not been able to defend migrants consistently or counter the racism of the Lega. It voices some moral condemnation but essentially accepts the notion of too many migrants. It was a PD minister, Minniti that passed a law leading to the notorious detention camps in Libya. The Catholic Church has mobilised more support than the official left.

A bit like Miliband's migrant mugs, the PD line has not even worked electorally. [3] At the well-attended militant protest in my town the PD mayor had called on us to be civic and polite to Salvini when he came. Their campaign offices were high on the square where he spoke - they could not even put out an anti-racist banner but some stood and watched the vigorous protest.

- A big factor in the Lega's resilience is the way it was **always organised as a serious political party with local structures and cadres** (even if this has weakened somewhat). A rather artificial development of a 'Padanian' cultural identity was also cultivated. (3) Forza Italia was organised as a Berlusconi topdown enterprise and the M5S movement also eschews local or party structures for online organisation. Salvini's turn to a national Lega means it has developed more robust structures than its rivals through recruiting local Forza Italia cadres and taking over the mafia links.

- There are some **contingent reasons for Salvini's rise. He was in the right place at the right time when**

**Berlusconi was finally** charged with fraud and when Bossi, the historic founder, was found with his hand in the till.

- I would add another factor. The fact that Salvini is not a lawyer, teacher or academic. Even though he is far from being a salt of the earth proletarian **he consciously does not use the historical language of the Italian politician.** Just as with the British Labour Party most of the centre left politicians are professionals, lawyers or academics or at least speak like them. In my opinion a big error of people opposing Salvini is to focus on his lack of education or the fact that he does not respect the dignity of Italian politics. In British terms it is a bit like middle class sneering at Nigel Farage's lack of culture.

## **“Captain Salvini” as interior minister**

The 2018 general elections saw the Lega and M5S as the two biggest parties. The latter had won a large number of PD voters disillusioned with the Renzi government, particularly in the South. Although there were clear political differences, their common euroscepticism and populist rhetoric about the political caste/corrupt Rome swamp meant there was a basis for a government contract. Salvini made sure he became Interior minister which allowed him to be on the media all the time, ‘defending Italians from the threat of the migrant invasion’. He would dress up in a different police uniform every day and eagerly took on the ‘capitano’ (captain) nickname.

Nevertheless the limits of Salvini's political nous was shown by his grandstanding play in August 2019 of resigning to force a new general election which polls suggested he might win. Both Conte, the ‘independent’ prime minister imposed by the M5S and Matteralla, the PD President, manoeuvred adroitly to set up a new PD/M5S coalition.

## **M5S in crisis**

The M5S is in total crisis as the leadership and MPs split between those who want to retain their original anti-institutional/movementist ideology and the majority who prefer to become a party like the others. According to reports in *Corriere della Sera* (26 August 2020) Di Battista and Casaleggio who lead the fundamentalist wing, think they can take 30 - 50 MPs and senators. Broder captures well the intrinsic contradiction of the M5S:

M5S is anti-establishment but not anti-systemic. Its opposition to the establishment is limited to the terrain of representation, forms of politics rather than the wider organisation of society.

(Chapter 4)

The PD is hopeful of absorbing a big part of the M5S into a new organic coalition even leading to some sort of new movement or party. Given the vacuity of PD politics that is not so far-fetched.

## **Since the book was published....**

In the big vote for 7 regional governments and over a 1000 local councils on September 20/21 the government parties are disunited with a joint slate only in one region. At the same time the right are pretty solid with the post-fascist Fratelli di Italia (Brothers of Italy), led by Meloni, and Berlusconi's Forza Italia in a common slate along with a number of smaller right of centre groups. Salvini is hoping a big vote for the right might spark a political crisis leading to a general election.

However the government parties and Conte are determined to serve out the legislature. This position is bolstered by the fact that if the referendum at the same time as the local elections agrees to a reduction of about a third of the MPs and senators many of them

will lose their posts, an early election reduces their pension rights!

There are other worries for Salvini. Conte has seen his approval ratings soar during the Covid crisis. Despite a catastrophic start a strict lockdown, much harder than in Britain, meant the pandemic was restricted mostly to the north - indeed in places mainly governed by the Lega. His demolition of Salvini when he attempted to force an early election last year was widely applauded.

Conte might weigh up the possibilities of setting up his own electoral front, which may also not be welcomed by the PD. Meloni, whose political career has crossed all the neo-fascist organisations, sees her party is on 18% in the polls and her personal ratings are close to those of Salvini. The latter's cavalier attitude to the Covid pandemic may cost him some support and he is certainly looking over his shoulder at Meloni. The rise of the neo-fascists reflects a radicalisation to the right in Italian politics. It was noticeable at a recent anti-Salvini protest I attended that the stewarding protecting him was in the hands of hard line fascists.

The coming unemployment catastrophe could provide fertile recruiting ground for Salvini if there is no organised resistance in the workplaces or communities. Certainly the current government cannot be judged as progressive just because the Lega has been excluded. Its debates focus on which sectors of capital should get the Covid EU money rather than a determined defence of jobs or living standards. Broder correctly points out in his conclusion that moral crusades and general anti-fascist posturing will not defeat Salvini. You have to develop a programme that can win over working people on the fundamental material issues facing them. Nobody is saying that democratic and progressive movements like the Sardines, which helped save Emilia Romagna region from a Lega victory, do not make a helpful contribution but a class based active opposition is still necessary that can impose a new relationship of forces.

David Broder's book is a very useful



primer and introduction to Italian politics, particularly since the 1980s. It digs behind the colourful demagoguery of “captain” Salvini to show the

subjective and objective forces that have propelled him this far. As he also notes, some similar trends are visible in British politics.

28 August 2020

*Cava dei Tirreni, Italy.*

# The Pandemic and the Vote

29 August 2020, by **Against the Current Editors**

As Dr. Anthony Fauci warned of 100,000 new daily coronavirus infections by November, Trump’s dispatching federal marshals and border patrol thugs to face off against Black Lives Matter marches, was deliberately calculated to inflame chaos in American cities on the pretext of “restoring law and order.” When that didn’t work he turned to another chaos-inducing ploy, announcing that the November election is “rigged” by mail-in voting. In anything like normal political times, a poll-slumping president’s call to “postpone” a looming election would be an occasion for his party to save itself from oblivion by dumping him.

That same day, we learned that the Census Bureau was ordered to cut short household visits in order to deliberately undercount communities of color. This happened immediately after the White House instructed hospitals to report COVID statistics to Health and Human Services instead of the Centers for Disease Control — where the HHS bureaucracy can bury and falsify them. Mercifully, after Trump’s super-spreader campaign rallies from Tulsa, to Phoenix, to the Black Hills of South Dakota left more virus outbreaks in their wake, the GOP convention in Jacksonville, the Florida epicenter of the pandemic, finally had to be cancelled.

This administration — tragicomic in its incompetence, vicious and sadistic in its treatment of immigrants and asylum seekers, grasping dangerously although ineptly for authoritarian presidentialist rule — presents the most repellent picture to an increasingly desperate domestic population and a disbelieving world.

At present, the likely margin of Trump’s defeat looks to be too great to allow the election to be stolen either by rightwing voter suppression or, as several widely circulated articles have warned, post-election manipulation by Republican-controlled state legislatures. In the present climate, however, no outcome can be taken as certain. Polls have been wrong before; voter intimidation and suppression are escalating; dirty tricks close to the election are inevitable; and we know too well that the anachronistic Electoral College can produce fluky and disastrous results.

At the outer improbable extreme, a Trump/GOP Grand Theft Election could create not just a contested outcome but an existential crisis for the constitutional system that has served U.S. ruling elites so well through more than two centuries. That’s another whole scenario. But here’s what we know for sure: Following the November vote, the United States will remain a country bitterly polarized — between insurgent anti-racist and social justice movements, and vicious reaction spearheaded by white nationalism.

The United States will still face a coronavirus calamity and severe economic shocks, neither of which are ending soon — with tens of millions of people facing eviction, long-term unemployment, loss of health care, the destruction of public education and whole communities, with the prospect of mass misery on a scale not seen since the 1930s Great Depression.

The unfolding climate catastrophe, and a global pandemic with huge loss of life in the global South, are layered on top of numerous looming

international conflicts, particularly the U.S.-China confrontation. The cancer of rising authoritarian regimes is spreading. And we know that win or lose, some 40%+ of the U.S. electorate will cast its votes for the candidate, and what has become the Trump party, of open white supremacy.

Is this really new? No, and yes. Certainly we’ve seen blatant racial presidential campaign appeals before — Richard Nixon’s 1968 Southern strategy, Ronald Reagan’s 1980 “welfare queens,” George H.W. Bush’s 1988 Willie Horton ad, and plenty other repulsive spectacles. Yet not in living memory has a sitting president actively embraced the Confederate flag, the symbol of human slavery in America — not since Woodrow Wilson proudly screened “Birth of a Nation” in the White House.

The Trump reelection campaign is reduced to its essentials: open promotion of white racism, pandering to corporate greed, and Trump’s incomprehensible denial of the scale of the COVID-19 nightmare that exposes even his own support base to the risk of mass death. With the economy cratering, he has nothing else left to run on.

## What’s New, and Not

There is indeed something new here — both in the magnificent rise of the Black-led, multiracial insurgency against murderous police brutality and the systemic racism and obscene social inequality at the roots of this society, and in the virulence of the

entrenched opposition. The tectonic conflict of these forces will define the coming decade.

If the gulf on social issues between the two U.S. capitalist parties has grown to historic levels, what's not new in any fundamental sense is the Democratic Party. Much attention focuses on the growth of a "progressive" and sometimes oppositional wing of the party, which has energized the voting base. But the levers of policy-making and power remain firmly in the hands of the Pelosi-Schumer leadership, which answers to the party's corporate donors.

The Democratic candidate Joe Biden offers a hardly inspiring option "a continuation of the stagnant neoliberalism of the Clinton, and with some variations the Obama, administrations. Despite its verbal gestures toward the progressive wing and (much more) toward the movements in the streets, the Biden campaign is a consistent message of No: No to Medicare for All, No to the Green New Deal, No to defunding and demilitarizing police. Yes to platitudes, no to meaningful concrete change.

Some of Biden's announcements, on the environment for example, look half-decent on paper, and so does the Democratic platform "a meaningless document, influenced as usual by the liberal and progressive wing. What counts aren't words, but what a president and potential governing party will be prepared to seriously fight for. Remember for example how president Obama in 2009 put forward a "public option" for health care but withdrew it without a struggle. As for Biden, behind shopworn phrases about "healing America" that mean nothing substantive, his honest campaign theme might be: I'll fight for nothing, and that's what I'll deliver.

It should hardly be necessary to detail the fact that nothing in Biden's political record deserves progressive, let alone socialist, support. His Senate career runs from presiding over the Senate character assassination of Anita Hill in the Clarence Thomas Supreme Court confirmation hearings,

to enthusiastic advocacy of "tough on crime" legislation leading to mass incarceration in America, to supporting the disastrous and criminal Iraq war, from "ending welfare as we know it" to sweetheart sponsorship of the interests of the credit card industry headquartered in Delaware.

All this establishes Biden's credentials as a 100% corporate Democrat. Like the Clintons, Biden has performed the formidable political trick of winning the support of blue-collar working class and especially Black voters, while spearheading the awful neoliberal programs that have brought pain and destruction to so many in those communities. Those very policies ultimately brought us the Donald Trump presidency, from whose disintegration Biden now stands to benefit.

Dozens if not hundreds of Trump executive orders need to be immediately cancelled "the Muslim travel ban, mass immigrant detention and family separation, massive assaults on the environment and women's rights. It's entirely unclear whether Biden would repeal these peremptorily, or even if he's been asked about them. Beyond that, it should be clear by now that facing the economic carnage caused by COVID-19 requires a massive economic stimulus, to bail out people not banks and corporations "by some estimates amounting to 40% of the annual U.S. GDP (as estimated for example by leftwing economist Jack Rasmus).

That's vastly beyond the inadequate post-2008 program of the Obama administration. Nothing suggests that Biden is interested in fighting for anything on that scale, without which the likelihood of a prolonged and deep Depression looms.

## The Alternatives?

The horrific implications of a second Trump term can't be overstated, however unlikely it may presently appear. An irresistible imperative "the removal of Trump and the white-supremacist Republican administration, by the largest possible vote "confronts an immovable

object, the corporate neoliberalism of the real Democratic Party led by Pelosi, Schumer, Biden, the Clintons, and, yes, Obama.

We don't think that many folks on the left have illusions that Joe Biden himself represents anything positive beyond being not-Trump. There are, and will be, differing views about how much the Democratic progressive wing could influence his administration (more than verbally). In any case, the difficult choice facing serious progressive folks in this presidential election, we believe, needs to be posed this way: What electoral choice can both oust Trump and advance the prospects for the movements that are challenging the brutal racial capitalism of this society and spearheading the struggles for social justice, for human rights, for labor, for a future without climate and environmental collapse?

The argument to "vote for the Democratic lesser evil to defeat the rightwing menace," repeated on an endless feedback loop ever electoral cycle, has no attraction for us "but that doesn't automatically tell us what's appropriate this time.

There are two basic options (in addition to work on local races and ballot initiatives). One is summed up in the formula "Dump Trump, Fight Biden," seeing a vote for Biden and Kamala Harris as an unavoidable necessity "at least in states where the outcome is not certain while the struggle against what he represents must also begin immediately.

This argument holds that the imperative to defeat Trump in 2020 outweighs whatever openings might exist for an independent progressive, third-party alternative "and that no such alternative is presently strong enough to be meaningful.

The alternative argument contends that precisely now, the importance of supporting independent, anti-capitalist politics is paramount, and that in the 2020 election that option is embodied in the Green Party campaign of Howie Hawkins and Angela Walker, on an unabashed ecosocialist program. (See Howie Hawkins' "[Which Green New Deal?](#)" and his statement on running

for president published in ATC 203, November-December 2019.)

Throughout his campaign for the Green Party nomination, Hawkins has stressed not only its program but also the importance of building the party as a meaningful political force and voice of the movements. Due to restrictive and oppressive ballot access laws backed by both capitalist parties, the Green Party is on the ballot in between 27-32 states. [See Angela Walker's statement in this issue.]

Hawkins has stated that "for the Greens, every state is a battleground," and we have no doubt that the consciousness of many dedicated activists is a battleground as well. Among members of the socialist-

feminist organization Solidarity that sponsors this magazine, opinion is divided "as we expect it is in other currents on the left. (While making no formal endorsement, Solidarity held a poll of the membership to establish the balance of views. [4])

In any case, we don't see "sitting it out" as a viable option. Whatever choice any of our readers make, the crisis and the struggles ahead will last long past the nasty, brutish and long U.S. electoral slog. The changes we most desperately need will come, as they always do, through mass action from below. The mass movements have won the significant gains in recent years for LGBT rights, progress toward decent wages, and a modicum of protection, however fragile it

remains, for immigrant youth.

Most dramatically, #Black Lives Matter has put racial justice, police violence and mass incarceration on the political agenda and in cultural expression, from street paintings to sports uniforms and even corporate promos. To be sure, all that's both a signifier of changing consciousness and the system's effort to safely contain it. What's been achieved remains a very long way from the deep changes we need, but the discussion in society has changed, and the task is to sustain and accelerate it.

22 August 2020

*This article will appear in the September-October 2020 issue of **Against the Current**.*

# A Year Has Passed Since August 5, 2019, but the Menace Still Hangs Heavy in the Air

## 28 August 2020, by Siddiq Wahid

On August 5, 2019, the Narendra Modi government revoked Jammu and Kashmir's special status and statehood, dividing it into two union territories. [5]

It is vital to remember the moment that gave birth to the past twelve months in Jammu and Kashmir if we are to understand how it has redefined India, yet again, for itself and the world. The effect on the erstwhile state's three constituent units on this side of the Line of Control (LoC) has been diverse and will take some time to grasp. But immediately speaking, Leh celebrated with drum and dance. Kargil debated meaning and implications. Jammu city partied but its hinterland was nervously split. Kashmir saw it as more of the same, but with a difference.

But the beginning, for everyone, even after a year, remains raw.

I: Naked power

For Kashmir, reminding ourselves of the morning of August 5, 2019 is difficult.

At the stroke of midnight between the 4th and the 5th, all mobile phone, landline and internet connections were cut off. The silence was a physically felt phenomenon, not mere absence of sound. It was unnerving and eerie. Usual morning routines became unusual. It is difficult to articulate how that felt. No access to news, after weeks of rumours, was the least notable fact. It is easy to know that you are alone but to feel it is a gut-wrenching experience.

As the day progressed, more facts became apparent. Heavily armed paramilitary and army personnel manned every significant street corner around us. The streets and lanes were empty, the traditional baker and corner shops shut tight. The only civil voices and activity allowed by the military were that of terrified non-

Kashmiris moving towards the airport and road transport centres, clamouring to get out. There was a menacing stillness in the air.

By day's end it became clear that the government's military operation was a manoeuvre planned over months, executed with precision and intended as a sledgehammer. Slowly, the meaning of what seemed "routine" developments of the past two months past began to sink in: the plane loads of additional troops disgorging themselves on the tarmac of the already most militarised zone of the world; the fortification of nodal military bunkers the Valley's vital arteries; the quantitative leap in the number of bunkers (on just one 15-kilometre stretch of the highway they increased from 12 to 22 in a matter of days).

Suddenly, it became clear why private airlines were announcing that the ground transport for Amarnath



pilgrims would have GPS devices; it was a message implying imminent violence. On a flight from Delhi to Srinagar on June 22, the cabin attendant made the usual announcement that photography was not permitted at Srinagar airport, but intensified it by asking passengers to "Please report about (sic!) anyone taking pictures". Delhi's intentions were fuelled by the street buzz that it was willing to absorb at least five thousand civilian deaths in case of protests.

Kashmir is familiar with this military tactic. Psychological operations, or "psy-ops", have been in play for thirty years here. But the clinical phrase veils the true purpose and intended consequence of this soft technology: namely, to introduce, in Michael Taussig's words, an "epistemic murk" to dominate a population, "making the terribleness of death squads, disappearances and torture all the more effective in crippling of people's capacity to resist." To try to make the dominated doubt that they know right from wrong, good from evil or, indeed, anything at all. [6]

To remember August 5 minutely is to be catapulted into understanding that the BJP operation in Kashmir was not merely the 'failure of democracy', a skirmish between priestly and secular politics in India or an argument between the virile modernity of unending development and an impotent past of fake idealism. It is not the runaway basic social urge towards irrational capital formation, as Marx argued, or deeply subconscious sexual desire, as Freud posited.

The past year under the BJP has helped us in Kashmir to grasp, up close, what an attempt at total political domination looks like. Bertrand Russell warned us about this impulse to power, almost a hundred years ago, by making a distinction between conventional state power and "naked power". The latter, he said, "involves no acquiescence on the part of the subject. Such is the power of the butcher over sheep, of an invading army over a vanquished nation, and of the police over detected conspirators". He goes on to clarify, more woodenly, that "The power of the State over loyal

citizens is traditional, but its power over rebels is naked."

Russell's distinction is important for India's "loyal" to understand because, in Kashmir, it is the "rebel" who is ubiquitous, making the deployment of naked power seem the norm.

## II: From one trouble-spot to five

On the ground, both locally and internationally, the government's claim of a successful J&K policy has been a short-lived victory. Leh, Kargil and Jammu have all become increasingly skeptical about the BJP's August 2019 action as nativist land privileges, livelihood opportunities and culture conservation are threatened, respectively, by central territorial control, corporate carpetbaggers and the threat of a project of social homogeneity.

On the one hand, the validly insecure Buddhist population of Kargil and Leh, passionately devoted and vocal about their identity, is rapidly discovering that the Hindutva project of the BJP is not aimed exclusively at Muslims. On the other, to the Muslims of Leh and Kargil the BJP's August 2019 action is confirmation, in praxis, of Muslim fears in India. A litmus test of cross-community emotions about this effect will be administrative "orders" like the one on July 20 for the "Deputation of officers/officials to the Union Territory of Ladakh". It has affected Buddhists negatively, a sentiment which, sooner or later, will surface. Meanwhile, on July 24, students in Leh and Kargil observed a shutdown against "grave" discrimination in government employment, highlighting restlessness among the youth in both districts.

Concretely, what Leh and Kargil have realised is that while it was a Congress Central government, during governor S.K. Sinha's rule that rammed through the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC) in 1995, it was the PDP-led State government that empowered the LAHDC, today a lame-duck institution, in 2003. In Jammu, the primary threat perception of the BJP's policy is different. It is one of the loss of trade privileges thus far reserved for intra-J&K state businesses. These developments should offer a fresh

perspective on the maxim that "all politics is local".

In Kashmir, the centre of the J&K political conundrum, the methods of arbitrary lockdowns, lockups and legalistic exclusion have been practiced unbroken throughout the year, with sporadic letups, releases and reversals to allow the government to claim that its throttlehold has not been endless. New domicile rules, the forced facilitation of settlers in the Valley, deprivation of resource access to locals (ranging from silt for construction purposes to any relief for local businesses adversely affected by the year-long lockdown) and other ground shifting changes have become the norm. However, despite the government's confidence that these actions will bring Kashmir to its knees, the combined mood of all the peoples of the former state augurs a period of rocky relations in the region for the BJP and, in the longer run, for India.

What the past year has achieved for the government is that whereas Delhi had one trouble spot to deal with in its [former] J&K state, it will henceforth have five very different political facets of worry to contend with in Kashmir, Leh, Kargil, Jammu's city and its rural districts. The domestic problem within India is best summed up by the law of physics that pithily describes the scenario: when centrifugal forces are accelerated, it releases centripetal energies.

## III: Looking for respite beyond South Asia

What is undeniable is that while the BJP's credibility appears to remain in place domestically, its international reputation wanes. For the Kashmiri, it calls for a leap over South Asia to address the international community.

Ironically, India's fading self-propagated image of itself as the world's democratic hope against authoritarian China is arguably a direct result of New Delhi's attempt to deny the Kashmir dispute. The February 14, 2019 attack in Pulwama and Balakot retaliation in March resulted in India's intelligence and military capabilities being open to criticism. The hubristic claims during that February-March 2019

confrontation became the reason for the August 5 action which, in turn, has inarguably allowed Beijing to insinuate itself into the J&K dispute by making vulnerable India's de facto vantage points in Daulat Beg Oldie, Siachen, the Galwan Valley and its portions in the Pangong Tso area.

Meanwhile, China's response to India in trans-Himalayan Ladakh have considerably diluted or weakened Delhi's claims over China's de facto occupation of the Akasi Chin, the Shaksgam valley and its hefty decade-

old presence in J&K's Gilgit-Baltistan.

Not helping this southward trend is scathing criticisms of India's human rights record by the United Nations Office of the Human Rights Commissioner in 2018 and repeated in 2019, and the April 2020 report of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom recommending that Washington "designate India as a country of particular concern, or CPC, for engaging in and tolerating systematic, ongoing, and egregious religious

freedom violations, as defined by the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA)".

Recognising these shortcomings may not directly impact rights violations in Kashmir yet, but it should help to spur hopes for an opportunity to catch its breath.

To catch its breath and, as it must, contemplate its future.

5 August 2020

[The Wire](#)

# Beirut's devastating blast has not shaken the ruling class's grip on Lebanon

27 August 2020, by **Gilbert Achcar**

The tremendous blast that shook Lebanon on 4 August will be recorded as a major turning point in the country's history, no less so than the much less powerful explosion that killed former prime minister Rafik Hariri on 14 February 2005. [7] Judging from the 15 years it took before a UN-appointed tribunal basically admitted its impotence on the latter event, there won't be any official certainty about the circumstances of the terrible explosion at Beirut's port in the foreseeable future. [8] A few conclusions can, however, be drawn about this highly traumatic tragedy.

The first is that, notwithstanding the blast's particular circumstances, the responsibility for leaving 2,750 tonnes of highly explosive ammonium nitrate [9] warehoused in the heart of Beirut for no less than six years falls on the whole Lebanese ruling class - all those who have been in the Lebanese government during that period. Presidents, prime ministers, ministers of transport, chiefs of key security apparatuses and port administrators are all equally to blame. The list includes leaders of both the official Lebanese state and

the parallel state constituted by Hezbollah in Lebanon, which is known to closely monitor Beirut's airport and port and use them at its will.

How did Lebanon get to this point? We need to take in 30 years of political and economic misrule to understand. Before 1975, when the civil war started, Lebanon was known to be a "fiscal paradise": a country of wild capitalism, whose bank secrecy and sham taxation made it an ideal territory for money laundering, capital flight and all sorts of trafficking. The war ended with a political and constitutional agreement between Lebanese factions achieved in 1989 under the joint auspices of the Saudi monarchy and the Syrian regime. It was confirmed the year after by the latter's participation in the US-led coalition that waged the first international war on Iraq from Saudi territory.

During a dozen years, Lebanon was run by this Saudi-Syrian entente: representing the Saudi side, Rafik Hariri closely coordinated with Ghazi Kanaan, the all-powerful head of Syria's security apparatus in Lebanon. [10] Damascus's opposition to the second US-led war on Iraq and

the occupation of that country in 2003 led to the end of the entente. Washington started exerting pressure to expel Syrian troops from Lebanon, notably by sponsoring UN security council resolution 1559 of 2004 (Russia and China abstained in order not to veto it). [11]

Hariri's assassination triggered a huge outpouring of popular anger, compelling Damascus to withdraw its troops. It kept pulling strings in Lebanon nevertheless, through a triple alliance composed of its close ally Amal, the Shia sectarian movement led by Nabih Berri, the Lebanese parliament's speaker for life (he assumed office in 1992); Hezbollah, the Lebanese agent of Iran, Syria's regional ally; and Michel Aoun, Syria's former bitter foe who about-turned in 2006. [12]

Over the past 15 years, Lebanon has basically been run by a renewed joint government, involving Rafik Hariri's son Saad and the triple alliance, and continuing a disastrous economic policy of neoliberal reconstruction that had been in place since the end of the war. However, the war that unfolded in Syria since the 2011 Arab spring has considerably weakened

Damascus and increased the role of Tehran and its Lebanese representative, as Iran gained the upper hand over Syria itself. This shift in the regional balance of forces translated into the election of Aoun as president in 2016. [13] The botched attempt by the Saudi crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, to twist Saad Hariri's arm into ending collaboration with Tehran's followers in 2017 was a clumsy reaction to this turn of events.

In any event, the responsibility for the Lebanese economy's collapse falls squarely on the whole spectrum of the country's ruling class, all those who held offices over the past 30 years, as much as it falls on the banking sector with which they have all been enmeshed. Riad Salamé, the governor of Lebanon's Central Bank since 1992 and still in place, embodies these entrenched problems. This shared responsibility was addressed by the now famous central slogan of the popular uprising that began on 17 October last year: "All of them means all of them." [14]

With popular anger reaching a climax because of Beirut's recent blast, there has been much hope in Lebanon for a silver lining to the tragedy in imposing two key demands of the October uprising on the ruling class: a government truly independent from it and new elections on the basis of a new electoral law. The expectation was that international pressure would force the implementation of these demands and provide a counterweight to the local ruling class. [15]

Emmanuel Macron's visit to Beirut two days after the blast brought this expectation to a peak. Here was a leader who dared to mingle with the people right after the disaster, many thought, overlooking that it was a great photo-op for a French president beleaguered in his own country. The expectation did not last: Macron's consistent line regarding the Middle East has been to mediate between the US and Iran (where French capitalist stakes are high), as he did when he

attempted to organise a meeting between Donald Trump and Iran's foreign minister on the margin of the 2019 G7 summit in Biarritz.

The logic of this position regarding Lebanon is that Macron has systematically acted to maintain Hariri-Hezbollah coalition rule in the country. This is why he intervened decisively to bring back from Riyadh a sequestered Saad Hariri in 2017, and why he has now dispelled the Lebanese people's hope for an independent government and new elections by reportedly favouring a "unity government", which has been interpreted as a plan to "[reinstate] the Sunni former prime minister, Saad Hariri, in return for concessions from Hezbollah". Instead of a big bang, this would mean Macron is actively working to turn Beirut's blast into a backward-propelling force - surely a recipe for increased discontent and further turmoil. [16]

Source *The Guardian Comment is free*.

# The Significance of 5th August and Prospects for the Future

## 26 August 2020, by **Radical Socialist**

5th August will go down in Indian history as the day aggressive, chauvinistic nationalism, in its most fascistic form, but also with a deeper implantation in society than any other ultra-right fascist-type force, succeeded in throttling the First Indian Republic.

It is incontestable that the constitution, the political practices, of independent India always had a Hindu, and Brahminical tilt. However, what was one element among many became, in the hands of the RSS, and the entire range of political and 'socio-cultural' organisations it floated, the core and overwhelming thrust. That is why, on one hand, the BJP [Bharatiya Janata Party, the RSS-sponsored

governing party] has been able to claim the nationalist high ground, and on the other hand, the Congress and other bourgeois parties have not been able to, and cannot, resist them on principled grounds. Rather than upholding secular principles, the Congress is currently competing with BJP over the ownership of Ram.

5th August has been chosen deliberately as the date for the bhoomi puja [ceremony to begin construction] of the Ram Temple to come up. One year back, it was on 5th August that by a total disregard for even India's previous, scarcely democratic procedures in Jammu and Kashmir, that the residual autonomy of the province was finally and totally

smashed, by illegally turning it into two Union Territories. In the name of integration of the province into India, this marked the final step in an all out colonisation, since now the land, the resources of the province were up for grabs in a way they could not be done in the past, and the relatively progressive reforms of the early Abdullah regime were set to be overturned. Also, for an entire year, Kashmir has been under total despotism with the Supreme Court accepting claims made by the government, so that all arms of the state are united.

By linking the same date for the bhoomi puja, a whole set of coded messages are being sent out. This

temple is being constructed through a judgement, whereby India's Supreme Court admitted that a mosque had been destroyed in a criminal action, but still went on to tell the government to spend public money to build a religious institution for the majority community. Each step of the verdict was thus a blow against the principles of secularism. By choosing 5th August as the date, the Central Government is signalling that its actions are in one line. Muslim majority Kashmir is threatened with forced population changes in a bid to silence the decades long struggles there. The nation is being identified in an unabashed way with aggressive Hindutva [Hindu nationalist] politics, and with a Brahminical, north Indian brand of Hinduism.

There is no doubt that people will

continue to fight oppression and exploitation. But the entire record of the past decades show, that unless India fights for the rights of Kashmir, India cannot get democracy, justice, social progress anywhere. The toiling people, workers and peasants, dalits and adivasis and other oppressed communities, women and other marginalised and oppressed genders, have to unite, have to come out of the hegemony of bourgeois politics, and Brahminical-Hindutva ideology.

They have to build struggles that do not create hierarchies according to one so called main enemy, in the name of fighting whom, all special oppressions, all class exploitation must be forgotten. That is how bourgeois politics and its tail-ending by the reformist left for the entire period since the Emergency of

1975-77 has led us into this destructive situation.

There is no short cut. The struggle will be long. But the Hindutva triumphs of August 5th can only be fought back by unity based on real understanding of each oppression, the building of a mass united front, and a rejection of all bourgeois parties.

Socialism is the only alternative to barbarism. Not the pipe dream of holding aloft the flag of a spurious real bourgeois democracy abandoned by the bourgeoisie, but the need is for a sustained and protracted struggle for a proletarian revolution under specific Indian conditions, which is possible only by becoming the voice of all the oppressed and exploited.

Source *Radical Socialist*.

## Kamala Harris selection causes racist and sexist backlash by Trump

25 August 2020, by **Malik Miah**

President Donald Trump once again raised the issue of "birthism" regarding Democratic vice-presidential nominee Kamala Devi Harris, due to her parents having been immigrants from India and Jamaica. As he normally does when talking about a strong woman, Trump called Harris "nasty", "mean" and "radical far left".

This is no accident. Black women have always been denigrated more than any other group in US history. Slavery made Black women chattel and baby makers for their rapist owners.

Most Black women and South Asian women take pride in the Harris selection, even if many disagree with her record as a prosecutor and a mainstream Democratic Party politician.

The left is more divided, because Joe Biden is a corporatist presidential

candidate. The extreme right-wing presidency of Trump, however, has made Biden appear as a "centre left" bourgeois politician (a "lesser evil" or "palatable" option).

### Why Harris' appointment matters

When Biden selected California Senator Harris as his vice president, she became the first Black and South Asian female candidate nominated as president or vice president by either major ruling-class party.

Trump has conducted a foreign and domestic policy of "America First" and white nationalism. In 2016, Trump attacked Mexican immigrants and other people of colour.

Within 48 hours of Harris's selection, Trump challenged her eligibility under the constitution to run for vice president. The constitution states only citizens born in US territory are eligible to do so.

Trump raised his ludicrous "birthism" charge against Harris, who was born in Oakland, California. Her Stanford University economist father, Donald J Harris was born in Jamaica. Her South Asian mother, cancer scientist Shyamala Gopalan, was born in Tamil Nadu, India.

Trump made the same allegation of "foreign born other" against former president Barack Obama.

Not surprisingly, Harris is seen as an "other" by Trump to promote his anti-immigrant and racist ideology. This tactic has been used for two centuries and usually works.



Until 1967, immigration laws favoured immigrants from northern Europe. When labour was needed, the door was opened slightly to others — for example, when men from China were brought to California to build the railroad.

In 1967, a sweeping new immigration law was adopted, allowing immigration from Asia, Africa and other non-white countries. Until then, only a few qualified students from the Caribbean, Asia and Africa could attend schools of higher education (except for the all-white colleges in the segregated South).

## Early years in Oakland

As a child of the '60s in Oakland, Harris went to protests for civil rights with her father and mother. Her mother encouraged both daughters to identify as "Black".

Harris decided to attend Howard University in Washington DC, a historically Black college, known as the "Harvard of the South". Harris, thus, became deeply rooted in Black politics and culture.

Following university and law school, Harris decided to become a prosecutor rather than a public defender.

The concept of "progressive district attorney" did not exist. It was an unusual choice by a daughter of civil rights supporters. She said she wanted to change the criminal justice system, which disproportionately harms Blacks, by working within the system.

Harris became the first Black and South Asian woman of colour to win the office of District Attorney in liberal San Francisco. She then ran for Attorney General of California. Again, she was first woman of colour to win.

In 2016, Harris became the first woman of colour to be elected to the Senate from California and only the second Black woman in US history.

She sought the 2020 presidential nomination, but could not gain

traction, dropped out early and endorsed Biden.

Harris' most principled position as Attorney General in San Francisco was to oppose the death penalty, including after an undercover cop was killed.

At the same time, she did not advance a progressive agenda around prison reform and mass incarceration, and supported the expansion of the police force.

Harris has modified her positions with the rise of the Black Lives Movement. She says she supports BLM but not its most radical demands.

## Trump as existential threat

One reason Harris did not win the presidential nomination was that a majority of Black women did not support her because they feared she could not defeat Trump.

Trump is seen as an existential threat to people of colour. History shows how white supremacy remains a dangerous ideology and underpins the capitalist system. The American-style caste system is based on the white caste at the top and Blacks at the bottom, whatever one's class.

Black people had hoped Obama's election in 2008 could lead to a new recognition that race is an unscientific concept. The hope was that a "colour blind" society could result.

Trump's 2016 victory, however, escalated a white backlash that continues today.

The capitalist system is based on more than private ownership of property and the means of production. It is intertwined with race and racism and maintaining the colour line.

Trump tapped into that conscious and unconscious sentiment among a majority of working-class white men and whites in general. It's why he can still win re-election.

The white nationalist backlash in 2016 is a warning to Black and Brown people of what could happen in the

2020 election. That's why most Black women and men decided to vote for the "safe" white centrist bourgeois politician, Joe Biden.

## The left

After Harris accepted Biden's nomination, longtime Marxist and activist Angela Davis spoke about its significance, with a caution, at an online fundraiser: "I don't think that simply finding new actors to participate in a system that is structurally racist and misogynistic is going to lead us in a progressive direction. But, at the same time, I don't think that means that we don't participate in the electoral system."

Davis told Reuters on August 14: "We can't forget some of the real problems that are associated with [Harris'] career as a prosecutor," referring to Harris' role as California's attorney general.

"But ... it's a feminist approach to be able to work with those contradictions. And so, in that context, I can say that, I'm very excited.

"I think it makes the ticket a lot more palatable, that's for sure."

Davis has been a radical activist since the 1960s and is a professor emeritus at the University of California-Santa Cruz. She was also the Communist Party's vice presidential candidate in 1980 and 1984.

Her observation about Harris is what many on the left and socialist movement are considering. Davis posed the contradiction of recognising the significance of Harris' nomination and the fact Harris supports a system based on racism.

There are those leading the street protests in the Black Lives Matter upsurge — the Black vanguard — who see protests as key to winning reforms and fundamental change to policing and government institutions. The presidential election is seen as important but secondary to the movement.

The Black elected officials in the Democratic Party who back the protests, on the other hand, view

voting as primary over the next 90 days. They are for modest reforms to policing. They reject demands to defund and dismantle the police. They falsely state there are only a “few bad apples” in policing. Yet, the facts show that most cops are enablers (the “Blue Wall”) of the worst cops.

The most radical group is the militants, including socialists, who align with the Black vanguard leadership but advance an anti-capitalist perspective. They see the democratic struggle as the first step toward a radical transformation of the capitalist system.

The Harris nomination is also seen as significant, because it is a way to highlight defence of immigrant rights,

civil rights, LGBTI rights and women’s rights, especially on the 100th anniversary of women winning the right to vote.

The suffragette movement was historic. But it was influenced by white nationalism. The leaders refused to support Black men getting the right to vote. They also refused to demand that Black women in the legally segregated South be included in the 19th Amendment, adopted in August 1920, which gave women the right to vote. State laws allowed racial discrimination denying Black women and men the vote.

The Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) — the largest socialist group in the US — has not yet decided whether

to endorse the Biden-Harris ticket. Its general electoral policy is to support DSA members who run for office as Democrats or independents. Some DSA members will likely vote for the Green Party presidential candidate, Howie Hawkins.

The Harris candidacy is significant. But it is not a reason for working people of colour to actively campaign for Biden.

Harris, as his number two, will defend Biden’s big business and pro-war policies. Her record as a pro-cop attorney general in San Francisco and California is what matters, not verbal support for Black lives.

[Green Left](#)

## "Belarus will never be the same"

**24 August 2020, by Yury Glushakov**

Today, many people are watching Belarus closely. Events over the past 12 days have raised questions about the country’s famed “stability”, in the words of the authorities.

On 9 August, Belarus held its main day of voting in the presidential election. By evening in Minsk and many other cities, large groups of people began to gather to express their dissatisfaction over voting falsifications. Special police units were deployed to deal with them, and their actions were accompanied by unprecedented brutality, cruelty and force. [17] In response, people came out to protest further, and eventually the protest mood made its way to Belarus’ state enterprises. [18]

Despite the apparent retreat by the authorities, the situation in Belarus is unpredictable. Aliaksandr Lukashenka still considers himself president, and is not planning on giving up power under any circumstances. He is yet to express any desire to hold negotiations with protesters and find a compromise.

Protesters, alongside the newly formed opposition Coordination Council, are demanding that the elections are declared void and that Lukashenka swiftly resigns. To ensure a peaceful transfer of power, the opposition proposes round table meetings between representatives of society and state institutions.

But how far are these actions justified in current conditions, and does the Belarusian opposition have enough real power to realise its demands? How far does the opposition’s economic programme fit with the interests of the majority of the electorate, including workers - who are now actively participating in the protests?

### The regime’s weak points

Belarusian president Aliaksandr Lukashenka came to power in 1994 on a wave of social discontent, produced by the collapse of the Soviet Union and “market reforms” to the economy.

But he quickly began to move away from the populist programme he was elected on.

In 1995, the country removed some social benefits, and then introduced a forced fixed-term contract system of employment, limited the state’s control of prices, and raised the pension age. Indeed, Belarus became financially dependent on the IMF under Lukashenka, and in exchange for loans from the latter the country was forced to implement their demands on cuts to social programmes. The only measure that Lukashenka did not implement was the mass privatisation of Belarus’ state enterprises. The authorities, meanwhile, limited the activity of independent trade unions, and their leaders were subject to persecution.

All elections held since 1994 have taken place with numerous and serious violations. And this is why Lukashenka approached this year’s presidential contest with a particularly low approval rating. Although all independent surveys are banned in Belarus, surveys conducted online

suggest a support rating for Lukashenka of [no more than 25%](#). Here's a few reason why.

First, the difficult socio-economic situation of the majority of voters affected their attitude ahead of the election. Officially, the average monthly wage in Belarus is \$505 (May 2020), but in reality, in the regions the monthly wage is somewhere around \$250-\$300. A loaf of bread costs \$0.70, and a bus ride costs \$0.25. Utility bills for a two-room apartment are around \$50 per month.

Second, Lukashenka's position on Coronavirus hurt his support levels in society. Belarus did not introduce quarantine measures, and schools and enterprises continued operating as normal. Many started to suspect that the Ministry of Health's statistics were significantly reducing the numbers of people who had caught the virus, and those who had died from it. But it was Lukashenka's jokes about COVID that had the worst effect ("[I'm worried most of all that people will develop psychosis](#)"), as well as attempts to lay the blame for deaths on the people who died. In this sense, Lukashenka's public attitude to the pandemic was reminiscent of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil.

Third, Lukashenka's attempts at scaring society had the worst effect. In one of his speeches in June, the president reminded dissenting listeners of the [Andijan massacre in Uzbekistan in 2005](#), when hundreds of people were killed by security forces. In another interview, Lukashenka stated that if he had to, he would "[give the order to fire](#)" to defend the country.

Despite the clear failure at the ballot box, the Belarusian authorities continue to use their favourite rhetoric. References to past services still predominate in Lukashenka's speeches ("I pulled the country back from the brink in the 1990s"), as do attacks on opponents and protesters ("Agents of foreign powers", "drug addicts", "zombified by social media") and attempts to instil fear.

To demonstrate at least some kind of support from society, the authorities have also held public rallies ("For peace and stability"), which they have

forced public sector workers to attend under threats of losing their jobs. The extremely bureaucratised system of power has turned out to be ineffective in retaining voters' sympathies. All of its attempts to come up with some kind of "state ideology" have been unsuccessful, and in that sense the Lukashenka system is in a less envious position than the Communist party nomenklatura under Leonid Brezhnev.

Indeed, a serious crisis has also started to emerge in the ranks of the Belarusian ruling class. Following the elections, several high-placed public officials resigned, and law enforcement officials have also resigned.

## The new opposition and old regime

In the past, Belarusian authorities' principal opponents were opposition parties - both liberal nationalist and left-wing. After the dissolution of Belarus' Supreme Council in 1996, these parties were more or less successfully prevented from getting their representatives into legislatures, given the total falsification of elections. Their activity was therefore limited to street protests, which became almost impossible to hold outside of Minsk. In effect, political parties in Belarus were forced to turn into scaled-up politicised NGOs.

Ahead of the 2020 elections, conservative and liberal parties tried to choose a "united candidate" to challenge Lukashenka. But due to personal ambitions and the general crisis of the "established opposition", these primaries were scandalously unsuccessful. Still, this electoral season's "sensation" came in the form of new leaders on the Belarusian political scene - blogger Siarhei Tsikhanouski, banker Viktor Babaryka and former deputy chief of the presidential administration Valery Tsepkala. [19]

Tsikhanouski, a businessman from Gomel, got involved in politics relatively recently - becoming known for his [YouTube channel](#) ("[Belarus is a](#)

[country for living in](#)"). His videos about the problems of ordinary Belarusians made him incredibly popular. And indeed, Tsikhanouski acted as a classic populist, mobilising a broad protest electorate. But given the sudden emergence of Tsikhanouski and his team, and his having worked in Russia in the past, certain members of the "old" opposition viewed him with suspicion, and rumours spread about Tsikhanouski being a "Russian agent".

The candidacies of establishment heavyweights, Valery Tsepkala and Viktor Babaryka, were even more sensational. Tsepkala, a former US ambassador and deputy chief of the presidential administration, ran a state-backed IT park outside of Minsk; Babaryka was head of the board of Belgazprombank for many years. Initially, many saw these two candidates as "spoilers" promoted by the authorities, but it soon became clear that they are Lukashenka's real opposition. They became the candidates of the "new opposition" - the dissenting liberal section of the state bureaucracy and big business. Instead, it seems the spoiler candidate was Hanna Kanapatskaya, from the opposition United Civic Party.

Lukashenka saw the threat that the three candidates posed to him. In contrast to the old opposition, these new candidates had support from a newly mobilised, broad spectrum of society. Tsikhanouski and Babaryka were arrested on false charges during the campaign, and Tsepkala had to flee the country.

## Liberals and the proletariat

But another surprise for the authorities was that the arrests of Tsikhanouski, Babaryka and their teams, as well as leaders of the radical part of the old opposition, neither stopped the protest movement, nor disorganised it. Instead, the arrests gave the movement new impulse. An intense process of self-organisation began on Telegram, with activists coordinating their actions via internet chats.

In the end, the Belarusian Central Election Commission was forced to register several alternative candidates - Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, wife of the blogger Siarhei Tsikhanouski, Andrey Dmitriyev - leader of the “constructive opposition”, Hanna Kanopatskaya, and social democrat businessman Siarhei Cherachen.

Most likely, the authorities’ logic was that Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, an English-language teacher unversed in politics, would be a convenient opponent for the current president. But she became the main rival to Lukashenka early on, and was supported by the Tsepkala and Babaryka teams. Veranika Tsepkala and Maria Kolesnikova, representative of the Babaryka team, accompanied Tsikhanouskaya around the country - the diplomat’s wife and public official giving weight to Tsikhanouskaya’s sincerity.

Many different social groups have united around Tsikhanouskaya - small business owners and workers, young people and pensioners, intelligentsia and big business. The large number of migrant workers - who haven’t made it to Poland or Russia due to quarantine - have also created additional tension for the regime.

It’s worth noting that the Tsikhanouskaya team decided to use an economic programme previously developed by liberal economists for the Belarusian opposition’s “united candidate”. It proposes a far-reaching privatisation of state assets, introducing new employment laws and other anti-social measures. But in the euphoria of struggle against the authoritarian regime, ordinary voters neither see, nor think about this.

In their direct addresses to voters, the “united opposition” does not discuss the prospect of neoliberal reforms. And speaking before 14,000 people in Gomel, Maria Kolesnikova promised the opposite - to “restore workers’ their respect” and introduce workers’ control at Belarusian enterprises.

## Bloody Sunday

After voting came to an end on the evening of 9 August, Belarusian police

used rubber bullets, flash grenades and water cannons against peaceful protesters, and they led to serious injuries. The police detained both active protesters and passers-by. In the days after 9 August, up to 7,000 people were detained in the country.

According to many testimonies, detainees were subject to beatings during arrest, and then in detention centres afterwards. Official statistics suggest that more than 200 people ended up in hospital, and some of them are still in serious condition. In the city of Pinsk, a man received a firearm wound to the head and is still in a critical condition. At least three people died. And 80 people are still unaccounted for.

But even this unprecedented violence did not stop protesters, provoking instead an explosion of civic anger. Women were the first to come out against police terror, and in the week following the election they stood in white on streets and squares of towns across the country, demanding that the violence end. The authorities, it seems, chose not to use police force against them.

On 13 and 14 August, the protest movement shifted to the factories. The first to come out on strike were the Minsk Automobile Plant, GrodnoAzot and the Belarusian Metal Factory in Zhlobin. Then meetings started being held at other factories, largely around demands to stop violence, release those still in detention, and hold free elections. It was precisely these actions by the working class that forced the Belarusian authorities to stop mass arrests of protesters. And after four days of brutal repressions, the authorities ended the widespread persecution of protesters. Interior Minister Yury Karayev apologised for the actions of his subordinates, and arrestees started being released, including before their sentences were finished.

On Sunday 16 August, mass rallies, unprecedented in their size, were held in Minsk and the other big towns of Belarus. In the capital, between 120,000 and 200,000 people were in attendance. The police did not interfere, and the rallies were held with an atmosphere of a public

holiday. In a number of towns, representatives of the administration and law enforcement had to justify the actions of their subordinates in public.

The next day, on 17 August, the strike continued and began to spread. Miners in Salihorsk declared a strike and held a rally in the centre of town. Large enterprises such as Belaruskalii, the Naftan petrochemical complex, Minsk Wheel Tractor Plant, Minsk Tractor Factory, Minsk Automobile Plant, Belarusian Metal Plant and BelAZ automobile plant and the Polotsk glass fibre factory came out on strike or held solidarity actions. The strike committee in Grodno had applications from initiative groups from 22 enterprises in the city, including the local airfield. Journalists from state television also joined the strike, having previously participated in the information war against the Belarusian opposition. Several thousand workers from Minsk Automobile Plant marched to the state television centre.

In response, Lukashenka visited the Minsk Wheel Tractor Plant, arriving by helicopter. But he was forced to end his speech, which mixed pleas with threats, after workers shouted him down with cries of “Leave!”. Several people were detained in the aftermath. [20] That same day, on the initiative of Tsikhanouskaya, a new opposition Coordination Council on transferring power was set up, and similar councils were formed around the country - and Lukashenka made some vague promises to change the Belarusian constitution via referendum and then hold elections.

## Locked in political struggle

But do protesters have enough real power to carry out these demands? Despite the rise of the protest movement, it’s not so clear cut. In the majority of cases, enterprises have not gone out on strike. Instead, at state enterprises workers are mostly holding public meetings, resolutions and marches. At many plants, management still has the situation under control - for example, at Gomel’s largest factory, the



Gomselmash agricultural equipment manufacturer, workers are simply being locked in their workshops.

The mobilisation of workers to protest has often happened spontaneously, and independent trade unions have long held a “wait and see” position, joining the struggle slightly late. Their influence, it should be said, is extremely limited due to resistance by management. The people who initiated the mobilisations are mostly young workers at the big Minsk factories. In this regard, workers who are older, or who work in the provinces, are more conservative and inert.

Liberal ideologues and commentators are also forcing a purely political agenda onto workers. The Belarusian Independent Trade Union has already announced the creation of a National Strike Committee. Yet it often seems that people who speak for this committee have no relationship to the labour movement. If strike committees do put forward socio-economic demands - for example, an end to the fixed-term contract system or cancelling the pension age rise - then opposition media do not report it. Business, meanwhile, has announced a campaign of material support for striking workers.

Moreover, a new Marxist [Telegram channel](#) (“StrikeBY”, “ZabastovkaBY”) has been set up, which proposes more clear class demands for Belarusian workers. Aside from the demand to recognise the presidential elections as false, this channel proposes to ban privatisation, an end to the fixed-term contract system, the pension reform and the “social parasite” tax, and establish workers’ control at state enterprises. [21] But the influence of this group among workers is limited.

A few weeks before the elections, a conference of left-wing parties and trade unions was held in Minsk - the Just World left-wing party, the Belarusian Green Party, the Belarusian Social Democratic Party (Assembly), Marxist group Common Cause, the Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions, the Independent Union of Metal Workers

and several other organisations. The conference agreed to put forward a joint demand to the alternative candidates to include socio-economic demands in their agenda. Unfortunately, due to disagreement between Just World and the Green Party (of which I am the deputy chair), the conference was unable to agree the final text: the Green Party passed a separate social resolution; the social democrats chose to support Tsikhanouskaya’s liberal programme.

The Coordination Council, now targeted in a criminal investigation, has hardly any delegates from Belarus’ state enterprises, and is mostly made up of representatives from the liberal intelligentsia, including Nobel laureate Svetlana Alexievich, creative professions, business and centre-right opposition parties. [22] Of course, neoliberal reforms remain a priority for them, though they don’t wish to advertise this too strongly in front of most protesters.

The regime has also started actively mobilising their supporters, and one of the central themes of official propaganda has been privatisation. In Belarus’ largely state-owned industry, people are afraid of being left without a job, and the authorities are playing on that fear. The Coordination Council has already publicly distanced itself from the “anti-Russian” section of its programme. But no one in the Coordination Council is in a hurry to distance themselves from neoliberal reforms. And this significantly reduces protest potential in the country.

Moreover, there are several voices on the National Strike Committee that suggest that workers have not come out “for money”, while some in the liberal camp have put forward similar ideas. Despite its apparent idealism, these messages ignore the social component of worker unrest - and serves the true interests of the country’s liberal bourgeoisie. Similar messages were put forward during Ukraine’s Maidan.

In his previous speeches, former

banker Viktor Babaryka and other candidates have tried to give a populist slant to the prospect of mass privatisation. In their opinion, workers who lose their jobs as a result of privatisation will be able to retrain and requalify via state-supported programmes, joining the ranks of small and medium-sized business. The outcome of this proposal for many is clear.

The problem of business in Belarus is not that the state “suffocates” businesspeople. In fact, the government has long limited audits for business. Small business owners, much like the economy as a whole, suffer from high levels of competition, including from transnational corporations, people’s low purchasing power, and global economic crises. The promise to make Belarus’ economy “blossom” by turning millions of workers into individual entrepreneurs is a reactionary utopia. But as political advertising, it finds support among entrepreneurs and young people.

The variety of social forces involved in Belarus’ protests guarantees a broad front, but it also makes this coalition internally fragile. Today, the authorities and their opponents are locked in a political grapple. On the one hand, Aliaksandr Lukashenka, the state bureaucracy and sectors of big business connected to it. The more inert parts of society are also on their side. And then you have a broad spectrum of social groups, from liberal entrepreneurs, workers and service personnel, as well as even some public officials. They have a common aim: democratise the country. But it’s hard to forget that the true interests of the “progressive bourgeoisie” and workers are not the same.

The outcome of the standoff in Belarus is far from being decided. But in any case, the country will never be the same. The authoritarian model of power has entered the most serious crisis in its existence.

21 August 2020

[Open Democracy](#)

# Minneapolis in Paris

23 August 2020, by **Jean Beaman**

On July 19, 2016, Adama Traore, a 24-year-old Black construction worker, was killed after an arrest by three police officers in Beaumont-sur-Oise, a northern banlieue, or suburban outskirt, of Paris. Adama was stopped for an identity check—a not uncommon measure by which police officers stop individuals and ask for their identification (often disproportionately targeting Black and Arab individuals). In this case, Adama was taken to a nearby police station and by the time he arrived, he was dead. The police originally stated that he had died of a heart attack, and then said he had prior health conditions which caused his death. In late May, the three police officers were cleared in their involvement for Adama's death.

Assa Traore is Adama's 35-year-old sister and is leading the movement for justice for her brother and other victims of police violence through the collectif, Comité Vérité et Justice pour Adama. On June 2, 2020, more than 20,000 protestors demonstrated outside of the High Court in Paris (in defiance of France's quarantine-related prohibition of gatherings larger than 10 people). As this demonstration was a mere week after the murder of George Floyd by police officer Derek Chauvin in Minneapolis on May 25, 2020, many assumed that this demonstration was just like any of the other protests throughout the United States (and the world) in the aftermath of this death. However, what activists in Paris and elsewhere in France are doing is making a direct connection between the police violence and injustice facing Black Americans with the long-standing police violence and injustice facing Black and Arab individuals in France, and around the world. Simply put, as both Adama and George's last words revealed, neither of them could breathe.

"Justice pour Adama, Justice pour

George Floyd, Justice pour Tous!" or "Justice for Adama, Justice for George Floyd, Justice for everyone," protest signs read. Adama and George's deaths are connected, and so too are the anti-racist protests.

As an ethnographer and scholar of race and racism in France for over a decade, I remember hearing of Adama's death in a New York Times headline—"Black Lives Matter in France, Too"—on July 29, 2016. But Black and Arab, or Maghrebin-origin, individuals have long known—through the histories and legacies of colonial slavery and colonial rule—that the state does not value their lives.

State violence does not just refer to killings by the police or police violence more generally, but also the myriad ways the state rejects and devalues Black individuals, as well as the "normality" of this devaluing and disregard. As anthropologist Nicolas De Genova argues in this journal, "Police racism is not exclusively an expression of specifically anti-Black racism but rather the systemic reflex of an all-encompassing regime of the white supremacy that has been the bedrock of U.S. national formation." But white supremacy does not just undergird the formation of the U.S., but also the formation of what we now understand to be Europe, including France. And this fact is crucial to understanding the state of global racism and white supremacy, and anti-racist struggles in both societies.<sup>2</sup>

## HOW WE GOT HERE

During the summer of 2019, I met up with an older white woman activist in Paris's 5th arrondissement who has long been involved in Left and anti-racist struggles in France. She sighed and said, "No one did anything after 2005, so we're here now. I know this

in my heart... we are in a dictatorship, no longer a democracy. And what we have now in France, and around the world is unbearable."

"Justice pour Adama, Justice pour George Floyd, Justice pour Tous!" or "Justice for Adama, Justice for George Floyd, Justice for everyone," protest signs read. Adama and George's deaths are connected, and so too are the anti-racist protests.

By "2005," she is referring to the 2005 uprisings in various banlieues throughout France, understood by many as acts of violence by postcolonial immigrants and their descendants refusing to integrate into mainstream society, and not as spurred by the deaths of two France-born ethnic minority youths - Zyed Benna and Bouna Traoré- by the French police in Clichy-sous-Bois, a banlieue north of Paris.<sup>3</sup> The media and popular attention these uprisings received focused on the "other France," that France not seen in glossy images of Paris boulevards, or reflected in the motto of "liberté, égalité, fraternité." Such images of burning cars and buildings seemingly threatened France's model of assimilation and integration. Local and state politicians proposed various reforms to improve schools, amenities, and public transportation in these communities following the uprisings, yet as my interlocutor explained, not much actually changed since that time.

Yet, Zyed and Bouna's deaths were not as unique or exceptional as it might have appeared. We can draw a genealogy of state violence against Black and Arab individuals during French colonial rule in the Maghreb and other parts of Africa, the Caribbean, and parts of Asia, to the present-day. This state violence includes the 1961 Algerian War of Independence, including how the police drowned about dozens of

Algerian protestors in the Seine river in Paris, or the death of Lamine Dieng in July 2007, a 25-year old of Senegalese origin who was born in France, following a struggle with multiple police officers in during which he was restrained face down on the street with his hands tied behind his back and his feet strapped together Paris's 20th arrondissement. According to BastaMag, there have been more than 700 deaths due to police intervention in France since 1977. In other words, state violence—whether it involves identity checks (les contrôles d'identité) or actual killings by the police—has become routine and normalized, especially against Black and Arab individuals.

When we focus on France's colonial empire and postcolonial legacies, it becomes clear that state violence and racism have been integral to the construction of modern France as we understand it, and that populations racialized as Black have long had to simultaneously survive and resist state repression. In France—and indeed, throughout Europe—this repression relies on a racial logic of white supremacy that sees Zyed, Bouna, Lamine, or Adama as forever outsiders. As Stephen Small<sup>4</sup> notes, Black people throughout Europe are simultaneously hypervisible and invisible, and alongside this history of racism there is a long-standing tradition of resistance. This is reflected not only in the demonstrations for Adama and other victims of state violence, but also in the formation of anti-racist and anti-colonial groups such as Les Indigènes de la République [Natives of the Republic] or La Brigade Anti-Nérophobie [Brigade anti-Negrophobia].

Just as the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States has its origins in earlier periods of struggle for Black liberation in the United States and around the world, so too does present anti-racist mobilization make similar global and temporal connections. We need to pay attention to both the local and place-specific contexts of these struggles, as well as what unites them worldwide.

As Frantz Fanon reminds us, we can

never forget the relevance of colonialism for delineating these boundaries between insiders and outsiders, and for establishing hierarchies of superiority and inferiority based on race. For example, in a conversation with Mamadou<sup>5</sup>, a 47-year-old activist who was born in Guadeloupe and moved to mainland France when he was two years old, he explained to me how “what's happening in France is just reproducing what happened in the colonies. Post-colonialism is just a myth, what we have now is neo-colonialism. Nothing has changed, the ideas are the same. This is a bigger problem than just police violence.” So we cannot discuss or understand present-day racism, both in France and globally, without understanding how these present struggles are just the latest enunciation of ongoing anti-Blackness, Islamophobia, and global racism.

## WHERE DO BLACK LIVES MATTER?

After the murder of Michael Brown, an unarmed Black American man in Ferguson, Missouri in August 2014, scholar and activist Angela Davis noted that “Ferguson reminds us of the importance of a global context... The militarization of the police leads us to think about Israel and the militarization of the police there—if only the images of the police and not of the demonstrators had been shown, one might have assumed that Ferguson was Gaza.”<sup>6</sup> But the importance of the global context extends beyond the structure of police and policing, but also to the structure of anti-racist mobilization. Following Brown's death, some activists in Paris formed a collective, Ferguson in Paris, connecting incidents of state violence against Black Americans like Michael Brown with similar incidents in France through social media campaigns and demonstrations in the Paris metropolitan region. To them, the death of Michael Brown echoed the many deaths of Black and Arab individuals for which there has been no justice. As their Facebook page

explains, they aim to show that what is happening in France is happening in the United States, and also around the world.

In other words, we should not look at the present solely through a United States-based lens, but rather consider how racial and ethnic minorities are connecting their racial oppression and anti-racist struggles worldwide. These global connections have their roots in earlier moments of diasporic solidarity and Black internationalism, as articulated by the Nardal sisters in the 1920s. Black individuals are making transnational connections regarding how it feels to be rejected by the state. Again, this is not to center the United States as the locus of such knowledge, but rather to consider global solidarities in the experiences of and mobilization against global white supremacy. Just as the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States has its origins in earlier periods of struggle for Black liberation in the United States and around the world, so too does present anti-racist mobilization make similar global and temporal connections. We need to pay attention to both the local and place-specific contexts of these struggles, as well as what unites them worldwide.

On a Le Média program on June 15, 2020, not long after the massive demonstration at the High Court of Justice, “En Finir avec les Violences Policières” [Ending Police Violence] activist Almamy Kanouté, a child of Malian immigrants, explained, “The conditions that killed, or assassinated, George Floyd are the same that killed Adama Traore, Lamine Dieng, all the others. The list is so long, sorry, I cannot name everyone ... French police and American police are one in the same.” This is one reason why protestors in France can demonstrate against Adama's death and George Floyd's—without minimizing one or the other. We must pay attention to how police violence and racism has and continues to be normalized in both U.S. and Europe, so it therefore is not surprising that anti-racism mobilization is also global and interconnected.

That same month the European Parliament voted to declare that Black Lives Matter and to condemn the

death of George Floyd. Yet Black and Arab individuals in France—and the rest of Europe—are still waiting.

So we need to understand these present anti-racist demonstrations as a way that activists are mobilizing across nation-state lines and illustrating how both anti-blackness

and racism, and the movements against them, are global. As when Assa remarked, when I met with her in 2017 in the offices of her book publisher, Seuil, in Paris's 14th arrondissement: "When we mobilize with others, we intimidate the state. That's why they want to separate us." In the aftermath of both George Floyd and Adama Traore's deaths, both men

were framed as violent or delinquent. Global mobilization against state violence is crucial for explaining how the state enacts violence on all Black lives.

*August 18, 2020*

[Spectre](#)

# United States: A new stage in Black Lives Matter's battle against Trump's state violence

22 August 2020, by **Malik Miah**

Trump has unleashed the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to bring military-style agencies onto the streets of Portland, Oregon and other cities to attack BLM in the name of protecting federal property. Trump's agents initiate the violence then blame demonstrators defending themselves for the confrontations. The right-wing media then broadcasts the images as "proof" that protesters are allegedly burning down cities.

Mayors and governors have denounced these illiberal actions as a violation of state rights and free speech. The movement in Portland and other cities has grown in response.

## Trump's game plan

Trump is sending his agents to cities with Democratic mayors and governors. The broad reaction to these "secret police" led by Trump, Attorney General William Barr and others is resistance.

Trump's aim is to distract and deflect from his failures of leadership. He is preparing to declare the November presidential election as impossible to hold. Finalising the results of the

election, if held, could take "months, even years", he says. It is a sign that what has happened in other countries can occur here.

The Portland upsurge against local police and now federal agents was initiated by leaders in the Black community (which makes up less than 3% of Portland's population), but there was an almost immediate outpouring of participation from whites. The broad resistance shows that the American people are not ready for a Putin-style dictatorship.

Portland stood firm for more than 60 days — facing off against vicious local police and then Trump's federal agents. The White House was forced to pull back their agents, which occupied the city for most of July, even though it denies doing so.

## Eyewitness report from Portland

According to Portland-based socialist activist and author Johanna Brenner, "Thousands of people showing up night after night, for two weeks straight, to protest the presence of Trump's police was key to the "deal" the Governor [Kate Brown] struck to get the feds to go."

In accordance with the deal, Oregon state troopers would take over from the federal agents.

"The fury about the federals' over-policing extended to state and local policing, so the Governor promised that the state troopers would not be provoked by small acts like having bottles thrown over the fence or fire-crackers set off.

"[Brown] promised not to use tear gas, except in extreme circumstances, none of which, she said, had been present over the last weeks. The Mayor [Ted Wheeler] promised the same.

"Of course, we shall see - but still a significant concession," said Brenner. "Trump embarrassed them immensely by doing what local police had been allowed to do."

"On Thursday night [July 30], the first night that the Oregon state troopers took over "protection" of the federal court house, the crowd was substantial, although not as large as previous demonstrations. There were many instances where the people in the protest disciplined others — for example, when some people lit two small fires, others doused them with water, when a protestor took a piece of wood and banged on the fence,



others told her to quit and forced her to stop, and many people speaking called on everyone to keep their attention on the movement for Black lives, not the fence or the building.

"On Friday [July 31], the fencing came down, although the windows of the building remain boarded up. The downtown was pretty quiet.

"The statue in the park across from the federal courthouse that had been cleaned of graffiti Thursday was once again painted on Friday, but come on, kids need to have fun.

"Whether further protests will be called remains to be seen," said Brenner. "I think there will be, because organising continues around police accountability and de-funding at the local and at the state levels.

"Still, I will not stand by any prediction I make - this is an amazingly unpredictable political time."

Eyewitness Bette Lee told Counterpunch on July 31: "I was heartened to see so many recent newcomers like the 'Wall of Moms', the dads, veterans, teachers, union workers, nurses, doctors and healthcare workers at the protest, as well as the die-hards who had been at the frontlines for 58 nights.

"Their presence makes it much harder for Trump, his supporters and critics of the BLM protesters to separate us into 'good' vs 'bad' protesters, or to demonise us all as 'violent anarchists'.

"The government, police and law enforcement agencies have a long history of suppressing many political movements for social change in the past by using this strategy of criminalising our right to dissent and by deploying police and law enforcement violence to crush the resistance."

Trump's support is declining as he mishandles the coronavirus pandemic and anti-cop protests. Further, the economy is crashing. GDP had its worst quarterly decline since modern records began after World War II — at 9.5%. Some economists say it is the worst decline since 1875.

Trump continues his attempt to undermine fair elections. He assigned former fundraiser Louis De Joy as Postmaster General to slow down the processing of mail. This could lead to postal ballots not being processed in time during the November election.

## ***Agent provocateur in Minneapolis***

Trump's smear against BLM leaders was recently exposed as fraudulent in Minneapolis, where the anti-cop, pro-Black lives movement began after George Floyd's death in May.

From the start of the mass protests, white supremacists inspired by Trump have infiltrated the movement. The big lie told by Trump has been that Blacks and others are the instigators of violent actions at federal landmarks and Confederate monuments. In his mind, these symbols represent "true (white) America".

However, facts have emerged confirming that the agent provocateur in Minneapolis was a right-wing vigilante.

Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison, a progressive Black politician, said in May he was not convinced that the left was behind the violence. He said it was likely an agent provocateur on the right. Ellison said at the time: "Far-right extremists are hoping to turn the George Floyd protests into a new civil war."

An "Umbrella Man" was filmed smashing the windows of a car parts dealership on May 27, two days after the police killed Floyd. Investigators reported in July that the man is a white supremacist, who sought to provoke violence against protesters.

A Minneapolis arson investigator wrote in an affidavit: "This was the first fire that set off a string of fires and looting throughout the precinct and the rest of the city."

In the 1960s, the FBI ran a program called COINTELPRO, targeting civil rights and Black leaders as well as those on the left. The language Trump uses today was used back then — and the attacks were bipartisan.

Organisations such as the Black Panther Party and militant Black workers, such as the League of Revolutionary Black Workers in Detroit's car plants, were targeted for attacks.

Leaders of the Panthers were assassinated. Pan Africanists who supported the colonial revolutions faced scrutiny. It was not surprising that both Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr were assassinated in their prime.

The mass incarceration of African Americans and Latinos occurred in the 1970s and '80s to demonise and criminalise African Americans and people of colour. The Democratic and Republican parties supported this policy of mass jailing of Black and Brown people.

## **Some concern on focus**

This is the historical context for why there is some concern in the broader BLM movement that the struggle is focusing too much on the federal thugs and not on the issue of Black lives. This includes some moderate leaders in Portland, Seattle, Minneapolis and other cities. Many Black elected officials say efforts should focus on voting rights and the November elections.

This is not new. Historically, Black protesters were labelled by the police and government as "violent rioters", "communists" and "terrorists" to convince whites to stay away from demonstrations.

Today, a majority of the public and youth back the movement for Black lives. It includes mainly whites in rural areas.

Before the changes won in housing since the 1960s - many of which still stand - Blacks could not live in the suburbs. Today about 13% of Blacks do; while only 8% live in urban areas due to gentrification. San Francisco's Black population, for example, is less than 5%, down from double digits in the 1970s.

It is not surprising that some Black

activists are concerned about the focus of some allies being the government's defence of federal property.

Journalist Anne Branigin raised the issue of Portland's "Wall of Moms" in an article on popular Black website The Root. [23] She wrote: "The mostly white group of mothers has been accused of 'anti-Blackness' by another local group led by Black organisers, who say the Wall of Moms overlooked the safety of Black protesters during the demonstrations and were not truly invested in the cause.

"Don't Shoot Portland, a social justice and mutual aid group first formed in 2014, made the allegations public on Wednesday [July 29] via its Instagram. In it, the org[anisation] disclosed behind-the-scenes tensions between Black organisers and the Wall of Moms, who had recently agreed to cede leadership roles to Black leaders.

"This concern about co-option is at the heart of Don't Shoot Portland's callout.

"We were used to further an agenda unrelated to BLM,' said the group.

'We need everyone to show up against racism, but it's even more crucial to prioritise transparency and accountability.'"

How valid is the concern? Since African Americans are the leaders of the movement, it is not likely. The focus remains Black lives, even with Trump's use of federal thugs — something Blacks face all the time. It is new for many white demonstrators.

The success of the Portland mass protests against the federal agents and for Black lives does not take away from Black activists' concerns. Allies in the past have moved on as African Americans continued to resist, since simply being Black can lead to police violence and the loss of one's life.

## Mind the final words of John Lewis

On July 30, an Op-Ed written by John Lewis before his death was printed in The New York Times. It is a

noteworthy reminder of the importance of protests. One of Lewis' final actions was to stand on "Black Lives Plaza" in front of the White House in solidarity with the mass upsurge.

Lewis wrote: "Emmett Till was my George Floyd. He was my Rayshard Brooks, Sandra Bland and Breonna Taylor. He was 14 when he was killed, and I was only 15 years old at the time. I will never ever forget the moment when it became so clear that he could easily have been me.

"Like so many young people today, I was searching for a way out, or some might say a way in, and then I heard the voice of Dr Martin Luther King Jr on an old radio. He was talking about the philosophy and discipline of nonviolence. He said we are all complicit when we tolerate injustice. He said it is not enough to say it will get better by and by. He said each of us has a moral obligation to stand up, speak up and speak out. When you see something that is not right, you must say something. You must do something."

[Green Left](#)

# In Belarus, the Left Is Fighting to Put Social Demands at the Heart of the Protests

21 August 2020, by **Volodymyr Artiukh**

The police brutality in Minsk is often said to be without parallel in Europe: something that France's gilet jaunes protestors would surely deny. Yet something definitely is changing in Belarus, after unprecedented popular support for opposition candidates challenged the twenty-six-year rule of president Alexander Lukashenko. When authorities claimed that he had taken 80 percent of the vote in the August 9 election — and crowds took to the streets to protest — the state unleashed police terror against them.

The street demonstrations were

initially dominated by urban youth. Yet, as I have shown in a recent article, the protest has in recent days changed form, expanding into a wider working-class movement involving widespread workplace mobilizations. Actions spanning most of the country's biggest industrial sites have seen thousands of workers gathering, discussing their demands, and threatening a general shutdown.

So, everything in Belarus is said to be "unprecedented." Yet one can, indeed, find precedents, in Poland's Solidarnosc or the miners' strikes in

the late Soviet Union — examples of worker militancy allied to wider protest movements that unwittingly paved the way for neoliberal transformations. The tragic story of labor in the post-Soviet space thus calls for a careful and grounded approach to the recent events in Belarus.

In order to shed some light on the contradictions of Belarusian society and the condition of its working class, I interviewed two representatives of the Belarusian left, who asked not to reveal their identities. "Ksenia

Kunitskaya" is a member of Poligraf online magazine, and "Vitaly Shkurin" is a Belarus-based author of September, a leftist media platform covering the post-Soviet space. Both of them have connections in activist circles and are well placed to assess the situation from a working-class perspective.

**VA: It seems that neither analysts nor Belarusian authorities expected unrest on this scale around the elections that took place on August 9. What sparked the pre-electoral mobilization and the subsequent protests? In what wider political conjuncture should we see them?**

KK: The first reason is the fatigue that has long built up among much of the population on account of Lukashenko's quarter-century rule. His approach is apparent in his abrupt style of communication with both opponents and his own subordinates, often resembling casual rudeness. This is aggravated by the indifference shown by local officials, following not the mood of the people but the mood of the leader. These qualities clearly manifested themselves during the government mishandling of the COVID-19 epidemic, which massively irritated the population.

Additionally, the government has been consistently dismantling the welfare state model and its social obligations to its citizens. This was apparent with the 2004 introduction of individual contracts with workers instead of collective agreements; the 2017 "tax on unemployment"; and the exclusion of military service, maternity leave, and university or college studies from the years that count toward your pension. The tight monetary policy of the past five years also led to a wage freeze, while prices continued to rise.

VS: The last ten years saw a depoliticization of Belarusians. After the failed post-election protests of 2010 and the subsequent "clapping revolution" [when people clapped in the street to show their dissent, fearing that they would be arrested if they mounted protests], many members of parties and movements suffered state repression.

In 2017, after the government introduced the so-called tax on unemployment, Belarus saw protests not only in Minsk, but also in small provincial towns, for the first time in six years. This tax was then postponed. But it seemed that after the defeat of oppositional parties and movements, the new opposition to Lukashenko appeared only in the vague form of "Belarusians."

Since a substantial share of Belarusian economy is still state-owned, the "common people" — Lukashenko's own usual voters — consist of workers of state-owned factories, schoolteachers, or doctors. In recent years, the public sector has been starved of money, which led to falling wages, contraction of the labor force, forced unpaid vacations, and a rising retirement age. Obviously, this did politicize the "common people," but unfortunately no strong positive agenda emerged.

KK: Besides, the authorities paid little attention to their positive image in the eyes of the population. Our state propaganda is very weak and often looks ridiculous: "We have never lived as well as we do now," they claim. Their opponents, however, have created an effective system of professional, modern, electronic media. Through this, they highlight the state's shortcomings and conduct propaganda in favor of neoliberal reforms and a nationalist memory politics. This allowed the liberal-nationalist opposition to mobilize supporters before the elections, to catch the authorities on numerous cases of vote rigging, and to bring people to the streets.

Additionally, the harsh police actions — the use of stun grenades, water cannons and tear gas, tortures of the detainees — aroused indignation not only among opposition supporters but also shocked those who were not previously interested in politics.

**VA: What kind of Belarusians have tended to support Lukashenko — and is this support now coming apart? Is this to do with the weakening of the tradeoff of "no political rights, but still welfare rights"?**

KK: After Lukashenko's first electoral victory in 1994, his support was very wide, comprising proponents of an alliance with Russia and the revival of the USSR, opponents of tough market reforms, and Russian speakers dissatisfied with the policy of "Belarusianization." Village residents perceived him as "their guy." In the 2000s, he attracted supporters with a policy of constant wage growth, promising to bring the average salary to \$500 and even \$1,000 a month.

A series of economic crises prevented this dream from being realized. The union with Russia also suffers due to the contradictions among Russian and Belarusian elites. And the campaigns to raise wages were replaced by a tight monetary policy, in the spirit of IMF recommendations.

Independent sociology in modern Belarus is practically banned, and state-associated sociologists do not publish data, so it is difficult to judge the president's real ratings. Obviously, it is less than in the 1990s and 2000s, and the harsh police actions clearly did not add to his popularity. At the same time, the opinion popular among the opposition that Lukashenko's rating is only 3 percent is most likely a myth.

VS: I think that Lukashenko's economic model based on the re-export of Russian oil has exhausted itself, since Russia increased its oil price for Belarus and global prices plummeted. Obviously, Lukashenko cannot sustain the current level of welfare for the population, so for him, neoliberalism seems to be the only exit route.

However, we must remember that a high share of employment in the public sector means that workplaces are also sites of political control. As the unofficial unemployment rate in Belarus is quite high (about 10 percent) and unemployment benefits are about \$10 per month, being unemployed is not very comfortable. Public-sector employees must regularly participate in other activities to save their workplaces: working Saturdays, voting in early elections (where falsifications mostly occur), and even participating in elections as members of electoral committees and

falsifying results. Employment in the public sector is based on fixed-term contracts that prevent an employee from easily leaving — but allow an employer to get rid of the worker at will. Obviously, at some point, many public-sector employees realized that there is no way out, except for voting against Lukashenko.

At the same time, we can identify new strata that support Lukashenko: his servants in the sphere of ideology and power. By the former, I mean a new generation of pro-government “public experts” employed in various state-owned institutions (from universities to dubious “public organizations”). They are regular guests on state-owned, independent, and foreign media, where they promote the Belarusian state. As opposed to the old establishment of boring Soviet-style clerks, these people are bright in their speeches and their appearance. The old Soviet-style official establishment also strongly supports Lukashenko, as outside of his system they are useless.

The police and secret services are the second stratum of Lukashenko supporters. They have special welfare benefits that include subsidies for the purchase of housing, early retirement, health care in special clinics, vacation in sanatoriums, etc. The number of police in Belarus is not publicly known, but the interior minister said in 2016 that there are 405 police officers per 100,000 citizens, and according to a 2013 UN estimate, this number is 1,442 per 100,000. This job is also a significant factor for social mobility: people from small towns without employment can move to bigger cities to work as police. In exchange, they must blindly obey orders: we can see the outcome on the first days of the protests, when stun grenades and tear gas were used against relatively small and disarmed groups of protesters. Police and secret services are outside of public control, and, significantly, the new, shiny “ideology men” have ties with them.

**VA: How would you describe the social constitution of the protesters, their social and class profile, ideologies, and grievances?**

KK: First, there is the traditional opposition from the 1990s:

nationalists, liberals, and the intelligentsia sympathetic to them. Second, there are urban youth, businessmen, and the likes of IT specialists, who call themselves progressive, Western, and anti-Soviet. During the election campaign, the opposition headquarters managed to mobilize a slightly wider population, at least from large cities. The politicization in society during the pre-election days was extremely high. A lot of disaffected citizens were actively involved as election observers.

Now, wider sections of the society are joining, shocked by the unprecedented police violence and outraged by electoral fraud. Some of them had been dissatisfied with their economic situation but had passively supported Lukashenko as the “lesser evil” compared to the right-wing opposition. The national liberals involved in the electoral process did not speak openly about their program, only about fair elections and later about reducing police violence as an end in itself.

VS: Despite many orthodox communists’ belief that this is a “hipster-programmer revolution,” many young protesters are factory workers, taxi drivers, and students. I don’t think we can attribute any specific ideology to this spontaneous movement. Protesters carry Belarusian official [green-and-red] flags as well as the old flags [white-red-white flags that served as national symbols in 1991–1994]. Since the latter dominate, some argue that the protests are nationalist. But as I said, the leaders of the traditional nationalist opposition are in jail, and there were no conflicts about symbols among protesters. When protesters started using violence against the police, we can suspect that the organized football fans were involved, but they are still small groups.

**VA: How would you compare these protests to other mobilizations in Belarus and in the region?**

VS: All protests before 2010 had a strong nationalist politics, but already the 2011 “clapping revolution” had no such agenda. After Ukraine’s Maidan in 2014, nationalism was back in vogue among protesters — it became

commodified as a brand of new, successful, more “European” Belarusians. The current protests are even further removed from nationalism and rather more reminiscent of the protests of 2017, when large crowds all around Belarus protested against the tax on unemployment.

This year’s protests have two peculiarities: they lack any political and social agenda apart from contesting election results, and they are scattered around Belarus. Before 2017, almost all big demonstrations happened in Minsk and followed the same scenario: big procession through the city center, gathering on a big square, and the subsequent hard beating by police. Except for 2006, when there was a tent camp on the main square, they lasted for a day. But these protests have already lasted for four days in different cities and towns, not only in Minsk. Even in the capital, protesters do not occupy one place, mostly because the city center is under police control from early evenings. Throughout the evening and night, protests can happen in different districts; protesters run from the police and return after police’s retreat.

KK: Most significantly, the scale of violence has become such that it is no longer perceived as an abstract picture in the news. A huge number of people have seen and experienced this themselves or have victims among friends and relatives. The opposition does not formally propose anything that could lead to a conflict of interests of different classes and social groups, only new elections — this has become an additional mobilization factor.

VS: Most violence comes from the police: never before in Belarus were flash grenades, tear gas, and rubber bullets used on such a scale. I think the state wanted to intimidate protesters, but this had the opposite effect of prolonging the unrest. Besides, the scale of violence is clear from the amount of people detained — never before did we have three thousand people in jail over one night.

Finally, on the fourth day after the elections, we saw a new dimension of



protest activity: statements from labor collectives across the country about possible strikes. Unfortunately, these statements mostly do not include any social demands, only the demands to stop the police violence, release all detainees, and hold fresh elections. Anyway, there has been no (legal) strike activity in Belarus since 1991.

Also, the internet as the efficient communication medium was used for the first time, although during the first three days of protests, foreign internet traffic was disrupted, and most people used VPNs and proxy servers. Thus, by analogy with “Twitter revolutions” during the Arab Spring of 2011, the protests in Belarus can be called a “Telegram revolution.” Telegram messenger was founded by Pavel Durov after his emigration from Russia, and it became popular among post-Soviet users to buy drugs (basically it resembled access to a dark net, only without any hard technical skills being needed on the user’s part). In 2018, a young emigrant from Belarus in Poland started the Telegram channel “Nexta” (“нєхтa,” meaning “someone” in Belarusian), and it gained popularity among Belarusians because of “insider” posts about Belarusian authorities.

Obviously, one guy can’t organize a network of insiders, and there are suspicions that various journalists and media specialists who emigrated during the years of Lukashenko’s rule work for it. Nexta and a network of affiliated Telegram channels shared photos and videos from different spots during the protests. Before the first protest night, they posted “instructions on how to protest carefully,” but without radical things like recipes for Molotov cocktails. Besides, Nexta provided scenarios of protests that people mostly followed. If, on the first night, this scenario was one place in Minsk and big squares in small towns, on the next two nights, the scenario implied movement of small groups in Minsk’s sleeper districts and big streets in small towns. Sometimes Nexta was really provocative: “Just one last push, let’s show the police our solidarity,” “[Town X] calls for help, police are beating our women.” After the internet started working, Telegram

channels lost some of their influence. The protests started occurring mostly in daylight and had exceptionally peaceful character, mostly in the form of “chains of solidarity”: lines of people, mostly women, holding flowers along the main streets.

I don’t see similarities between these protests in Belarus and previous protests in Eastern Europe. Some try to find similarities with Euromaidan in Kiev in 2014, but this is a purely ideological tool to justify Lukashenko and show that no alternative is possible. In contrast to Euromaidan, Belarusian protests have no big far-right groups that lead and use violence. We have a couple of ultras gangs, but after Euromaidan, most of them were repressed by the police. In Belarus, there’s no language and ideological conflict, as in Ukraine. Finally, in contrast to Euromaidan, the Belarusian protests have no leader: traditional opposition figures are in jail, and the presidential candidate Sviatlana Tikhanovskaya is in Lithuania. I am absolutely sure it can’t lead to war like in Donbass: there’s no ideological conflict between West and East, as in Ukraine in 2014.

**VA: How would you describe the current situation of the Belarusian left?**

KK: The left-wing movement has been in crisis for a long time, because Lukashenko himself used quasi-socialist slogans to come to power. When right-wingers call him “Soviet” and “communist,” he doesn’t seem to mind. Soviet monuments, street names, and holidays have been preserved in full in Belarus. So, somehow it was “decided” that he was a “leftist.” Additionally, under a dictatorship, only those non-state political forces and media can survive that are fed from abroad. It is well known that large American and European funds donate money to non-communists.

As a result, we do not have large left-wing media outlets and parties capable of supporting at least part of the leadership. Under these conditions, we have two “communist” parties. The first is called Communist Party of Belarus, and it supports the regime (including its most odious

antisocial measures); the other, A Just World, supports the liberal opposition in demands for regime change, focusing less on the class agenda. There are also grassroots initiatives: Marxist circles, small media, interest groups, small associations of anarchists.

VS: The party of the Left “A Just World” split from the Communist Party in 1996 after Lukashenko’s first referendum shifted the balance of power toward the president. Today, it stands against both Lukashenko and against Western-oriented opposition. The Belarusian Green Party, founded in 1994 and oriented against nuclear energy, developed a left and anti-authoritarian agenda. It is quite strong and, in contrast to A Just World, is less oriented on Marxist-Leninist classics. Also, we’ve got three social-democratic parties, some of whose members do have strong social orientations, but most are part of the Western-oriented oppositional establishment.

Belarus used to have a big and strong anarchist movement, maybe the strongest in post-Soviet space, connected to a punk-hardcore scene. Some of them infiltrated the Green Party; some ended up in jail. It is hard to say anything about anarchists’ activity now, because they are still the main target of repression. Some anarchist groups don’t call themselves “left-wing,” for they wrongly associate it with pro-Soviet “tankies”; some find their support from the Western-oriented nationalist opposition.

Finally, a Russian fashion of “Left YouTube” and Marxist kruzhenki (small self-education organizations) reached Belarus in recent years. Unfortunately, much of their content is not so much about their own agenda but a fierce criticism of the Western-oriented opposition. They charm their viewers with Soviet nostalgia or Soviet resentment more than propose a positive agenda for building a wide democratic social movement. This Left YouTube and kruzhenki are not bad in themselves, but they can’t be seen as the only strategy for the Left, such as they often propose.

**VA: What is the attitude of these various groups to this political**

## conjunction and the protests?

KK: Part of the Left is ready to directly support the liberal protest, mostly at the level of grassroots activist involvement and statements. Another part believes that the people have the right to protest, that the police violence is unacceptable and outrageous, and that the elections were rigged, but cannot take the side of the liberal opposition. For its goals are to continue the privatization of enterprises, to curtail free medicine, and introduce even more labor flexibility than we have now.

Recently, a small grassroots initiative has emerged with a purpose of bringing economic and social demands to the workers' protest agenda, since at the moment, all workers' protests are centered around broad political demands: Lukashenko's resignation, the release of political prisoners, lawsuits against the security forces, fair elections.

VS: All the left-wing parties refused to participate in presidential elections during the pandemic; and anyway, they didn't have enough resources to mobilize common people and activists to turn the popular discontent with Lukashenko into a socialist agenda.

At the same time, after the state had already started using repression against alternative candidates and their supporters before the elections, many kruzshki and YouTube activists decided not to take notice. They continued to reject any opposition to Lukashenko; some went looking for similarities with Euromaidan, warning of a catastrophic end in decommunization and repression from far-right groups. But mostly they insist on a cunning strategy to develop Left YouTube and kruzshki while the state grapples with the pro-Western, democratic opposition.

For me, this position is a big failure, because it ignores the mood among

Belarusians. They are really tired of Lukashenko's system, and obviously the Left must work with this, not just blame them for being blind sheep that will lead the country into a total market economy. Under Lukashenko's system, working-class or grassroots organizations will never be able to change the situation.

At the same time, when on the fourth day of protests, working-class masses took to the streets and the possibility of strikes became real, almost no left organization or party actually opposed this movement. Everyone tries to organize a strike movement and propose social and economic demands to shift these protests from a purely electoral to a social agenda.

## **VA: To what extent is the working class taking part in the unrest, and what is the role of organized labor?**

VS: Workers' collectives from more than twenty state-owned factories and organizations expressed their desire to strike. After Lukashenko's first dismissive words about strikers ("there were about twenty strikers in some factory," he claimed), some workers from the Minsk Tractor Works marched through Minsk to Parliament to demonstrate their opposition. In my view, this was not specifically class-conscious — it overlapped with the "chains of solidarity against violence." But on August 14, outside Parliament, we could see workers with banners reading, "We are workers, not sheep."

KK: There is only one large national trade-union association, the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus, which has become part of the Lukashenko government's bureaucratic apparatus. All its activities boil down to organizing celebrations of national holidays and issuing vouchers for rest homes. This "trade union" has nothing to do with

protecting workers' rights.

The few independent unions formed in the wake of the early 1990s upsurge in the labor movement were crushed. Only a few enterprises have cells, for example, of the Belarusian Independent Trade Union. These independent trade unions are now more similar to NGOs, relying less on workers' contributions than on foreign grants. Their activities are focused on legal assistance to individual employees who have applied for them.

The last major protest by metro workers in 1995 was brutally suppressed by Lukashenko. Since then, there has been no talk of strikes. Now, we are seeing the first large protest movement of workers since then. So far, these protests look rather like meetings with the management of the enterprises, the "yellow" trade unions, and the local authorities. Now there is news that on August 17, Belaruskali potash miners are planning a strike (the Independent Union's cell has survived there — its chairman was beaten half to death during his arrest). Workers' collectives from the large factories threatened strike action, and this, at least at the time of writing, forced the authorities to rein in police violence.

But so far, workers have put forward only general democratic demands, in line with a broad liberal protest. The protests clearly marked a new trend: traditional political parties, whether left or right, played practically no role in them. The ideological and practical inspiration rather came from the media in a broad sense, including social media. Who has a strong media owns the mind. But now a strong media is in the hands of those who promote the liberal and nationalist agenda. And if the workers are indoctrinated in this, then where would a class-conscious labor movement come from?

[Jacobin](#)

# Triple Crises and the Parliamentary Election

# in Sri Lanka 2020

20 August 2020, by **Vame Handa (Left Voice)**

1. Two times postponed Parliamentary election 2020 in Sri Lanka was finally held on August 5, 2020. The election took place in the midst of three crises, namely, the epidemiological crisis, the economic crisis and the resultant multi-faceted political crisis, all are closely associated with the neoliberal economic policies introduced in 1977 and implemented with some modifications in the last forty-three years. Nonetheless, the reducing the crisis to the crisis of neoliberalism is unwarranted as it neglects the magnitude of the unresolved national question of the island nation. The political crisis had been overdetermined until 2009 by the armed conflict between the Sri Lankan state and the Tamil militant group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) that had come to an end with the decimation of the LTTE by the security forces of the Sri Lankan state in May 2009.

2. The end of the armed conflict although has not yet resolved the national question has given rise two seemingly opposite trends. The first trend is the emergence and the gradual dominance of economic/ class factor in national politics. Since 2009, Sri Lanka has witnessed student uprisings, peasant campaigns, worker strikes and many other forms of class struggles. Trade unions has begun to make demands related to their working conditions and against divestiture of public properties. The second trend has been the strengthening of Sinhala nationalism vis-s-vis Tamil and Muslim nationalisms. This was marked by attacks on Muslim mosques and Christian churches. Riots against Muslims were erupted in many parts of the country instigated by ultra-Sinhala Buddhist politicians and some Buddhist monks. This has in turn led to the strengthening of extreme nationalist feeling among Muslims while some have developed links with ISIS that reached a culmination point

at the allegedly ISIS attacks on three Christian churches in April 2018 killing around 300 people and making equal number of people disabled. Hence, even economic issues were given ethnic readings in turn weakening class-based actions.

3. Thirty years of mixed- economic policies (1947- 1977) and forty-three years of neoliberal policies (1977-2020) have miserably failed in resolving the issues of economic underdevelopment, unemployment, inequality and poverty. The country's domestic and foreign debt have increased to unmanageable level. The destruction of forests and habitats of animals has resulted in the country putting in an ecological imbalance creating the so-called human-elephant conflict. The country that was known to the world as the only country that preserved democracy and social welfare had in the last forty-three years become a quasi-authoritarian regime implementing austerity policies destroying the previous gains in education, health and social welfare. In the last twenty years, inequality in wealth and income has substantially increased. Hence this is nothing other than a crisis of capitalism that calls for systemic transformation.

4. Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, a former army officer and brother of Mahinda Rajapaksa, former president (2005-2015) who was defeated at the 2015 presidential election, won with 6.9 million votes at the presidential election defeating Sajith Premadasa, the son of the former president R Premadasa (1988- 1993). After winning the election, the president and his new cabinet announced a three-pronged economic policy framework. It includes (1) inward-looking economic policies; (2) granting substantial concession to domestic bourgeoisie and tax concession to high income earners; and (3) proposal to give employment to 50,000

unemployed graduates and 100,000 multi-purpose jobs to people with low educational qualifications. However, the government had to face a challenge of paying around \$ 6 billion loan and interest payment in 2020. Since the government had no intention to go for debt default, only way to face this crisis was debt rescheduling and/ or getting more loans from the international capital market and international financial agencies. Epidemiological crisis caused by Covid-19 virus hits two months after presidential election that first generate a supply shock in variety of ways and eventually a demand shock and financial shock.

5. At the same time a political crisis occurred since the new government had no majority in the Parliament. The constitution allows the president to dissolve Parliament after four and a half years of its election. Parliament was dissolved and the issues of finance and the re-convening of the Parliament were raised by the opposition and the civil society actors. Hence, the election was two times postponed. Meanwhile, the main opposition party, the United National Party (UNP) experienced a major split and the two groups decided to contest separately.

6. Parliamentary election 2020 gave Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) and its allies a two-third majority in the parliament. This had been considered as an impossible task under the proportional representation system. Final result of the election was:

Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna 145

Samagi Jana Balavegaya (SJB-breakaway of UNP) 54

Illankai Tamil Arasu Kachchi 10

National Peoples' Power (JVP) 03

Eelam Peoples Democratic Party 02  
 Akila Ilankai Tamil Congress 02  
 Tamil Makkal Vidudalei Pulikal 01  
 Sri Lanka Freedom Party 01  
 Muslim National Alliance 01  
 Tamil Makkal Thesiya Kuttani 01  
 All Ceylon Muslim Congress 01  
 National Congress 01  
 Sri Lanka Muslim Congress 01  
 United National Party 01  
 Ape Jana Bala Party (extreme Sinhala)  
 01  
 Total 225

As the breakaway group of the UNP gained 54 seats in the parliament, the UNP had recorded its worst election results failing to win at least one electoral seat. It got one seat from the national list. The Illankai Thamil Arasu Kachchi (TNA) failed to maintain its 16 seats in the last parliament and it won only 10 seats. Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) contested the election forming a center-left formation called National Peoples Power obtained 3 seats. It had 6 seats in the last Parliament. Vickramabahu Karunaratna, the leader of the NSSP who contested from the UNP to Kalutara district failed to get into the parliament. Vasudeva Nanayakkara (Democratic Peoples Front) and Veerasumana (Sri Lanka Communist Party) who contested under SLPP were able to enter the parliament. None of the left parties that includes Frontline Socialist Party (FLSP), United Socialist Party and Socialist Party of Sri Lanka failed to win a seat.

7. Massive victory of the SLPP has been interpreted in many ways. Commentators associated with left parties saw it as an outcome of action of the people who were gradually but consistently mesmerized by Sinhala Buddhist ideology. Vickramabahu Karunaratna (NSSP- UNP) informed after the election people were hypnotized so that it is not correct to say that the election result signified a rational human action. Jayatilaka

Kammellaweera, a national list candidate of the NPP saw election result as a reflection of a bankrupt cultural tradition. Some have mistakenly reiterated Bertolt Brecht's statement that what was necessary is to elect 'new people'. Left Voice posits that this kind of theorization is subjectivist and neglects the socio-economic crisis that has been operating underneath, the dominance of Sinhala- Buddhist majoritarianism notwithstanding. We firmly believe what Bensaid said in the following remark. "Political representation is not the simple manifestation of a social nature. Political class struggle is not the superficial mirroring of an essence. .. it operates by displacements and condensations of social contradictions. It has its dreams, its nightmares and its lapses. In the specific field of the political, class relations acquire a degree of complexity irreducible to the bipolar antagonism that nevertheless determines them" (emphasis added). Hence, Left Voice proposes that our analysis should transcend those dreams, nightmares and lapses.

8. Gotabhaya Rajapaksa's victory at presidential election in November 2019 as well as SLPP's massive electoral victory in August 2020 signifies peoples' total disappointment and discontent of the yahapalana regime led by UNP that ruled the country between 2015- 2020. During the yahapalana rule, economic growth was sluggish, foreign and local debt increased significantly, country's resources were given to foreign countries, unfavorable trade agreements were signed with foreign countries, and corruption became rampant. Inner conflict within the regime had undermined it. April 2018 terror attacks gave an idea that the regime was not in a position to provide basic security to its people. The JVP and the TNA without joining the government supported it. The UNP and part of the SLFP ran the show. By 2017, it was clear that the government was so unpopular among the people of all walks of life as shown in the local government election. Hence, the massive election victory of the SLPP was written on the walls even prior to the parliamentary election. The poor results of the SJB, UNP, NPP, and TNA the parties that directly or indirectly

associated with the yahapalana regime signify not an action of hypnotized masses but an open protest and opposition to the fundamentalist neoliberal policies of the regime.

9. Until this election, electoral politics in Tamil area was not affected by the changes in southern politics. On the basis of the results, Tamil National Alliance (ITAK) is entitled to get 10 seats including one on the national list. It lost its traditional position as D B S Jeyraj noted "the accredited premier political configuration of the Northern and Eastern province Tamils". TNA and its conciliatory policies were strongly questioned by C.V.Wigneswaran, the ex- Chief Minister of the Tamil Makkal Thesiya Kottani (YMTK) and Gajendrakumar Ponnambalam of the All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC). These two parties represented in the election as a radical Tamil alternative to the TNA that has failed miserably to either win constitutional reforms on a federal framework or obtain from the Colombo government an adequate package of welfare and social development to Tamil people. The disappointment and discontent with the TNA seem to have generated in the parliamentary sphere two new trends in Tamil politics breaking the TNA's almost monopoly position in Tamil politics after the defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. The first trend that is represented by C V Wigneswaran and Gajendran Ponnambalam appears to stand for a separate state and eventually they will seek an internationally supervised referendum among the Tamils to decide if Tamils decide to stay in Sri Lanka or to leave it. They may also strive to drag the Sri Lankan government to the International Criminal Court (ICC). In this respect they would closely work with the Tamil diaspora in Western countries. Moreover, they would try to pressurize the Indian Union government by linking with radical groups in Tamil Nadu.

10. Most interesting developments in Tamil politics that was reflected in the election results has been the emergence of a significant trend that is supposed to work with the Sri Lankan government seeking economic development, employment and



increased social welfare. This pro-government section is represented by Douglas Devananda and Kulasingham Dileepan (Eelam Peoples' Democratic Party); Angajan Ramanathan (Sri Lanka Freedom Party); Sivanesathurai Chandrakanthan alias Pillayan (Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Puligal) and Sadasivam Vyalendran (Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna). Initially, we have this kind of Tamil politics had been very much isolated from the Tamil people.

11. It may be presumptuous even to outline the trajectory the new regime would take in the near future. It has already announced its policies would be different from the policies of the previous government. The situation created by Covid-19 forced the government to take some measures that are different from strict neoliberal prescriptions. The serious trade balance deficit and debt crisis have to kept at a manageable level so that import restrictions are imperative. Similarly, the proposed 150,000 government jobs cannot be curtailed. At the same time the government has to offer series of concessions to the bourgeoisie in the form of tax concessions and quantitative easing. Hence, the government development model may be closer to Asian developmentalist state model. In this respect, President Gotabhaya may place much faith on retired military personal, bureaucrats

and technocrats. For the first time in Sri Lankan history the state mechanism, District Secretariats and Divisional Secretariats have taken under the Ministry of Defence.

12. Although the President and the SLPP came to power over essentially Sinhala votes, in appointing the cabinet and non-cabinet ministers and district coordinators, President give some representation to Tamil and Muslim communities. The Prime Minister, giving an interview to Frontline magazine has once again reiterated that the new government would pay more attention to the social and economic development to northern province that was neglected so far.

13. Main challenges to the new regime come mainly from three fronts, namely, socio-economic development maintaining human-nature balance, solving national question in diverse framework and maintaining Sri Lanka's valued non-aligned foreign policy. In all three fronts the opportunities opened for any government are narrow and the constraints it has to face are strong and intense. All three issues in the twenty first century needs systemic transformation, from capitalism to socialism. Socialism entails inter alia debt default instead of debt repayment, workers management instead of factory closure, public

control of national property instead of divestiture of public property, cancellation of debt imposed on rural poor instead of giving a space to blood-sucking usurer elements, a decentralized and devolved peoples' power structure at the all level of government instead of centralized authority, non-aligned and independent foreign policy instead of subordination to imperialist powers.

14. Can the new government go for those drastic and far-reaching reforms? If the government seeks new credit facilities from the IMF- WB, it has to adopt the policies attached to their conditionalities. That means austerity, increased indirect tax, reduction of public expenditure on health and education, privatization, and concession to the bourgeoisie, foreign and local. Government's capitulation to global capital in addressing these three main issues is clear and it would cause an eruption of protests from all sectors of the population as peoples' expectation are high because the government cannot say it does not have the mandate. From 1977 onwards, Sri Lanka has witnessed a gradual tendency towards authoritarianism. The growing global crisis and the domestic crises in Sri Lanka would strengthen this tendency in the future as the new government may not be able to find far-reaching measures that are imperative in order to come out of the current impasse.

**“Don’t ask me to be calm because I’m tired of your requests. How long will you keep saying I’m the same as those who want to kill me?”**

**19 August 2020, by Mamadou Ba**

Until when?

*“If we must die, O let us nobly die,  
So that our precious blood may not  
be shed  
In vain; then even the monsters we*

*defy  
Shall be constrained to honor us  
though dead!”*

*Claude McKay [24]*

In recent years there have been thousands of complaints of racial discrimination made to the competent body, the Commission for Equality and Against Racial Discrimination, not to mention the hundreds of cases of racism which have led to complaints in

the courts. A few dozen of these cases have even given rise to a huge public debate in the country. I will just remind you of a few of those that have given rise to public discussion.

In February 2015, dozens of police officers tortured six black citizens in the Alfragide police station and, while assaulting and torturing them, the officers made racist insults against the victims.

In February 2017, the Roma community of Santo Aleixo da Restauração, in the municipality of Moura, was the target of death threats painted on the walls of the village, with swastikas drawn on the walls, arson attacks that spared no homes, animals, cars and even the church building where the families held religious worship. In the style of the Nazi pogroms.

In the same month of February 2017, a controversy about school segregation also broke out over the existence of a Famalicão school where the students were all of Roma ethnicity.

In July 2017, the president of the parish council of Cabeça Gorda, in the municipality of Beja, refused to allow a member of the Roma community to be buried and a wake to be held for them at the local mortuary.

In January 2018, a group of parents of 4th grade children at the Major David Neto Elementary School in Portimão denounced mistreatment, racism, xenophobia and discrimination against the students.

In 2018, on Saint John's night, Nicol Quinayas was assaulted by the security guard of a public transport bus in Porto. The victim and those with her reported racist insults. There was also a great debate in Portuguese society at the time.

In January 2019, the Coxi family, residing in the Chãcharos Valley district, commonly known as Jamaica, was savagely assaulted by police officers.

In December 2019, the Cape Verdean student, Luis Giovanni Rodrigues, was beaten to death in Bragança. The details of the beatings and his death

were concealed for almost a week.

In January 2020, Claudia Simões was assaulted by police officer Carlos Canha at a bus stop in Amadora, and later in the police car that drove her to the police station, because her eight-year-old daughter was not carrying her pass.

In February 2020, Moussa Marega was the target of continued racist chants from Guimarães supporters. After facing the insults alone, he left the pitch in a hugely courageous gesture.

In June 2020, Evaristo Martinho premeditatedly murdered the black actor Bruno Candé Marques in broad daylight on a Moscavide street, after three days of racist insults and explicit death threats.

The election of three Black members of parliament, from the social movements, with a track record in fighting against racism, at the same time as the election of an openly racist lawmaker, has made the expression of racism even more visible. [25] The debate became more explicit and extreme, with the eruption of a torrent of hatred in the public arena, through social media, in broadcast media and the political arena. As the escalation intensified, everyday racism found its voice in the racist lawmaker, who became the sounding board of expressions that had previously remained concealed.

The growing terrorist onslaught by the extreme right in public spaces, from June, with a wave of racist "graffiti" on several buildings and murals in the Lisbon metropolitan area, with explicit threats of violence and death, is in line with this escalation. The escalation culminated in the attack on the SOS headquarters, the ku klux klan parade and death threats against activists and elected officials. [26] As a clear incitement to hatred and violence, these latest threats clearly cross all the red lines of political dispute. And they are the natural consequence of the racist escalation that the far-right lawmaker, André Ventura, has led, giving legitimacy to the terrorist action of neo-Nazi groups. The laxity with which the parliamentary parties have dealt with André Ventura's racist

agenda, whether as a result of omission, agreement or political tactics, has created the conditions for the blatant affirmation of racism in public spaces. André Ventura, who brought the racist discourse of the street into the Assembly of the Republic, and all those who, by omission, agreement or silence, choose not to confront it or to feed it, are to blame for the terrorist excesses of the extreme right. The financial mercenaries of the country's economic elite, who finance a project that is suffocating democracy, will also answer for the misfortune that the rise of fascism and racism brings.

In fact, it is becoming impossible to sweep racism under the carpet. The succession of cases of racist violence has helped to lift the veil on the structural character of racism in Portuguese society. Denial and the lack of discussion about its existence and its sometimes tragic consequences, as in the recent murder of actor Bruno Candé Marques, are no longer sustainable. To insist on denying racism or relativising its dimension and consequences in the lives of thousands of our fellow citizens, means not assuming responsibility for defending democracy, making us collectively complicit in the threat that hangs over it. There can be no collective life or possibility of a viable democratic society, so long as some of its members are systematically violated and excluded from the national fabric. Unfortunately, in the face of all the evidence, there are still those who continue to demonstrate extraordinary ethical pettiness and a disconcerting political dishonesty by systematically and hysterically insisting on equating anti-racism with racism. Have any of these people who ask for calm, restraint and common sense from the victims of racism been verbally or physically assaulted because they are Black or Roma in public space? Have they ever been prevented from entering a public space, from renting a house, or from getting a job, or have they been paid a third less for doing the same job as their colleague? Have they been persecuted and their private lives devastated to the point of exhaustion? Have they been blackmailed or persecuted *ad hominem* on a permanent and

systematic basis? Have they ever been ambushed by the extreme right in the middle of the street? Have they been forced to move because they fear for their safety and that of their family? Have they had to change their telephone or social media account because they can no longer stand insults and threats of all kinds, including death threats? Have any of these people experienced these things?

That is why, in the face of the terrorist action of the extreme right, the demand for calm from those who think that to talk about racism is to foster it, becomes unbearable and sounds like indifference to racist suffering and violence. For a long time, neo-Nazis and racist murderers, like the one who killed Bruno Candé Marques, have been feeding off this indifference and the relativism of those who want to be "sensible" in order not to confront racism. Calmness and restraint and/or silence in the face of racist violence is a form of complicity which no democrat can accede to. As long as the moral and ethical value of racism

does not carry the same weight as other kinds of violence that offend human dignity, we will continue to have institutional alienation and little political investment in the fight against racism.

Do not ask me for calm or restraint because I am tired of your requests. How long will you accuse me of being responsible for the racism of which I am a victim? How long will you continue to say that I am the same as those who rape me and want to kill me? How long will you keep asking me to wait while you kill or threaten to kill a part of me? Until when? Or have they not yet realized that any death or threat of racist death is a death for the very idea of the values of humanity they so much like to preach? Only acceptance of the death of the very idea of humanity can lead a political community not to feel itself threatened by death threats based on racial hatred. Therefore, the only decency I expect from those who insist on denying or relativising racism is that they have the intelligence and courage to kill racism before it kills

us. For me, as for the overwhelming majority of racialized people, it is increasingly difficult to breathe this air, and it is already unbearable for us to see society and its institutions whistling to the side in the face of our suffering and pain. We have survived because we have never lacked the courage to loosen the suffocation of racism that stifles our lives. We will continue to do so, no matter what the cost. It remains to be seen how long society and its institutions will continue to lack the courage to face the monster. Either we kill the monster or it will kill us all.

That is why, if we want a common collective future, there is only one choice: to defend democracy while there is time, facing with determination the barbarity of the extreme right.

14 August 2020

*Exclusive text of Mamadou Ba for the Portuguese newspaper [Expresso](#). Translated by International Viewpoint and published with the authorization of the author.*

## How Can Current Struggles in Lebanon & Iran Come Together in a Revolutionary Socialist Direction?

**18 August 2020, by Alliance of Middle Eastern and North African Socialists**

Of the countries in the MENA region that experienced popular uprisings in 2019, the situation of Lebanon and Iran stands out as the most catastrophic now.

The August 4 explosion at a warehouse containing 2750 metric tons of ammonium nitrate at the port of Beirut was equivalent in strength to one tenth the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima 75 years ago. It has killed almost 200 people, injured thousands and left over 300,000 homeless. It has

laid bare the complete collapse of Lebanese society which was already on the verge of collapse from a neoliberal capitalist government beholden both to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and partially controlled by the Iranian-backed Hezbollah.

In Iran, during the months of June & July, over 20 fires and explosions damaged a variety of sites, ranging from the Natanz nuclear fuel production site to Parchin, a military

and weapons development base, various power plants, production plants, the state television and radio station, the Evin prison, a medical clinic, several markets, forests and historical sites. The New York Times reports that Israel was responsible for planting the bomb that caused the explosion at the Natanz nuclear fuel production plant which in turn set back Iran's nuclear program. However, it is not clear whether all the explosions and fires that have taken place during the past month can

be attributed to acts of sabotage by foreign governments. No reports have also been issued about the dangerous radioactivity released by the Natanz explosion and the damage done to the public.

In Lebanon, over 50% of the population lives under the poverty line. Over 40% of the labor force is unemployed. The COVID-19 pandemic is growing, water is undrinkable, refugees from Syria live in squalor and the Kafala system of slavery binding migrant workers is continuing with impunity.

In Iran, people continue to suffer from the brutality, repression and authoritarian rule of the Iranian regime as well as severe U.S. sanctions, deep economic crises and the worsening COVID-19 pandemic. The value of the Iranian Toman continues to decline severely from one day to the next. The majority of the population lives in poverty and does not have enough to eat much less to pay rent.

In Lebanon, the popular protests demanding an end to the corrupt government are calling for revolution. In Iran, last week saw the largest wave of nationwide labor protests in 40 years and the protests have concentrated in the critically important oil and gas sector. Strikers also include teachers, nurses and

municipal workers.

In both Lebanon and Iran, feminist activists are fighting against femicide, honor killings, sexual assault and rape. Last December, Lebanese women creatively adapted and performed the Chilean women's song "against the rapist state". In Iran, women who removed their headscarves in public to oppose the compulsory hijab, and women who have been organizing against the death penalty, for women's rights, children's rights or the rights of oppressed minorities are now in prison and face long sentences. Kurdish activists in prison are being executed and youth who participated in the December 2017 and November 2019 uprisings against poverty, repression and militarism and the January 2020 protests against the government's downing of a passenger plane have received death sentences.

It is not enough to speak out against the corruption of the Lebanese and the Iranian governments and demand efficient management. It is not enough to speak out against privatization. It is not even enough to expose these states as exploitative capitalist and authoritarian. It is evident that Iran's militarized and religious fundamentalist state capitalism plays an important role in promoting the suffering of the people in the region, including Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen. Lebanon, despite being

perceived as a "democracy", has been very quickly entrenching the authoritarian aspect of its regime through state and militia crackdowns.

While acknowledging this reality, what we need, are active forms of solidarity between the current mass protests in Lebanon and the labor struggles in Iran. We also need active solidarity between feminist activists in both countries. Our respective struggles need to clearly spell out radical goals that go beyond simply opposing the current political system. We need to explicitly state that without a fundamental transformation in labor conditions, without ending the dehumanization of women, without ending the Kafala system in its variety of forms, without ending anti-Black racism, without ending discrimination against Kurds and other oppressed minorities including sexual minorities, and without preserving and detoxifying our environment, we will not move forward.

As the Alliance of MENA Socialists, we believe that such an effort is not possible without a type of socialism that promotes critical thinking, dialectical reasoning and reflection in search of affirmative solutions. We are here to promote and facilitate the type of regional and global solidarity that can help the people of the region.

*August 13, 2020*

## **'It is time for rage'**

**17 August 2020, by Ta'amim al-Masaref**

As our lives become more worthless by the hour, we are trapped between the military machine deployed to defend private property at all costs, and the ruling class it has vowed to uphold.

We are trapped between the death cult that is capital accumulation and its tendency to accumulate, store, bargain for better deals, negotiate and accumulate further, even at its own

risk. Especially at our expense.

The August 4 blast is an immediate and irreversible ramification of the ruling class' deliberate indispensability of the masses. The capitalist, neoliberal system was built at our expense, and always - without exception - seeks to serve the interests of the ruling class. It will never be more evident and salient than it is today the extent to which our

lives are regarded as expendable and worthless.

But the blast does not propagate evenly. It rips apart working-class neighbourhoods relentless and with impunity. Wave after wave, we can feel our precarity laid bare as our windows and doors shattered, and our buildings collapsed. The explosion both accelerates our condition and decelerates business as usual. It is in



this spatio-temporal reality that we are trapped.

Our livelihoods are closest to the epicentres of destruction. How could they not be, when our livelihoods depend on reproducing chaos, zombie capitalism, and our destitute condition? It slows uncovers their violence and their gentrifying displacement. As their interminable towers merely tremble, their children are kept safe by our comrades, domestic workers.

This regime functions precisely as it was constructed to: to exploit us, displace us, crush us and kill us, unapologetically and without hesitation.

They are untouchable even in defeat. They are indestructible even in catastrophe

But they are unreachable no more.

As thousands of families remain stranded and homeless, it is now our duty to occupy their luxurious homes. The ones purposefully kept empty as a form of class war, as an undying bourgeois sneer. We must occupy what they think is theirs. We must occupy what is, in fact, ours.

As this catastrophe steadily becomes militarized, it is our duty to fight against the unfolding military coup that is going to be perpetually

imposed on us.

As we are living through famine, hunger, and poverty, it is our duty to supply for our comrades. To fight for food sovereignty. To divorce dependency from our bellies.

We must demand justice for our dead. For our victims.

We do not need any investigations. We know who the culprits are. Structurally, yes it is the ruling class, its third-party tradesmen, middle-men, technicians of doom, and trades of destruction.

We must form neighbourhood committees, and workers must control their own destiny, both in the production and reproduction of wealth. We must rebuild our own homes. We must share them with our comrades.

We must open public schools. Transform them into temporary hospitals for the wounded.

We must honour our dead. Celebrate their lives. Continue their fight.

We must not let them force us into normalisation. Nothing that we have lived through in our lifetimes, and in the last year, has been 'normal'.

As we look at Palestine and Syria, we know that our struggles are intertwined, as are our regimes.

Millions of Syrians, Palestinians, Sudanese, Algerians and Arabs have fought their regimes in an open war of manoeuvre that has not said its last word. We are nothing if not a continuation of this war.

We must gather the strength to emulate our comrades in 1982 who fought against the Israel onslaught of Beirut. We will fight capitalism at home as we have previously fought imperialism.

We must be inspired by our Syrian comrades who have lived through thousands of the regime's barrel bombs and Islamist occupation.

We must draw inspiration from our Sudanese comrades in their organising and from our Algerian comrades in their perseverance.

Comrades, the time has come for us to organise and obliterate capitalism and its enablers.

It is now time for rage. For revenge. For justice. It is time to obliterate this regime, by any means necessary. We need to organise, and we need to organise now.

And with that, death to the system that kills our comrades.

*Beirut, 11 August 2020*

[Alliance of Middle East Socialists](#)

## Partisans or Workers? Figures of Belarusian Protest and Their Prospects

**16 August 2020, by Volodymyr Artiukh**

After a nervous election day on August 9, when observers reported numerous irregularities at polling stations, pro-government exit polls gave Lukashenka his traditional 80% of the vote, while his main rival Tsikhanovskaya was awarded almost 7%. This infuriated opposition supporters united under the slogan

"I/We are the 97%", with data drawn from their [alternate count suggesting that Tsikhanovskaya got 45 per cent](#). Both sides started preparing for a confrontation: the center of Minsk was cordoned off, Internet and mobile connections were disrupted, and paddy wagons and riot police appeared on the streets. [27] Both

Tsikhanovskaya and Lukashenka asked Belarusians to abide by the law and refrain from violence, although state TV channels accused the protesters of preparing provocations, while opposition Telegram channels called for resistance to the police.

On election night people took to the

streets not for Tsikhanovskaya, but against Lukashenka. The opposition leader was not in sync with her supporters: she did not call for protests, emphasizing instead legal and bureaucratic means of contesting the official outcome of the elections. After having voted, people began gathering in Minsk and other cities, even prior to the announcement of the alternate vote count. The official numbers meant that nothing had supposedly changed since Lukashenka's first election in 1994, but by this point it was clear to everyone that much had changed indeed.

Authorised mass gatherings are rare in Belarus, and on that night there definitely wasn't going to be one. Thousands of people pouring from all corners of Minsk to the fortified city center were confronted with stun grenades, water cannons, and rubber bullets. Several uncoordinated groups attempted to build barricades. This was unprecedented repression for Minsk, accustomed instead to targeted arrests or rapid dispersal of compact crowds rather than to the flashes and explosions reminiscent of a military operation. Serious clashes also took place in many provincial cities and towns, some of which have not seen similar sights since WWII.

Illustrating the socially diverse nature of the pre-election mobilization, the post-election uprising took on a wide geographic scope from the beginning – with hundreds of people taking to the streets in all regional centers, as well as in many other settlements, often for the first time in a generation. Another early sign: the crowd, which looked impressively large, on the order of hundreds of thousands in Minsk and many thousands in regional centers, moved chaotically around the city, while riot police tried to force people out of public spaces. Police violence, the lack of central ideological and strategic leadership among the protesters, and the decentralized nature of the protests will determine their further development.

## Postmodern

## partisans?

It seems that most of the protesters were participating in such events for the first time: [analysts](#) call the youth that hit the streets an 'unbeaten generation.' There were no visibly compact organized groups ready for serious tactical maneuvers, e.g. the seizure of administrative buildings, a 'black bloc,' disarming the police, the building of lasting barricades or tent camps, the use of improvised weapons, etc. This was in great contrast to previous electoral protests in Belarus in [2001](#), [2006](#) and [2010](#), [which imitated the established pattern of 'coloured revolutions' in Serbia, Georgia and Ukraine](#). The state, in turn, demonstrated its ability to suppress the crowd by using Western-grade riot-control methods. Although Belarus is often referred to as a repressive state, the familiar 'Parisian arsenal' of tear gas canisters, water cannons, rubber bullets, and stun grenades was used here on a mass scale for the first time. Western technologies of violence were complemented by traditional post-Soviet police brutality: beating and detention of random people, torture, humiliation, and sometimes threats of rape in jail, the hunting down of journalists, etc.[Euronews, 14 August 2020 "[Belarus: Detained protesters 'repeatedly beaten' and abused in post-election crackdown](#)" and Amnesty International, 13 August 2020 "[Belarus: Mounting evidence of a campaign of widespread torture of peaceful protesters](#)".]]

The state did not try to rely on softer methods to prove its legitimacy. State media were instead silent about the discontent of the masses, scattered results in some constituencies indicating Lukashenka's defeat were ignored, and ritual statements about foreign interference continued. Lukashenka's rare screen appearances have sparked rumors of his departure to Turkey or of health problems. His reaction to the protests was [advice for the participants to "find a job in an amicable way" so that they do not "walk the streets and avenues"](#): a relapse into his earlier discourses against "social parasitism," which only added insult to injury for the protestors. The recourse towards

police terror became obvious in the ensuing hours and days. After August 10, Minsk plunged into a de facto state of siege: public places were blocked, central metro stations were closed, Internet access was limited (Lukashenka claimed that [someone from abroad](#) was responsible for the shutdown), and some companies in the center of the city were closed in the evening. Even though the protesters refused to imitate the Ukrainian 'Maidan' with its civil-war-like intensity in the last days of February 2014, the Belarusian state wanted them to believe they were not in Minsk but in Kyiv – attempting to evoke through the thunder and lightning of police weapons the regime's claims that all protests will inevitably lead to the Ukrainian disaster. Given the lack of substance in the state's official ideology, violence became its only remaining ideology.

As a result of the security force's demonstrative violence and the disorientation of the protesters, the mobilization on the streets began to decline, even though the popular wave of discontent was growing. The police quickly learned from the open Telegram channels about the protesters and their movements, but the protesters did not change their strategy (i.e. they did not develop any strategy). None of the opposition leaders joined the crowd or made radical statements. The opposition movement turned out to be on the whole amorphous, without clear leadership at the top and any leaders from below. At the same time, the ruling elite showed no signs of a split, the security apparatus and the bureaucracy generally remained loyal, although there have been signs of hesitation at the lower and regional levels (with several state media journalists and police officers resigning).

Throughout these five days the protest mobilizations on the streets of Belarusian cities have been as close as one gets to the decentralized, horizontal, leaderless networked resistance that postmodern anarchists envision. The opposition did not take part in the protests to begin with, while the Belarusian authorities escorted Tsikhanovskaya and her team coordinator to Lithuania

Since Tsikhanovskaya's husband and some members of her team have been arrested, she is restrained from making any radical statements. In [her last video](#) she looked scared and depressed; she said that "no life is worth losing for what is happening now," and hinted at threats to her children. Not a single opposition leader remained at large or in the country. Tsikhanovskaya's husband's [Telegram channel](#), which fuelled the electoral mobilizations before, does not provide clear directions or coordination, and lags behind other anonymous social networks in reporting events.

There is no central coordination center of the protest, no local centers, no visible leaders on the street, no identifiable political groups. I believe that some already existing political groups are taking part in the protests, but they are not visible as separate 'tactical units': they are either disoriented, or deeply disguised, or participating as individuals.

This is partly out of necessity, since anyone suspected of leading the protests would be immediately detained and any in-person gathering would be quickly dispersed. It is impossible to imagine anything like "Occupy" or Gezi Park in Minsk these days, because the main public places are blocked and controlled by the police. The barricades are short-lived, and there is no question of seizing administrative buildings.

In part, however, this is a legacy of previous network mobilizations. Nearly two million subscribers, equal to the entire population of the capital, follow [Nexta\\_live](#), a Telegram channel created two years ago by a Belarusian journalist from Poland. Despite its radical rhetoric, it relies on videos, photos and information provided by subscribers from various places across the country, but without much context. This is also the case for a dozen other protest channels that I've followed. The messages are often misleading, contradictory and unverified. It is reasonable to believe that some of these channels are being used by the special security services for instigating provocations and to obtain information about protesters' plans.

Many have already compared these protests to the glorious Belarusian partisan tradition of the Second World War. [28] This is, of course, an exaggeration, since the partisans actually had a chain of command and actual strategic and ideological leadership. They could pool resources and concentrate them in a relatively safe space, develop tactical plans and carry them out while waiting for a regular army. Nothing of the sort is happening within this postmodern uprising. Faced with the increasing presence of militia and army units that are using ostentatiously brutal methods, the protesters have carried out some sporadic aggressive actions with firecrackers, sticks, a few Molotov cocktails and the setting up of some rickety barricades. The response has been the same: detentions, beatings, injuries, and one confirmed death.

However, a decisive turn of events may come with the possible use of more traditional methods. As part of the protest campaign, a general strike was announced for August 11. The potential consequences are clear to anyone who knows about the April 1991 strikes in Belarus, the famous spectacle of a hundred thousand workers in front of the constructivist Government Building on Minsk's Lenin Square. It was followed by a wave of strikes and mass demonstrations, which lasted a week and involved more than 80 enterprises in Minsk and throughout the country. This demoralized the Communist Party of Belarus and precipitated the collapse of the Soviet Union. But back in 1991 there were cells of anti-government workers' organizations, which were joined by some official trade unions, as well as the example of successful miners' strikes in Ukraine, Russia and Kazakhstan. The Communist Party was disoriented by the strife in Moscow, there was an opposition in parliament that claimed to represent workers, police were ordered not to intervene, and some enterprise directors supported their employees. Today the situation is clearly the opposite, so what can we expect?

## Which side are the workers on?

If you are skeptical about the working class, listen to the head of the Belarusian Mises Center: "Protest activity will tend to zero until the proletariat joins." As in the "good old" days, workers now have the most resources to gather peacefully in close quarters, without relying on the now precarious internet and without the fear of being arrested on the street. They are also the only class that can cause material damage to the state and challenge it ideologically. Belarusian industrial workers have an experience of cooperation and coordination, some kind of organizational structure, however bureaucratic, and a habit of formulating clear demands. My fieldwork among Belarusian workers and trade union activists in 2015-2017 taught me to be very careful not to overestimate the potential of organized labor in this country, but if there is a hope to resolve the impasse that the protest has entered in Belarus in a peaceful and progressive way, it can happen only thanks to an organized group of workers who understand, formulate and defend their interests.

There are already many scattered reports about unrest at some Belarusian state-owned industrial enterprises, including Minsk Automobile Plant, the world's leading dump truck producer BelAZ and the chemical plant Grodno Azot, which are key to the country's economy. [29] This is, however, far from a general strike, and I would be cautious as to the prospects of this ever materializing. The Belarusian working class is atomized and individually dependent on the bosses at all levels. There have been no large-scale strikes since the 1990s, trade unions that are not coopted by the state are few in number (only about 9000 members) and lack resources. The spontaneous strikes that happened before were quickly suppressed.

A political strike is a great idea now, because the state still holds the commanding heights of the economy and employs 45% of the country's



workers. However, we are no longer in 1991, with its complex layering of conflicts within the ruling elite and with the relative autonomy of workers in factories. The current Belarusian labor regulation regime is worse for workers than during the late Soviet period, combining as it does the bureaucratic despotism of the Soviet past with the market despotism of the capitalist present.

However, I hope and suspect that some form of spontaneous organization is taking place at shopfloor level, as can be seen from the videos and reports of hundreds of workers gathering to put forward their demands to their superiors and insist on their implementation. These demands are: a recounting of the votes, guarantees that those who participated in street protests will not be fired, the release of detainees, the restoration of Internet access; they also amount to an expression of distrust in official trade unions.

These are 'political' demands brought from the streets, but more pressing economic demands can already be seen on the walls of the factories. A quote from a leaflet posted somewhere in a the Minsk Tractor Plant is illustrative:

The plant is still alive thanks to its workers!

No lathe knife? Go get it in Zhdanovichy [a village near Minsk, here: a place far away and difficult to get to]. Your boss didn't give you working clothes? Fuck it, I'll buy it on the market. Then the boss will ask you to stay after your shift finished because 'you need to fulfill the plan.' You get your paycheck and understand that you've been screwed. You complain to the trade union, but you already know the answer. You get an industrial injury and you register it as an off-the-job accident because 'Well, you understand...'

Fucking tired of all this, right?

The best way to influence the bosses is to go on strike. No need to go to the square and bang your

helmet against the pavement. Just work to the rules [...] Demand that each step of the technological process be performed according to the regulations. This is your right. As much as a decent wage and the fair elections are your rights that have been taken away from you.

Want to join but afraid of being fired? Remember, no scumbag ideologist will take your spot on the machine.

Lukashenka's rule began with a bloody standoff with striking metro workers in 1995, who were ruthlessly dispersed, beaten, and fired. His rule tightened after he managed to split and subjugate the mammoth Federation of Trade Unions, whose chairman challenged him in the 2001 elections.

The 'Belarusian model' was built on fragmenting, disciplining, bribing and depriving the proletariat of its identity. In exchange for being deprived of their class subjectivity, workers were offered job preservation, restrictions on the commercialization of the social sphere, low utility bills and a ritual promise of \$500 wages. Borrowing a Gramscian phrase, I call this a Belarusian 'passive revolution': an authoritarian path of post-socialist transformation, spurred and mediated by the fear of spontaneous protests emerging from antagonistic social classes. Perhaps workers can change the direction of this process by regaining their subjectivity. It definitely won't happen overnight or this week, but I can't think of another optimistic utopia to resolve the current impasse.

My conviction that organized labor, and not a decentralized network movement without leaders, is the only agent capable of formulating clear requirements and making the authorities listen, can be illustrated by a [video of the meeting between workers of the BelAZ plant and the mayor of Zhodino](#), which took place on August 13. At lunchtime, several hundred workers gathered outside the factory gates and met with their director and later with the mayor. The

conversation was tense but respectful. The mayor looked confused and timid. The workers demanded that their colleagues, relatives, and friends be released from the pre-trial detention center, that the special forces be sent out of the city ("Why do we need a salary if we are beaten?"), and their votes recounted. They insisted that their city was safe, and they were in control of the situation. The mayor, of course, could not make any clear promises, but agreed to meet with the workers outside the plant in the evening to discuss their demands. He was seen off with the words "Thank you!" and chants of "The Mayor with the people!" The plant hasn't stopped working, but after watching the video, I'm less skeptical about the possibility of a real protracted strike. So far, this is the only channel through which the protesters can force the authorities into a kind of dialogue at the local level. If the central government cuts this opportunity, that will only be to its own detriment.

Later that day the mayor eventually [met with a huge crowd of BelAZ workers and other townspeople](#). Instead of exploding stun grenades and the sounds of rubber bullets, a long and not very fruitful conversation took place about the falsification of elections, the violence of the riot police, and the need to release those detained in the local pre-trial detention center, many of whom were brought from Minsk.

After uttering a variation on his favorite theme of "undress and work," Lukashenka also ["heard the opinion of labor collectives"](#) and promised to "deal with" the police outrage, and the chief of police apologized for the excesses. The authorities began to back down, but the people were not completely satisfied and the situation continues to develop.

As I finish this article, on August 14, the Minsk Tractor Plant has risen up. Workers were very hesitant and anxious the day before, they could not decide when and how to gather and what to do. But thousands of them nevertheless gathered in front of their factory gates and marched towards the city center, joined by various other demonstrators, the 'postmodern partisans' mentioned above. This was



a calm day, the riot police stood on guard but did not disperse the crowd. The route was the same as in 1991: from the industrial Partizan district of Minsk to Independence Square,

formerly known as Lenin Square...

14 August 2020

*This is an updated and revised version*

*of the article that first appeared in Russian in **Commons: Journal of Social Critique**.*

*Source **LeftEast**.*

# The Fight of LGBTQ Activists in Poland against Post-Election Repressions

15 August 2020, by **Marianna Szczygielska**

In the past few years, homophobic and transphobic hate speech became a standard political resource in a country that has gained the dishonorable status of the most homophobic in the European Union. [30] Queers have become public enemy number one in Poland.

Whereas Hungary's Victor Orbán mobilizes xenophobic sentiments against refugees and the Roma, Polish conservatives placed their bet on sexual minorities as a perfect scapegoat in times of social and economic uncertainty. [31] With elections pushed to take place in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, Duda's presidential campaign was fraught with anti-LGBT rhetoric. He promised that he will prevent teaching about LGBT-related issues at schools and warned against the so-called LGBT "ideology" as more destructive than communism. His own words that "LGBT is an ideology, not people" were widely criticized as dehumanizing. However, taken at face value, they also reveal the high currency of the simplistic formulas offered by the widespread mobilization against the amorphous and multifunctional "gender ideology."

Weaponizing state-controlled public media for the presidential campaign, the ruling party consistently portrayed the LGBTQ community as an imminent and foreign threat to Polish traditional family values. Meanwhile, the Polish Catholic Church also demonized the ominous "LGBT ideology" to divert attention from the pedophilia scandal in its ranks. In August 2018, the

Archbishop of Kraków, Marek Jędraszewski publicly denounced the "rainbow plague" afflicting the country: "not Marxist, Bolshevik, but born of the same spirit, neo-Marxist. Not red, but rainbow." [32] The deep-seated anti-communism behind such statements made by public officials and Catholic Church representatives remains unchallenged in the Polish political context, polarized between liberal and conservative camps that both univocally condemn communism as a totalitarian regime. Before Law and Justice came to power, the centrist-liberal government of the Civic Platform focused on maintaining the status quo for the sake of neoliberal reforms, thus not troubling to contest the hegemony of the Catholic Church, family traditionalism, misogyny, homophobia and transphobia and providing a fertile ground for nationalist radicalization. Moreover, an anti-communist agenda serves as a red (sic!) thread connecting various local and international actors invested in the war against "gender ideology," an elusive enemy that when necessary easily morphs into "LGBT ideology."

Apart from the nationalist state and the Catholic Church, a network of ultraconservative nongovernmental organizations became prominent in orchestrating attacks against the LGBTQ community in Poland. Charges against Margot were pressed by Fundacja PRO Prawo do Życia (Foundation PRO Right to Life), a group active in anti-abortion campaigning. [33] Recently, this fundamentalist GONGO (government-

organized non-governmental organization) was responsible for drafting a bill titled "Stop Pedophilia Act" that proposed criminalizing any form of sexual education (a subject practically nonexistent in Polish schools). [34] As part of their campaign to collect signatures under this sinister civic law project, one that has nothing to do with combating pedophilia, the Foundation sent out vans covered with homophobic slogans and armed with loudspeakers. The vans drive around several Polish cities and spread hateful and false messages about homosexuality. It is important to note that the legal path to combat such an obvious case of hate speech in a public space has been exhausted with no success. [35] On June 27th, one such "homophobus," as activists have started calling them, stopped in front of the Warsaw "Syrena" squat, with a clear intention to disturb a gathering that was taking place there. In response to this provocation, several activists first tried to chase them away, and eventually spray-painted the car and slashed the tires. Since Margot's arrest, members of the Foundation gather regularly in front of "Syrena" with their homophobic banners and rosaries to "pray the gay away."

The Foundation PRO is one of several ultraconservative groups active in Polish public life. Moreover, it is part of a larger transnational religious fundamentalist movement gathered under the umbrella organization "Tradition, Family and Property" (TFP) that in the early 2000s started to treat Eastern Europe as a new

frontier for building a new right-wing civil society. [36] A proliferation of affiliated local groups and think tanks stands behind campaigning against the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention on gender-based violence in Hungary, the 2013 referendum on the constitutional definition of marriage in Croatia, a similar initiative to define family as a union between a man and a woman in the Romanian constitution in 2013, 2016, and 2018, and blocking the civil union law in Estonia until 2016, among many other examples.

In her latest book *This is War. Women, Fundamentalists and the New Middle-Ages*, investigative journalist Klementyna Suchanow reveals the complex economic and institutional dependencies binding various right-wing and religious organizations, tracking their growing political influence from Brazil, through the U.S. and Russia, to Europe. [37]

In Poland one of the major players affiliated with TFP is a legal think tank, "Ordo Iuris", which is part of the extremist-Catholic Agenda Europe advocacy network that seeks to "restore the natural order" by blocking or dismantling policy infrastructure on reproductive and sexual rights. [38]

Ordo Iuris is responsible for drafting the legislation to completely ban abortion that was eventually withdrawn after mass protests, and the Convention of the Rights of the Family that is supposed to be an alternative to the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention on gender-based violence. Apart from legislative campaigns and policy lobbying, they also represent individuals and groups such as Foundation PRO during litigations, providing legal support for religious extremists to safely test the limits of democratic freedoms. One of their strategies is to appropriate the human rights discourse and cover homophobic and transphobic goals under the guise of pro-family policies. In this spirit, the "Charter of Family Rights" was presented to local governments in late 2019 as a less controversial template for declaring themselves "LGBT-free zones" after the wave of anti-LGBT resolutions initiated by the Law and Justice

councilors in March the same year. [39]

With the highest voter turnout since 1995 at 68,18%, the runoff elections left the country polarized. On the election night Duda made a clumsy attempt to cool down the destructive emotions he has mobilized during his campaign. [40] He apologized to those who felt offended by his words during the past five years of his presidency and in the recent months. [41] Later, when asked if he regrets his attacks on the LGBTQ community, he replied that he stands by his earlier statements. Although this apparent cease-fire declaration has been read as a sign of a possible suspension of the anti-gender rhetoric in the aftermath of the victory, the campaign of hate continues. On July 25th the minister of justice, Zbigniew Ziobro announced that Poland is withdrawing from the Istanbul Convention because the document carries "elements of an ideological nature," referring to its definition of gender as socially constructed. [42] At the same time, his ministry is financing a project by another fundamentalist GONGO titled "Combating crimes against freedom of conscience under the influence of LGBT ideology." [43] Planned for years 2020-2023, it aims at eliminating "new leftist ideologies" from Polish public space by utilizing the existing legal provisions on offending religious feelings. This new project is a perfect example of how quickly the network of religious fundamentalist groups responds to artistic and activist actions and how well connected they are to the governmental structures.

It seems that the arrest of a young queer activist was purposefully postponed for after the election results. After intervention of the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, Margot was released after spending the night in detention with charges of hooliganism. [44] On July 30th queer activists followed up with an action of mounting rainbow flags and pink face masks on several iconic statues across Warsaw as a call for greater mobilization against the rising tide of homophobia and transphobia. [45] From repressions against queer activists, cities and counties declaring themselves free

from "LGBT ideology," repeated attacks on the headquarters of LGBTQ NGOs, to brutal attacks on pride marches, including a failed bombing attempt in Lublin last year, this has never been a war only about symbols. [46] When the infamous "homophobuses" announce from the loudspeakers that "homosexuals live twenty years shorter," this is not even another pseudo-scientific fact, but something that becomes a grim reality in a country where suicide rates among queer youth are rising. [47] Meanwhile, putting a symbol of love and tolerance on the statue of Jesus Christ on Krakowskie Przedmie?cie street in Warsaw was commented as a "barbarity" and "profanation" by the Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, and as an "unnecessary provocation" by the opposition presidential candidate Rafa? Trzaskowski. While Polish liberals condemn the crudest forms of homophobia, they exercise its "light" version in the name of pluralism and balanced dialogue and by treating the massive attack on LGBTQ community merely as a red herring. In other words, homophobia and transphobia permeate both sides of this highly polarized political scene.

During the march commemorating the Warsaw Uprising organized by a coalition of fascist and nationalist groups, any trace of LGBTQ symbolism was being quickly detected and destroyed. Among several incidents, the participants took down a rainbow flag with the emblem of the Polish Underground State from the façade of one of the buildings and burnt it. In Eastern Europe the rainbow flag has become an important tool for queer resistance, as a way of marking lives that are being constantly attacked and erased. [48] There are subversive ways of using this symbol in public spaces, but also some "mainstreaming" strategies that flirt with the idea of assimilating to the majority. The ongoing conflict around the rainbow flag exposes the deep flaws and paradoxes of reclaiming religious and national symbols for leftist politics. It is not about proving that Virgin Mary with a rainbow halo or a colorful national emblem should not be an offence, but rather about finding ways of doing queer politics without assimilating the nationalist-patriotic discourse. [49] A

“queered” national flag is still a strong symbol of national belonging. The fight is uneven, but new strategies and new forms of coalition building are urgently needed.

Recent news about the European Union withholding grants for six Polish cities due to their anti-LGBT declarations might suggest that paying the price for discriminatory practices will change the hostile attitudes. [50] At the same time, this

punishment inscribes into the well-rehearsed discourse on “LGBT ideology” being a foreign threat imposed by “degenerate” West. It is unclear whether this will bring a sobering effect, or will consolidate the twisted anti-LGBT rhetoric. The TFP satellites already portray European institutions as the source of “gender ideology” smuggled in treaties such as the Istanbul Convention. With the police repressions against activists intensifying rapidly international solidarity with queer persons in

Poland is extremely important. [51] Much work needs to be done on the ground for building local solidarity networks with marginalized groups, including migrant workers and those who are most affected by austerity measures. If there is anything that these recent elections show very clearly, it is that queer and leftist activism has to find a way to reach beyond the metropolitan areas.

[LeftEast](#)

# The International Aid the Lebanese People Urgently Need Must Not Be Used to Enforce Neoliberal Measures

14 August 2020, by **CADTM**

It will take time to establish the truth about the specific causes of the explosion of 2,750 tons of ammonium nitrate in Beirut harbour in the early evening of Tuesday 4 August, if it can ever be determined. However, what is evidenced by this catastrophe – which caused at least 158 deaths and over 6,000 injuries – is the extent to which the Lebanese State had abdicated its responsibilities. The country’s Prime Minister mentioned a case of negligence. That negligence, which was literally a crime, is first and foremost that of the government and its administration, gangrened as it is by cronyism and corruption. The previous governments since the end of the civil war (many have been in positions of power since then), and of course the various parties and militias, are also responsible. That Lebanon is sick and that the local political leaders are heavily responsible is obvious to everyone. But that responsibility is shared with regional and global leaders, international financial institutions (the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank) and private banks.

## A local situation maintained by the game played by international powers

This catastrophe in early August has to be seen first of all in the context of the intense economic crisis the country has been in for several months. And that crisis itself must be seen in the context of a political situation that has been problematic for several decades. Lebanon is a magnificent country with a centuries-old history at the frontiers between several cultures and religions. This cultural and religious diversity is, as it is everywhere, a source of enormous cultural and social richness. That mixture and diversity of ethnic and religious groups is often exploited and amplified in political competition among the powers in place. The civil war that tore the country apart between 1975 and 1990 is an example. The end of the civil war has not meant an end to the international powers’

habitual attempts to profit from the inter-religious tensions. It is not oversimplifying to say that, historically, Saudi Arabia and its allies (and the USA behind them) and to a lesser degree Turkey have supported the Sunnite parties, Iran and Syria the Shiite parties (first and foremost the famous Hezbollah) and France (and more discreetly Israel) the Christian parties. Each power supports and uses these political forces to further its interests in a region that is geopolitically and economically strategic.

In Lebanon, this organization on the basis of religion defines the country’s political life. Voters can only vote for candidates who share their religion (actual or assumed by birth) – not in the voter’s place of residence but in his or her birthplace. This system has encouraged the development of a system of structural clientelism of enormous proportions. So enormous, in fact, that it is no exaggeration to say that the political class in Lebanon essentially works more or less exclusively and openly in its own interests with barely any regard for the population, which is left to shift for



itself in most areas of daily life: the provision of electrical power is chaotic; management of bus services in Beirut is left either to the various militias or to private individuals with mini-buses; waste (non-)management was at the origin of major demonstrations in 2015; communications are unaffordable; projects to build a railway line linking the country's South and North are postponed endlessly despite permanent congestion of the motorways and the fact that the plans have long been drawn up. As for public contracts and the government administration, the standard is political cronyism and nepotism. It goes without saying that in such a context, "good management of public funds" is a concept that exists only in the pronouncements of politicians. Public monies serve above all to enrich officials and further swell the large private fortunes. The Beirut city centre, around la Place de l'Etoile, with its empty buildings built with State subsidies that serve no purpose but real-estate speculation, is the perfect symbol of this collusion of interests between those who hold public and private power. Between 2005 and 2014. [52]

The popular protest movement in Lebanon began on 17 October 2019 and challenged that entire system of inequalities, demanding the departure of the entire ruling class, the sentencing of corrupt officials and the organization of an economy based on social justice. It has always endeavoured to remain in the streets in spite of repression and the exceptional public-health situation related to CoViD 19. The protest movement denounces confessionism and the dictatorship of the banks. The movement has resumed after the catastrophe of 4 August 2020.

**An ultra-financialized economy based on a shaky financial**

## **arrangement**

The country that was once known as "the Switzerland of the Middle East" has based its economy on the financial sector to the detriment of the productive sectors. The country has long had a large balance-of-trade deficit (which undermines food sovereignty) and the economy depends heavily on the dollars sent by the immense Lebanese diaspora around the world (8 billion dollars in 2018). The banking sector has built a veritable Ponzi pyramid on those funds. With cash sent by the diaspora, the private banks buy national-debt securities denominated in Lebanese pounds at the highly advantageous interest rates granted by the Bank of Lebanon (BDL), which used the system to finance public budgets that were essentially squandered by the governments, as described above.

This system of financing the State through and for private finance has led to the accumulation of an unsustainable public debt that in 2019 amounted to 170% of GDP (with nearly 40% of the debt denominated in dollars). This pyramid had begun to crumble little by little due to the slowdown in the flow of dollars caused by the war in Syria and the fracture of the financial system worldwide, as well as capital flight organized by the country's wealthiest citizens. It ultimately collapsed totally with the economic and financial crisis that accompanied the Coronavirus, although the socio-economic consequences were already considerable (a few months ago it was estimated that approximately a third of the population was living on less than \$4 per day and that unemployment was at around 25%, and as high as 37% if the population under age 25 is counted). The Lebanese people have now been stripped of their savings and their pensions and the State is incapable of financing anything, not even repayment of its debt (the country is in payment default for the Eurobonds that reached maturity in March 2020, which has only accentuated the suffocation of the banking system).

With the economic and humanitarian crisis reaching levels never before

experienced in the country, even during the civil war and the Israeli bombardments, once again it is international politics that has impeded the arrival of aid from abroad. Most political parties have been weakened as a result of the popular protests and only Hezbollah, using its dominant position as the country's most heavily armed militia to harass the demonstrators, had managed to maintain power. That being the case, it was out of the question for the USA, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Israel, but also France and the rest of the EU, to provide aid for the country in that context. On the contrary, the USA has attempted to take advantage of the crisis to apply maximum pressure on Hezbollah by depriving it (along with the rest of the country) of cash with the goal of handicapping Iran's strategy in the region. As for Iran, it was in a difficult position itself because of the economic repercussions of the tightened US blockade and the Coronavirus disease, which has hit the country hard, and was not in a position to provide adequate aid. After decades during which the world powers used Lebanon for their own interests, they are now abandoning the country at the worst possible time.

It is in this context that the World Bank granted an initial loan of 120 million dollars in April to the Lebanese State for financing its health expenditures. The IMF, always quick to react in this type of situation, has also posed as the saviour of the Lebanese by offering the government a loan of 10 billion dollars. Of course, as is traditional for the Bretton Woods institution, that offer of cash was accompanied by a Structural Adjustment Plan (SAP) - in other words, a package of "reforms" to even further liberalize an economy that is already extremely financialized.

**For a genuine international aid and reforms that really serve the**



## Lebanese people

Since 4 August, facing the real cataclysm that struck the people of Beirut and quite logically moved the peoples of the rest of the world, governments around the world have been promising humanitarian aid. The French president even went to the city to make an openly neo-colonialist pronouncement to the population of the former French protectorate, who demanded that he withdraw support for the political elites supported by France. While the explosion of 4 August of course affected the inhabitants of Beirut first, all Lebanon's people will also suffer its consequences. The city's port - the country's main trading port (60% of all imports, including 85% of all imported grain) in a country whose land borders have been cut off by the war in Syria and the conflict with Israel - was destroyed, along with a large part of the financial district. As a result Lebanon's entire economy is prostrate. At a time when the people had already lost their savings and

their pensions in the face of a skyrocketing cost of living, 250,000 persons are now homeless and millions will be deprived of income.

And we must not forget that Lebanon is a country where 1 in 4 inhabitants is a refugee. Although the data are not exact, it is estimated that along with 4.5 million Lebanese people there are more than 1.5 million Syrian and more than 500,000 Palestinian refugees, to speak only of the most important groups. We must also consider the huge number of migrants living in the country, working in appalling conditions, particularly domestic workers. All these people will be hit even harder by the current crisis.

It is therefore clear that international aid is indispensable, both to deal with the humanitarian emergency and to reconstruct in the middle and long term. It is also abundantly clear that local power can no longer be held by those who are responsible for this disaster but must be returned to the population, which must be able to manage the country's institutions in

the common interest. The aid must be genuine, and for that to happen it must take the form of donations, medical and food support and provision of logistics expertise (in particular for rebuilding the port, the hospitals and essential infrastructures) and not loans. And the major reforms (demanded by the popular movements) that are indispensable for the country must be of a nature to enable democratic, efficient management of the country, and not the kind proposed (with renewed insistence) by the IMF, which will lead to an even greater increase in economic inequalities and an economy that will remain dependent on finance, as systematically happens in all countries that are subjected to SAPs.

We therefore call for a genuine international aid in the form of grants and a complete cancellation of Lebanon's debt, and not new loans that will further prevent the country's reconstruction in the long term.

CADTM

## The New Right Wing Triangle in the Trump-Orbán-Netanyahu Era

13 August 2020, by Catherine Samary

In the context of a deep crisis of socialist alternatives, membership of the European Union (EU) seen from the East has often appeared to peoples as being associated with rights and preferable to an absolute external peripherization: it is in Poland or Hungary that we still find the highest rates (over 70%) of popular support for EU membership today. At the same time, the social degradation and corruption associated with opaque privatization quickly backfired against the parties which had organized it in the first decade of "post-Communist transition".

That is why, ten years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, in 1999 - at the end of

a NATO intervention (on the question of Kosovo) which also proved to be very destabilizing in the region, the European Union (EU) decided to try to stabilize the situation by offering the "liberal" parties the acceleration of a "return to ("civilized") Europe": it was a political choice aimed at opposing both the Communist past and the various nationalisms identified as "pro-Russian" in the Putin decade. The first wave of enlargement to the east of the EU for the CEECs (Central and Eastern European Countries) therefore materialized in 2004, notably for Hungary and Slovenia. From 1999, this opening was accompanied by a "stabilization plan" for the Western Balkan countries

declared "potential candidates" with the aim of tying them to the EU - which notably included post-Milosevic Serbia. All of this led in the early 2000s to surge in growth through indebtedness (with the opening of subsidiaries of Western banks in the East), and a take-off in FDI (foreign direct investment) attracted by "social and fiscal dumping".

### The 2008-2009 crisis and the

## opening of a new phase of opaque polarizations

The 2008 banking and financial crisis followed by the EU recession hit Eastern Europe hard. It put an end to the “catch-up” discourse which was now replaced by one of austerity. This new phase was and remains marked by multiple social explosions. But the illusions about a “real” capitalism (opposing corruption and opaque privatizations) was combined with the difficulty of outlining credible progressive alternatives.

The success of new right-wing “populisms” expressed the rejection of the forces identified as “left” and/or “liberal” who had carried out the privatizations which were a condition of EU membership. It was rejected by the new conservatives as a “decadent civilization” tolerating abortion and homosexuality at the same time as being (for some) dominated by Jews or (for others) invaded by Muslims. Orbán’s Hungary (and his party, Fidesz) would set the precedent.

The so-called “refugee crisis” in 2015 radicalized and largely unified

discourse with a dominant Islamophobic axis compatible with anti-Semitism: wasn’t the wealthy Jew Soros, stigmatized in Hungary, financing the NGOs supporting Muslim immigrants? Unlikely encounters grew between Orbán and Netanyahu in the era of Trump and the ethnicization of “neoliberal” policies with anti-foreigner sentiment. But doubts about the future of NATO, the difficulties of Brexit, and the rise of right-wing currents within the EU changed the orientations: with or without the euro, it was the conservative societal and anti-migrant axis which would emerge, with an authoritarian dimension. At the same time, Hungarian diplomacy turned in favour of Putin’s Russia, hit by European sanctions after the Ukrainian crisis of 2014, which, in turn, encouraged rapprochement with Serbia, dominated by Aleksandar Vučić: we have here all the ingredients of the triangular press conference.

## A new balance of power in the EU?

Aleksandar Vučić and his party, initially anchored in the so-called “pro-Russian” Serbian nationalist far right, has become the new strongman of a

country now negotiating EU membership like all the other “Western Balkan” countries. But that didn’t stop him from opposing sanctions against Russia. He is now playing on all fronts (including Trump, advocating an ethnic division in Kosovo). In the midst of a resurgence of the pandemic, he is accused by his opposition of exploiting this to muzzle it more and more.

The three leaders complain of stigmatisation - when they vaunt the support they have received from China (quicker than the EU) in relation to the pandemic, or when they are only expressing, they say, “how to live”. The Slovenian leader says: “The main threat to our continent is cultural Marxism” which seeks to dismantle the nation and the family. [53] But like the Hungarian leader, he advocates enlarging the Union to include the Eastern Partnership states.

For its part, the EU is juggling with regional “stabilocratic” logics which push it to support the Aleksandar Vučić regime, despite the social mobilizations that have opposed it for months: it is playing the card of relations between Belgrade and Pristina, on the one hand, and that of migrant control at the gates of the EU on the “Balkan route”.

## Problems of unequal development in underdeveloped countries

12 August 2020, by **Wijepala Weerakoon**

Why were the bourgeois parties in underdeveloped countries unable to carry out the bourgeoisie-democratic tasks realized by the bourgeoisie in developed capitalist countries? When we consider this question, it is clear that the bourgeoisie in underdeveloped countries is small, has closer ties with feudal forces in the country, and on the basis of their dependent economy some of the bourgeoisie have ties to imperialism.

Some of the key tasks performed by the bourgeois revolution, such as liberation from imperialism, democratization of the state, solving the national question and agrarian revolution, remain today important issues to be solved in underdeveloped countries such as Sri Lanka and India. Instead of leading the working class, the driving force of social revolution, to take power in its own hands, some workers parties of those Third World countries tied the working class to the

bourgeoisie of their respective countries.

Many people in underdeveloped countries consider democracy to be simply holding elections and electing governments. They do not consider the limitations of those elections. When we look for example at Sri Lanka, we see the dishonesty of the bourgeois parties regarding the national question. In late 1950s when Sirimavo Bandaranaike was about

become prime minister, she came close to reaching an agreement with S.J.V. Chelvanayagam of the Federal Party regarding the minority issue. In response, the United National Party (UNP) revolted across the country. When UNP President J.R. Jayawardena tried to sign the Indo-Lanka accord in 1987, the SLFP together with the JVP revolted across the country. In 1995, when SLFP President Chandrika Bandaranayake proposed a separate administration for North and East, the UNP Parliamentarians revolted. Such bourgeois parties will do the same in the future.

The argument of Stalinists is that communists must work together with the national bourgeoisie in each country in order to carry out the tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution before the socialist revolution becomes possible. Only then becomes it possible to overthrow those national capitalist governments and carry out the socialist revolution. This is called the two-stage theory of revolution. We can learn from the experience of Sri

Lanka in this regard. Although the LSSP was founded in 1935 as a Trotskyist party, it was still in a sense a Stalinist party because there was no clear agenda for the working class itself to take power. The hartal (mass protest) of 1953 was the best opportunity for workers to seize power. But in the absence of a plan, the LSSP leadership called off the hartal after two days. This betrayal by the LSSP leaders gave the UNP government the opportunity to reassert its power during a time when it was forced to hold its cabinet meeting in a ship docked at the harbor.

The economic prosperity of the late 1950s led to the emergence of populist leaders that implemented social reforms in many parts of the world. Bandaranayake in Sri Lanka, Nehru in India, Ben Bella in Algeria, Tito in Yugoslavia, Nasser in Egypt and Sukarno in Indonesia are some examples. The nationalization of companies and lands, concessions

beneficial for the people, expansion of industries etc. were some of the social reforms that took place during this period. As a result workers' parties in such countries entered in coalitions with bourgeois parties.

However, with the ensuing recession and under international pressure, the bourgeois rulers, who before had claimed such progressive ideals, usurped the rights of the people while leftist leaders made excuses for them. By then many members of such parties joined bourgeois parties.

The NSSP was formed in 1977 by a section of the LSSP which strongly criticized the betrayal of N. M. Perera, Colvin R. de Silva (leaders of LSSP) and others who in 1964 formed an alliance with the SLFP. At its founding, the NSSP presented peoples councils as a way for the working class to take power. What was in 1964 a tragedy, in 2020 turned into a farce. NSSP-leader Vikramabahu "Bahu" Karunaratne did not stop at an alliance but entered as a member into the bourgeois UNP, su

## On "antisemitism"

11 August 2020, by **Roland Rance**

The argument is specious because it is generally used not in a spirit of genuine inquiry, but in order to obscure and even justify incidents of anti-Jewish bigotry. But it is also specious because it uses pseudo-scientific arguments and half-understood etymological claims to make a reactionary political case.

In the first place, there is no such thing as a "Semite". Race is a social construct, not a biological essence, and this is particularly true of the so-called "Semitic race". Until the nineteenth century, the term "Semitic" referred solely to a linguistic group, including Arabic, Hebrew, Aramaic, Amharic and related languages. Significantly, neither Yiddish - the language of East European Ashkenazi Jews - nor Ladino

- the language of Sefardi Jews in the Ottoman empire - is a Semitic language.

### "Race science"

With the development of European "race science" in the nineteenth century, the term was expanded to suggest that all speakers of Semitic languages were also racially related. Despite Jews not speaking a Semitic language except in prayer, they were arbitrarily included in this spurious category.

And later, when Jew-hater Wilhelm Marr sought to give a pseudo-scientific gloss to the bigotry he had expressed in his notorious book *The Victory of the Jewish Spirit over the Germanic Spirit*, he named his new

anti-Jewish organisation the Antisemiten-Liga.

This was an explicitly anti-Jewish organisation; there is no evidence of Marr ever attacking any Arabs or Ethiopians. And since then, the term antisemitism, however misleading, has been used to mean anti-Jewish racism.

For some reason, when Marr's campaign was reported in England and his works translated, the term "Antisemitismus" acquired a hyphen and a capital, and became "anti-Semitism". This form of the term compounds the difficulties in using the term, since it implies an essential "Semitism" which the antisemites are combatting.

Indeed, this was precisely Marr's intention in coining the word. It is

clear what anti-racists or anti-capitalists are opposing, but what exactly are “anti-Semites” combatting?

The problem with the term is that it implies that anti-Jewish racism is something separate from other expressions of racism. It is not hatred of Jews, but opposition to the mythical “Semitism” which we embody.

Taken to its extreme, the term even implies that the reason for anti-Jewish racism is to be found within Jews ourselves, rather than in the racist society in which we all live – an argument that is explicitly advanced by the antisemitic charlatan Gilad Atzmon. [54]

By now, unfortunately, we are stuck with the term “antisemitism”, with all of its shortcomings. We need to be clear that any arguments about whether Jews really are “Semites”, or whether speakers of Semitic languages really can be antisemitic, are diversionary tactics.

The term was coined to mean anti-Jewish racism, and this is the way in which we should understand and when appropriate use it.

But we should not contribute to the racist myth of an essential “Semitism”, characteristic to Jews, and demonstrated explicitly in the hyphenated form of the term.

Increasingly, scholars and activists, of different political perspectives, have argued against hyphenating the term, making very similar arguments. I recognise that most people who use the hyphenated form are not aware of this socio-linguistic debate, and are certainly not trying to perpetuate the myth of “the eternal Jew”.

But I urge everyone to think of this when writing about anti-Jewish racism, and to consider exactly what message you want to convey. We won’t change the world by changing our language, least of all by dropping a hyphen. But as part of a broader struggle, even symbolic changes matter.

***Socialist Resistance***

# China and the United States: A New Cold War

10 August 2020, by **Ashley Smith, Kevin Lin**

Wang Huiyao, president of Beijing’s Center for China and Globalization, warned that “the level of trust between China and the United States is at its lowest point since diplomatic ties were first established in 1979.” He is worried this means that “the boom years of globalization will be over, and we might see the global system breaking into two parts. That would greatly slow down global growth, and developing countries would have to side with one of the two camps.” [55]

This new imperial conflict is precisely what the United States had aimed to prevent after the end of the last Cold War when George Bush Sr. announced the rise of a “New World Order.” The United States had attempted to superintend this new order as the unrivaled hegemon, imposing neoliberalism on the states of the world, overseeing corporate globalization, and buttressing the situation with international and economic institutions it largely controlled. Now that project lies in tatters. Washington has suffered relative imperial decline, China has

become its rising rival, and global capitalism has entered its deepest crisis since the Great Depression.

These new conditions will deepen the conflict between the two powers, regardless of the results of the upcoming U.S. presidential election. Presumptive Democratic Party nominee Joe Biden has adopted a position just as hawkish against China as the Trump administration. With interimperial rivalry returned for the first time since the end of the Cold War, and with each side whipping up dueling nationalisms, the left will have to stake out a clear position of international solidarity from below against both Washington and Beijing.

## The Roots of the Rivalry

While Donald Trump has certainly intensified the conflict, its roots are deeper than the policies of this or that administration on either side. They lie in the neoliberal boom, the strategic failures of U.S. imperialism, the Great

Recession, and China’s increasing weight as an economic and geopolitical power.

These changes brought an end to the unipolar world that the United States secured after the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. Back then the United States possessed enormous unrivaled power; its dollar was the global currency, its economy was far larger than any other, and its military, with a budget larger than the next ten states combined, was without a rival. Washington developed a grand strategy to lock in its hegemony by incorporating all the world’s states into a neoliberal world order of free trade globalization.

It used the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to pry open the world’s economies, established the World Trade Organization to cohere an international free trade system, and deployed the U.S. military often, through the UN and NATO, to police so-called rogue states and “stabilize” societies wrecked by its neoliberal policies. Throughout, it sought to prevent the rise of any peer



competitor.

Three developments in the world system undid Washington's unrivaled dominance. First, the boom from the early 1980s to 2008 restructured global capitalism. [56] It produced new centers of capital accumulation, most importantly China, which has transformed itself from a marginal player in the world economy to the workshop of the world. The economic development of it and other states enabled them to become more geopolitically assertive.

Second, the United States suffered what General William Odom called the greatest strategic disaster in its history with its invasion and occupation of Iraq, which bogged it down in endless counterinsurgency warfare. That compromised the U.S. ambition to place the Middle East and its strategic energy reserves under Washington's thumb and thereby position the United States to bully its potential rivals like China, which depend on the region for oil and natural gas.

Third, the Great Recession disproportionately hammered the U.S. economy. The ruling class did manage to drag it back from the brink of collapse with a combination of austerity and stimulus, but they have not been able to trigger a new boom. Indeed, the world economic system, and the United States and EU in particular, were locked in a global slump characterized by sluggish expansions alternating with deep recessions.

China, by contrast, managed to sustain its massive expansion with an enormous stimulus package of its own. Indeed, its boom sustained the economies of numerous countries, from Australia to Brazil, that export raw materials to meet the demand of China's manufacturing industries, construction of whole new cities, and building of modern infrastructure to support this development.

All of this led to the relative decline of U.S. imperialism. It no longer oversees a unipolar world order as it did in the 1990s and early 2000s. Instead, an asymmetric multipolar world order has emerged. The United States

remains the dominant state power with the largest economy and military and the greatest geopolitical influence, but it now faces an imperial rival in the form of China as well as Russia, which has outsized geopolitical power because of its military might, and a host of regional powers like Iran, all of which are jockeying for advantage in an increasingly conflict-ridden state system.

## The Rise of China

In this new order, Beijing has asserted itself as a global player. President Xi Jinping, who came to power in 2012, abandoned his predecessors' cautious grand strategy of developing the national economy and avoiding conflicts with other states and announced that his regime would instead pursue a "Chinese Dream" of reasserting China's rightful place as a great power.

Since this announcement, Xi has focused on turning China's economic might into geopolitical muscle. He launched the \$1 trillion Belt and Road Initiative infrastructure project in 2013. Beijing is exporting its industrial overcapacity to construct overland and oversea transit routes throughout Eurasia and parts of Africa, establishing itself in the process as the hub of the world economy.

Like other imperialist powers, China has financed all this development by extending loans to countries mostly in the Global South. As Harvard Business Review documents, "The Chinese state and its subsidiaries have lent about \$1.5 trillion in direct loans and trade credits to more than 150 countries around the globe. This has turned China into the world's largest official creditor—surpassing traditional, official lenders such as the World Bank, the IMF, or all OECD creditor governments combined." [57]

Xi is also determined to lead his economy's long march up the capitalist value chain through another initiative, called China 2025. While China officially abandoned the project to avoid the appearance of conflict with the United States, it is still pursuing all of the project's original

goals. On May 20, Bloomberg reported that China will invest \$1.4 trillion over the next five years to fund national champions in high tech, especially 5G, to compete with rivals in the United States, Europe, and Japan, who until now have dominated that sphere of the system. All these powers are now locked in competition in high tech not only for profit but also for its increasingly significant military role in cyberwarfare.

Based on its economic power, China has modernized its military and used it to pursue expansionist aims in the Asia-Pacific. Xi has built up the country's navy, deployed ships, established militarized islands in the South and East China seas to control shipping lanes, claimed undersea oil and natural gas reserves, and asserted rights to fisheries. Finally, China has become much more assertive geopolitically in every arena, from climate change negotiations to deliberations in the UN Security Council.

## The Contradictions of U.S. Imperialism

China's rise and the relative decline of the United States has thrown Washington's imperial strategy into a quandary. In contrast to the Soviet Union, the United States is now faced with a geopolitical rival with which it is deeply integrated economically. U.S. multinationals use China as an export processing platform, and they covet the enormous Chinese market. On top of that, the U.S. state is deeply in debt to Beijing, which holds vast reserves of treasury bonds. This financial dependency famously drove Hillary Clinton to complain, "How do you deal toughly with your banker?"

Before Xi's turn to imperial assertiveness, the U.S. policy toward China had been a combination of containment and engagement, or what analysts call "conengagement." The United States tried to incorporate China and pressure it to abandon the state-capitalist organization of its economy and adopt free-market capitalism. At the same time,

Washington remained vigilant because of Beijing's reluctance to fully follow these dictates.

As a result, the United States shifted back and forth between emphasizing the two poles of the "conengagement" policy. As its last advocate, Obama tilted the United States decisively toward containment with his so-called Pivot to Asia. He aimed to extract the United States from its occupations in the Middle East and reorient U.S. imperialism toward projecting its power in the Asia-Pacific.

Obama hoped to integrate Asia economically into Washington's neoliberal order through the ratification of the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement, which excluded China. He also aimed to shift 60 percent of the U.S. Navy to the Asia-Pacific to deter Beijing's military expansion. Finally, he planned to shore up and expand Washington's historic alliances, forged over decades of hegemony in Asia, and establish new ones like Vietnam.

Obama's pivot failed. The United States remained bogged down in the Middle East, the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement never came up for a ratification vote, and U.S. alliances frayed as states doubted Washington's commitment to the region and opted for balancing between the two rivals. Thus, U.S. imperial strategy foundered in confusion over what to do about China's new assertiveness.

## Trump's 'America First' Nationalism

The Trump administration, however erratically, has attempted to implement a new strategy of "illiberal hegemony" to solve Washington's imperial puzzle over how to confront China. This has four dimensions. First, Trump aims to strengthen the security state by policing its borders and surveilling oppressed people, especially immigrants and Muslims but also Chinese students in U.S. universities.

Second, he promises to onshore manufacturing and shift U.S. supply

chains away from China. Third, he is shifting away from his predecessors' focus on the so-called War on Terror to "Great Power Rivalry," specifically against China. He has reoriented defense plans for a new buildup with that confrontation in mind. Fourth, he wants to put "America First" and establish a transactional relationship with both U.S. allies and adversaries.

Applied to China, this new imperial strategy moved the United States toward a New Cold War with Beijing. In economics, Trump has tried to batter down China through a trade war. He wants to stop forced technology transfer between U.S. and Chinese companies, compel the privatization of Beijing's state-capitalist industry, open the country's markets even more to U.S. multinationals, and stop China's state support for national champions in high tech like Huawei.

But up until recently Trump's policy—like that of his predecessors—has been shot through with a contradiction. He has vacillated between, on the one hand, threats to decouple the two economies, forcing supply chains out of China, and on the other hand, calls for China to open up to U.S. investments and sales. Nevertheless, his administration's predilection is clearly for decoupling.

In geopolitics, Trump has tried to pressure U.S. allies to ban Huawei from their 5G infrastructure as a national security threat. And he is trying to shore up U.S. alliances state by state to prevent China from using its economic might to draw Eurasia under its influence. To enforce all of this, the United States is building up its defense forces to prepare for war with China, increasing its naval patrols in the Asia-Pacific, and selling more weapons to its allies including Taiwan.

## Trump's Pandemic Blame Game

The pandemic and global recession have dramatically intensified the rivalry between the two powers. Both countries face economic disaster; China's economy, which had slowed to

6.1 percent growth last year, will contract by 7 percent this year, and the U.S. economy, which had been crawling along at 2.3 percent growth, will shrink by 6 percent in 2020. Amidst the crisis, each state has whipped up nationalism to solidify domestic support for even sharper conflict over geopolitics, economics, and military supremacy.

The Trump administration, which bungled the U.S. response to the pandemic at the cost of tens of thousands of avoidable deaths, has tried to deflect blame for the carnage onto China. Trump and others repeatedly called COVID-19 the "Chinese virus" or "Wuhan virus" and peddled conspiracy theories that it was leaked from a research lab in Wuhan. His administration has even allowed U.S. states to override China's sovereign immunity and sue it for compensation. Missouri has already blazed the trail, bringing a lawsuit against Beijing in April.

The Republican Party is lock-step behind Trump in China-bashing. Its leaders drafted a 57-page memo with talking points blaming China for the pandemic. Politico reports that they stress "three main lines of assault: That China caused the virus 'by covering it up,' that Democrats are 'soft on China,' and that Republicans will 'push for sanctions on China for its role in spreading this pandemic.'" [58]

Steven Bannon, the dark prince of the alt-right and Trump's former chief strategist, predicted that in the upcoming presidential election, "Trump's campaign will be about China, China, China," and, in a fit of wishful thinking, "hopefully the fact that he rebooted the economy." [59] Thus, Trump and the extreme nationalist, right-wing, anti-China forces have tried to play the disaster for their own advantage and press for their New Cold War.

The Democratic Party has enthusiastically joined the Republicans' China-bashing. The Democratic National Committee developed a strategy document of their own, targeting Trump for absurd flattery of China. The party's presumptive nominee for president,

Joe Biden, has actually tried to outflank the Republicans on the right. He released an ad that, instead of criticizing the crumbling health care infrastructure in the United States, focused its attack on China, claiming that “Trump rolled over for the Chinese.” [60]

Such China-bashing is not restricted to establishment Democrats. Three self-described progressives argue in a February Foreign Affairs article provocatively entitled “The Left Should Play the China Card” that “stable, managed competition with Beijing is both necessary to secure U.S. national interests and likely to be beneficial for progressives. The left should seize the opportunity afforded by foreign rivalry to advance a progressive domestic agenda—embracing an ambitious program of investment, innovation, social inclusion, and national renewal.”

Bernie Sanders of course has not stooped to such lows. But truth be told, while he has advocated radical domestic reforms, he has not paired those with similarly radical positions on international conflicts, especially in relation to China. Sanders has adopted a protectionist position against Beijing, blaming it for U.S. job losses, and also supported the formation of a “progressive international” against it and other authoritarian states. Thus, both capitalist parties have adopted extreme nationalistic positions against China.

## Washington Flirts with Decoupling

Trump has channeled all of this into escalating the conflict to a fever pitch, going so far as to threaten to cut off relations with China and decouple the two economies. As the infamous “Dr. Doom” of bourgeois economists, Nouriel Roubini, put it in a May interview in New York Magazine, “We have a full-scale trade war, technology war, financial war, monetary war, technology, information, data, investment, pretty much anything across the board. ... So, decoupling is happening. We’re going to have

splinternet. It’s only a matter of how fast.”

Trump is considering nixing the “phase one” trade deal he struck to lower tariffs on China because of its failure to follow through on its promise to buy U.S. farm exports. He has used national security to try to force U.S. high-tech firms to sever their relationships with Chinese companies. For example, he issued a new rule that bars high-tech companies that use U.S. technology, like Taiwan’s TSMC, from selling their semiconductors to Huawei. Huawei hoped to put a stop to this, declaring that the rule puts its very existence in jeopardy and with it much of the 5G infrastructure in the world.

But Trump and his GOP hawks will push it through. Nebraska Senator Ben Sasse celebrated Trump’s edict, railing, “The United States needs to strangle Huawei. Modern wars are fought with semiconductors, and we were letting Huawei use our American designs. This is pretty simple: Chip companies that depend on American technology can’t jump into bed with the Chinese Communist party. This rule is long overdue.” [61] As part of this campaign, the United States has expanded its blacklist to include 24 more companies and universities and another nine institutions, which it accuses of complicity with human rights violations in Xinjiang.

Trump has also opened a new front in the economic conflict by barring various international financial transactions. He forced the Federal Retirement Thrift Investment Board, which manages \$600 billion in government workers’ retirement funds, to stop buying stocks in Chinese companies. On May 20, the New York Times worried that this move “could roil financial markets in the United States and China, as well as cross border investment.”

Finally, Trump has intensified pressure on U.S. corporations to divert their supply chains out of China. His U.S. Trade Representative, Robert Lighthizer, penned an op-ed in the New York Times that called for the decoupling of the two economies. He railed against corporations offshoring their production, denounced free

trade agreements for eroding U.S. sovereignty and hemorrhaging American jobs, announced that reflexive offshoring is over, and declared the path to prosperity is the same for companies as it is for workers: bringing jobs back to America.

Whether corporations will follow his dictates is another matter. U.S. multinationals remain deeply integrated with China both for production and sales. Most Apple products are manufactured in China, and the country remains one of the largest markets for U.S. corporations like Ford. Nevertheless, the combination of the global recession and Trump’s nationalism is driving a wedge deeper between the two economies.

These pressures are having an impact. On May 11, the Financial Times reported, “Chinese direct investment in the United States dropped to the lowest level since 2009 last year—down from \$2.7 billion a quarter in 2018 and \$8 billion a quarter in the boom years of 2016 and 2017—amid souring bilateral ties.” And “Chinese venture capitalist investment into the United States also fell off a cliff, slumping from \$4.7 billion in 2018 to \$2.6 billion last year.” But in a sign of the persisting integration of the two economies, the paper found that “U.S. investments into China showed considerable resilience” and that “a majority of U.S. companies operating in China did not plan to move production and supply chains out of the country.”

Still the trajectory is clear enough to lead the vanguard magazine of neoliberalism, the Economist, to predict a contraction of international trade, disintegration of global supply chains, a rise in protectionism, and restrictions on international capital flows. They concluded their article on May 14 saying, “Wave goodbye to the greatest era of globalization—and worry about what is going to take its place.”

## Warmongering



## and Sinophobia

Even more ominously, the United States has ratcheted up military tension with China. The Trump administration and U.S. allies—most importantly Australia—deployed a flotilla of naval ships to challenge China in the South China Sea over competing claims for control of islands, fisheries, shipping lanes, and underwater drilling rights for oil and natural gas.

Trump has pressed ahead with retooling the U.S. military for great-power confrontation, specifically with China. He withdrew the United States from the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces treaty with Russia so that he could build more nuclear weapons to close the so-called missile gap with China in land-based cruise and ballistic missiles. He is also ramping up plans to make high-tech weapons to win a possible war with China. [62]

As part of its Indo-Pacific strategy, the Trump administration intends to deploy these weapons throughout the region. One of the most threatening moves it has made against China is its increased weapon sales to Taiwan, which Beijing considers a rogue province. Last year the United States sold a \$2.2 billion package of F-16 fighter jets, M1A2t Abrams tanks, and portable Stinger anti-aircraft missiles to Taipei. And it just announced plans to sell Taiwan 18 submarine-launched torpedoes for \$180 million and promised further sales of coastal missile defense systems, spy drones, and technology to aid intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance. [63].

The United States will also bully states to stop them from drifting into the Chinese sphere of influence. And it will not hesitate to orchestrate military coups to replace hostile regimes with pliant ones in order to bring states back into its orbit. In fact, an op-ed in Bloomberg News in May predicted that the “China rivalry may put the United States back in the coup business.” Of course, it actually never the left it, so it would only be ramping up.

To justify this militarism, the U.S. ruling class has whipped up

nationalist and xenophobic hostility to China. They have racialized the pandemic, portraying not just the Chinese government but the Chinese people as enemies. As a result, they have opened a new phase of anti-Chinese racism, including racism against Chinese- and Asian-Americans.

This nationalist campaign is having a dramatic impact on popular consciousness. The Pew Center reported on April 21 that 91 percent of Americans believe that the world is better off with the United States as its leading power, 71 percent have no confidence in Xi, 66 percent hold an unfavorable view of China, and 62 percent see it as a major threat to the United States. This Sinophobia has triggered a tidal wave of hate crimes against Asians, with over 1,500 incidents and climbing since March. [64]

Trump even institutionalized this bigotry in his pandemic policy. He imposed an early travel ban on China, but not on Europe, with disastrous results. It was Europe, not China, that was source of the outbreak in New York City, which quickly spread through the northeast and the rest of the country

## China Parries and Postures as an Alternative

China has parried Trump’s attacks, postured as a defender of the existing global order, and at the same time prepared for even great rivalry with the United States. Its first step has been to try to flip the script on its own disastrous mishandling of the pandemic.

China initially suppressed information about the outbreak, disciplined doctor Li Wenliang, who later died from COVID-19, for posting about it on social media, and thereby enabled the outbreak to spread from Wuhan internationally. After the crisis was clear for all to see, the state locked down the city, imposed domestic travel bans, and mobilized its state resources to address the health emergency, building hospitals,

conducting testing, and isolating those who contracted the disease. [65]

Faced with the Trump administration’s unrelenting attacks and slander, hardliners in the regime rolled out their own set of conspiracy theories, blaming the United States for releasing the virus. For example, Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian tweeted that the U.S. Army might have brought it to Wuhan. [66] Like Trump, Zhao and the “wolf warrior” diplomats hoped to deflect blame for the catastrophe on to their rival.

After the regime successfully controlled the initial outbreak, it went on the offensive to restore damage done to its reputation. It unleashed a domestic propaganda campaign celebrating its successes in order to reconsolidate its popular base of support in the country. It has whipped up Chinese nationalism just like Trump has whipped up U.S. nationalism.

China also has tried to rehabilitate its international reputation by mobilizing its enormous economic power to help address the pandemic. It sent ventilators to Italy and personal protective equipment to Iran and Serbia, while Jack Ma, the billionaire founder of Alibaba, delivered tests and masks to the United States and has promised to do the same for all of Africa’s 54 countries.

Taking advantage of Trump’s failure to coordinate an international response, China has used its pandemic efforts to project itself as an alternative leader in the world system. Thus, while Trump pulled funding and potentially U.S. membership from the World Health Organization, China increased funding for it. As Jude Blanchette, a China expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, notes, “We are seeing version 2.0 of the assertiveness Beijing exhibited following the 2008 global financial crisis. It is a result of the conviction of their rising power versus a West in decline.” [67]

But rather than pose a frontal challenge to the United States, China has positioned itself as the one demanding collaboration even as they



compete. Beijing rightly judges that it cannot supplant the United States now. So, the same Foreign Ministry Spokesman, Zhao Lijian, who spread the bizarre conspiracy theory against the United States stated, “Stable development of China-U.S. relations serves the fundamental interests of both countries. The two sides should strengthen anti-epidemic cooperation, win the war against the epidemic, treat patients, and resume economic production. But this requires the United States to meet China halfway.” [68]

## Matching Washington’s Militarism

At the same time, though, China recognizes such cooperation may no longer be in the cards, and it is gearing up for a much more assertive geopolitical, economic, and military stance. As one commentator notes, “There is a major reassessment of the U.S.-China interdependence underway. ... Even if Xi might like to temporarily de-escalate the trade and technology conflicts to reduce pressure on the Chinese economy, there is now powerful momentum behind what we might call a ‘security first’ future.” [69]

Beijing is pushing to develop its own internal market to insulate it from U.S. economic pressures. The South China Post documents that “exports as a percentage of China’s gross domestic product (GDP) fell to 17.4 percent in 2019 compared to 36.04 percent in 2006. Imports fell from 23.37 percent of GDP at their highest point in 2011 to 14.45 percent last year. Trade in goods accounted for 64.4 percent of the Chinese economy in 2006, World Bank data show, compared to 32 percent last year.” [70]

Confident in this internal economic potential, China has matched Washington’s geopolitical bullying in kind. “The mindset now is more to coerce counterparts to respect China’s interests as cooperative security is seen as less and less effective,” said Zhao Tong, a senior fellow at the

Carnegie-Tsinghua Center for Global Policy in Beijing. [71] Already China has disciplined lesser powers for crossing it. For example, it banned import of red meat from four Australian abattoirs to punish Canberra for calling for an inquiry into the origins of COVID-19.

Beijing has stood up to Washington’s military posturing. It has no intention of backing down to the United States and conceding its claims to its projected sphere of influence in the Asia-Pacific. In April, it deployed its own naval vessels in the South China Sea and similarly deployed a flotilla led by its aircraft carrier, the Liaoning, in waters close to Taiwan, provoking Taipei to scramble its warships.

China is preparing to respond to Trump’s plans to deploy new missiles in the region. Reuters reported May 6 that Senior Colonel Wu Qian had warned last October that Beijing would “not stand by” if Washington deployed land-based, long-range missiles in the Asia-Pacific and that China promised to increase military spending by 6.6 percent this year to fund the new arms race.

## Repressing Dissent and Bashing Immigrants

China has taken advantage of the pandemic to crack down on dissent in Hong Kong as well as Xinjiang and Tibet. It pushed the Hong Kong government to arrest leading figures of the pro-democracy movement, including former lawmakers. [72] Xi also planned to enact a new national security law for Hong Kong that will treat all political dissent as “treason, secession, sedition, and subversion” against the Chinese government. Even more ominously, this law opens the door for Beijing to deploy its national security forces to arrest and jail all sorts of activists under the cover of defending the Chinese state against “foreign-backed terrorists.” [73]

Similarly, Xi will brook no dissent in Tibet as well as Xinjiang, where the regime has built a massive

surveillance apparatus and interned more than one million Uighur Muslims in concentration camps. With the regime looking to develop its internal economy and market in the country’s western provinces, it will double down on its repression of this oppressed nation and national minority.

This crackdown will produce resistance in these areas, perhaps most importantly in Hong Kong, which was rocked last year by a democracy movement that regularly put millions of people into the streets on mass marches. Already, thousands have hit the streets in opposition to Beijing’s new national security law, and more will join them in the coming months. Hong Kong along with Taiwan will likely become the biggest flashpoints in the rivalry between Washington and Beijing.

Despite the resistance in Hong Kong, Xi’s nationalist campaign has stabilized his domestic support. In fact, Cornell professor Jessica Chen Weiss told the Financial Times in May that his handling of the pandemic and geopolitical conflict has “strengthened Xi’s grasp on power, despite the shockwave that the outbreak initially sent through the system.”

But this nationalism has a dark side—xenophobia. Just like the United States, China has repressed immigrants, tightened border restrictions, and implied foreigners are responsible for re-introducing the virus. This scapegoating has triggered widespread discrimination and hate crimes against immigrants, especially those from African countries.

## Death Rattle of the Neoliberal World Order

We have thus entered a New Cold War between the United States and China. The pandemic, global recession, and the unravelling of Washington’s neoliberal world order will stoke this rivalry over the next decade. Pre-existing trends are accelerating: U.S. decline, increased Chinese assertiveness, growing interstate conflict, and tilts toward protectionism

against globalization.

In a stark article in *Foreign Affairs*, former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd predicts there will be “slow but steady drift toward international anarchy across everything from international security to trade and pandemic management. With nobody directing traffic, various forms of rampant nationalism are taking the place of order and cooperation. The chaotic nature of national and global responses to the pandemic thus stands as a warning of what could come on an even broader scale.”

Amidst this crisis, Rudd argues, “Strategic rivalry will now define the entire spectrum of the U.S.-Chinese relationship—military, economic, financial, technological, ideological—and increasingly shape Beijing and Washington’s relationships with third countries.” While this trajectory is clear, there remain counter-tendencies that will mitigate any open confrontation between the two powers.

First, China remains weaker and unprepared for now to supplant the United States from its dominant position. While it is rising as an economic superpower, it remains dependent on the United States for high-tech research and design and its currency cannot supplant the dollar as the global reserve. Its military, while regionally strong, cannot match the United States in global scope. And geopolitically, it has been deeply discredited by the pandemic and it is increasingly resented by countries deeply in debt to it. [74] Therefore, it is likely to shrink back from direct confrontation, continuing to build its power to compete while it calls for cooperation.

Second, both countries’ capitalist classes remain deeply integrated, again further dampening open conflict. Any decoupling of the two economies remains in the earliest phases. Apple, one of the most

significant U.S. corporations, has only just begun to consider diverting some of its production in mainland China to other countries like Vietnam.

Finally, since both powers possess and are building bigger nuclear arsenals, any military conflict would end in mutual destruction. Thus, in similar and different ways to the last Cold War, conflict will be pushed into battles over other countries through proxies and allies and into “geo-economics,” with each trying to carve out clearer spheres of influence. But, the crisis and its tendency to intensify nationalism, spur protectionism on the grounds of national security, and reorient supply chains into spheres of influence are driving the United States and China toward classic interimperial conflict.

## **Neither Washington nor Beijing, but International Socialism**

The China-U.S. rivalry will become a pivotal and unavoidable issue for the left. In both states, the ruling classes—and especially their right-wing hardliners—will turn to nationalism to deflect blame for the deep crisis in the system on to their rivals and will rally their working classes behind their respective imperial projects. The left must chart an alternative path of working-class solidarity against both the United States and China.

In the United States, the left’s first and foremost obligation is, to paraphrase the German revolutionary Karl Liebknecht, to oppose the main enemy, our own imperialist state. It remains the biggest enemy of peace, equality, and democracy throughout the world. If anyone doubts this statement, look at the catastrophes the United States wrought in Vietnam

in the 1960s and Iraq in the 2000s.

But in opposing the U.S. state, we should not support the Chinese state. This is an understandable temptation given the Trump administration’s transparently cynical exploitation of the pandemic to attack China. Yet we must resist adopting the disastrous logic of “my enemy’s enemy is my friend.”

The Chinese ruling class and its state, while a lesser power compared to the United States, is no less capitalist and imperialist. It exploits its working class and peasantry, oppresses nations and national minorities like the Tibetans and Uighurs, and projects its power against the United States and throughout the developing world. Instead of supporting this oppressive state, we should align ourselves with workers and oppressed people in China who have organized, protested, and gone on strike for their rights and improvements in their wages and working conditions.

That is the only way to build international solidarity between workers and oppressed groups in each state. In the United States, we must win workers away from the siren song of economic nationalism, sung by both the right-wing nationalists and the liberal and social democratic protectionists, that will only bind us to our bosses and their state by painting Chinese workers as the main threat to jobs and wages.

We must also work with Asian-American groups who have mobilized to oppose Trump’s China-bashing and racism. The Chinese-American community has been directly impacted by the rhetoric and actions of the U.S. state and is increasingly moving to push back against the U.S.-China rivalry. In a global economy, we have no choice but to organize from below across borders against both imperialist states, that is, the politics of genuine anti-imperialism and international socialism.

[New Politics](#)

# A triumph of ideology: John Hume and the defeat of Irish Republicanism

9 August 2020, by **John McAnulty**

There is much distortion here. Hume was not a leader of the Civil Rights Association. Rather he was a conservative nationalist who marched within the loose federation that was the Civil Rights Movement. His response to the iconic October 5th march in 1968 attacked by the RUC, was to appear on the 6th of October with a newly formed Derry Citizens Action committee, formed in alliance with the Church and the Derry Traders Association to act as a restraining force on the radical mobilisation.

He was already active on social issues, but this was a gradualist movement with close links with the Catholic Church - a housing association, a Credit Union and a campaign for a University campus in Derry.

A new political movement was being born. The old Nationalist Party had fallen into decay and opposed any protest. The slogan of its leader, Eddie McAteer, was;

"Half a loaf is better than no bread" Hume and the nascent Social Democratic and Labour Party had more of an 'Oliver Twist' approach that can be summed up as;

"Please sir, can we have some more?" As with the Nationalist Party, they were willing to operate within the confines set by the Orange state. Where the Nationalist party were content to receive favours for the middle class and the Church, the new nationalists wanted a place at the table and a share of political power.

So the voice of John Hume was the voice of conservative nationalism, of the Catholic Church and of the Catholic business class. Later this voice was sponsored by Irish capitalism as a whole and, following US supported academic studies in America, it was the local voice of the

Irish-American lobby inside the Democratic Party.

The ideology that emerged was intoned ad infinitum in what became known satirically as 'the single transferable speech'.

Imperialism, sectarianism and class oppression were restated as cultural misunderstanding. Border watchtowers, troops, guns, tanks, all the material aspects of oppression counted for nothing - it was the divisions in people's hearts that had to be addressed. We should ignore the physical reality of British occupation and partition and focus on unionist perceptions. Moderation was the key. John Hume credited Gandhi with the saying;

"An eye for an eye leaves everyone blind".

He never dealt with the inverse; passive acceptance leaves the oppressed blind and the oppressors in full possession of their faculties.

Hume was no great speaker, tending towards monotone in interview. It is argued that he managed to win the day by constant repetition until he eventually won over his opponents.

That's not the case. There was a bloody struggle in which thousands died. The British employed military repression and used loyalist killers to wage a war of terror. This combined with a resistance that focused in on militarism rather than linking to class politics led to defeat.

Throughout this period Hume and the SDLP consistently supported British institutions. Formal opposition to British violence ran alongside bitter condemnation of Republican violence. In a long nationalist tradition of acting as recruiting sergeants they supported the formation of an Ulster Defence Regiment to replace the notorious "B"

Specials, earning the nickname of stoops - the Stoop Down Low Party.

It was not Hume's speech that changed, but the environment in which it was delivered. The defeat of the Republican hunger strikers and the collapse of Republican strategy led to a sharp shift to the right and to the Provisionals adopting the constitutionalist nationalist ideology of Hume. This is his singular triumph: the conversion of a defeated Republicanism.

Hume's ideology serves to explain events rather than to have driven them. His arguments did not lead to the current settlement but merely served to explain it. Much of the show was simply window dressing. The Nobel Peace Prize with unionist leader Trimble, the dance on the stage choreographed by the obnoxious Bono, all took centre stage when the real deal in the background was between London and Dublin, supported by the USA. The bit actors were retired, with Adams taking over from Hume and Sinn Fein taking over from the SDLP as the voice of a chastened nationalism.

John Hume's later years were sad and dogged by serious illness. In his final moments he was not well served by his friends. The torrent of adulation from people like Blair and Clinton leaves a nasty taste in the mouth, as does the sugary praise of Sinn Fein. Comparisons with Gandhi, Mandela and Martin Luther King are particularly obnoxious. These people suffered serious violence and oppression at the hands of the state and advanced the cause of the oppressed. John Hume was early on recognised as the voice of 'reason' and treated with deference by the British. Protests and threats came from his own constituents, unhappy with his

representation of their struggle.

Perhaps the most honest assessment was from former Taoiseach Leo Varadkar:

"Today, we mourn the passing of one of Ireland's greatest ever sons. He ranks alongside O'Connell and Parnell in the pantheon of Ireland's great leaders".

This is the pantheon that John Hume

can be associated with - representatives of constitutional Irish capitalism in contradiction to its long revolutionary history.

John Hume's victory is echoed in the fervent praise of former opponents won over to his ideology. He would, I believe, be content to be given credit for today's Ireland - a "shared" Ireland where an Irish democracy is indefinitely postponed. Little has changed in the life chances of the

working class in Belfast and Derry, but the middle classes reek of self satisfaction at their place in the sun.

The permanence of Hume's legacy depends heavily on the permanence of the peace settlement - a structure that after decades has yet to demonstrate any stability.

5 August 2020

[Socialist Democracy](#)

# A Global View of Coronavirus, Medical Policy, and Research

8 August 2020, by **Gerard Chaouat**

In fact, passage of diseases from animals to humans, be it by microbes or viruses, is as old as humanity. For example, the H1N1 epidemic started from a chicken-breeding plant in La Gloria, Veracruz, Mexico. HIV originated from African monkeys, and Ebola was originally from bats and then most often passed along by monkeys. Similarly with coronaviruses (SARS in 2002-2004 and MERS), not to mention the infamous 1918 "Spanish Flu" and of course the pests, transmitted and carried by rats, that caused the plague that swept Europe in the fourteenth century. Such passages of disease from animals to humans, especially for flu, are not exceptional, but what is new is the frequency of the emergence of such epidemics and their faster and faster dissemination.

This is not an accident and is obviously linked to the over exploitation of natural ecosystems. In Southeast Asia, as elsewhere, bats, for example, are a natural reservoir for a wide array of viruses, including a great number of coronaviruses. Capitalism has the effect of reifying nature and transforming every resource into a merchandised object, which has resulted in the brutal penetration and destruction of ecosystems. Areas that were secluded

in jungles, savannahs, and rain forests are now in immediate contact with humans, devoid of any previous "mild" confrontation and thus of any prebuilt immunity. Add to that the construction of roads to rapidly transport goods to cities, and all of the conditions are met for the spread of disease nationwide. Then comes air transportation as well as merchant vessels and the carrying of infection via asymptomatic incubating individuals or on goods—especially since the virus or bacteria can stick to and stay alive on surfaces such as paper, plastic, and others for several hours, not to mention the aerosols caused by coughing or sneezing. Remember that an ordinary flight from Europe to the United States takes 6 to 8 hours, and the current Coronavirus can survive in an infectious form for 72 hours on plastic and up to 24 hours on paper or cardboard.

Most of the data on the emergence of COVID-19 indicates it originated in a food market in Wuhan via contact with a live pangolin sold for food, but some epidemiologists suggest that the patient zero might have been infected in November by direct contact with an animal in the adjacent woods of once-wild areas. Whatever the case, the repetition of such epidemic outbreaks is almost unavoidable in the future if

the present brutal exploitation of natural habitats persists. At least some of the outbreaks and dissemination could nevertheless be prevented if minimal research cataloging animal viruses in transition areas where agricultural or urban land meets wild territory was correctly supported and if research was also conducted on "pan-vaccines" rather than only on "individual" ones. But this requires long-term support and is not immediately profitable. We will discuss that later.

The conclusion is that a mode of production based on hyperexploitation of ecosystems is bound to induce more and more frequent epidemics of this kind, just as global warming results in the accumulation of CO2 from mass burning of fossil fuels and massive deforestation for intense production of programmed-to-be obsolescent goods. A whole system of eco-destruction is in fact at the origin of the epidemics and will cause new ones if unchanged.

## Heath Impact (as of May 10, 2020)

At present, five months after the start of the pandemic, we have more than 3.75 million cases worldwide and 263,831 deaths. The United States is



now officially the worst case in the world, with a toll of 10,259,708 cases, and 74,851 patient deaths [more than 100,000 by June 2020]. These figures are officially released ones, but are considered significant underestimates. One salient example is India, where no one trusts the government's statistics (52,959 cases and 1,789 deaths) but nobody is able to produce a reliable figure. I am reminded of a similar situation during the early AIDS history when I met with Françoise Barré Sinoussi, director of the Regulation of Retroviral Infections Division, Patrice Debré, now president of the French Association for the Advancement of the Sciences, and then Health Minister Sourav Ganguly, who said of India, "Everything is under control"—and then our missions discovered an HIV prevalence well above 10 percent in the slums of Delhi, Mumbai, and Calcutta. In Brazil, figures released by Bolsonaro's government state there are 126,618 cases and 8,588 deaths, while scientists from São Paulo hospitals warn of more than 1.3 million cases and photos of mass graves have been widely released. We will discuss below the differential handling of the epidemic in different continents and countries, but it is worth mentioning from the start that so far the announced catastrophe in Africa has not (yet?) taken place.

One must mention that people of every age are affected. While the disease is more severe in older people, especially those above 70, young children are also affected. And in the very young, aside from the well-known respiratory syndrome there are now reported cases with diarrhea and cardiac failure, akin to what is known as the "Kawasaki syndrome."

Factors like pre-existing disease, obesity, poor nutrition, and so on are proven to worsen the outcome. And, of course, we will come to factors that also affect the possibility of accessing care. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that in the United States, black communities are much more at risk than whites. For example, in April in Illinois, 40 percent of COVID-19 deaths were African American, but they represent only 15 percent of the state population, while in Louisiana, 60 percent of the first 900 deaths

were African American.

## Strategies

The responses to the outbreak vary greatly, from strategies aiming at confining the disease with various restrictions, as in most of Europe, to countries with almost no restrictions, as in Sweden.

Sweden and initially the United Kingdom based their strategy on the goal of reaching herd immunity, which is a way to stop the plague from spreading when there is no vaccine available. Using this approach Sweden recommended telework, regular hand washing, no meetings of more than 50 persons, no access to retirement homes, and closing of schools and universities. However restaurants and bars have remained open there. With this approach the hope was that the death toll would remain "moderate" and the population would become immunized within a few months, blocking the epidemic. Thus by May 7, in Sweden, which has 10 million inhabitants, there were 2,769 deaths (1,463 in the capital of Stockholm). This can be compared to adjacent northern countries, which used greater restrictions to confine their populations, with death tolls of 493 in Denmark, 240 in Finland, 214 in Norway, the three of which have a combined population of 16.7 million.

Vietnam has used the opposite approach. There, military-style rule was enforced: the closing of the borders, isolation in camps or hospitals for foreigners, up to 40 days quarantine of infected individuals and their neighbors, imprisonment for reluctant individuals or violators of the rules, denunciation of trespassers, and—almost on the other hand—no large-scale polymerase chain reaction (PCR) virus screening. A mobile-phone tracking of infected individuals and of nearby individuals indicated 75,000 persons or more had been quarantined this way. All that started in very early February, and confinement was enforced until April 1, though loosened in mid-April. The result, as confirmed by the World Health Organization (WHO) and by Johns Hopkins University, is eloquent: 94 million inhabitants, 268 cases, 0

deaths.

Similar results are seen in the examples of Taiwan (420 cases, 6 deaths) and South Korea, but with no large-scale confinement. Both opted for mass PCR testing, contact tracing, isolation of infected individuals, and monitoring of their movements. Taiwan had very early screened passengers at airport entries and proceeded to a mass distribution of masks. South Korea had chosen, after the experience of SARS 1 and MERS, to be ready for the next plague alert. Large-scale PCR screening was prepared, with up to 40 "mobile PCR clinics" and the necessary reagents stored. A large stock of masks was prepositioned, and quarantine was enforced by a mobile phone application and followed up by immediate tracking of credit card use. The fines for trespassing have few equivalents. Breaking confinement in France will cost you \$150, while in Seoul the penalty is \$2,500!

One can easily see that a) a capitalist country can eventually invest preemptively in pandemic readiness in order to protect the population as much as possible, and b) there is a cost to that as far as individual rights are concerned.

Let us now turn to Europe. With variations, European Union countries should have been ready to fight off the epidemic, having national health care systems implemented since the end of World War II and given adequate warning. Hospital care is totally covered most of the time, whatever the cost of the treatment. And the costs are paid directly by the state. The National Health System (NHS) in the UK is funded by general taxation, while Sécurité Sociale (SS) in France is financed by deductions from workers' wages and taxes on employers. The SS does not fund hospitals, which are paid for out of the general budget. Still, the infrastructure of the health system has been subjected to a search for cost effectiveness and profitability rather than development of investments. The same is true for the NHS in Britain and the health systems in Italy, Spain, and more especially Germany, have kept its system at a higher state of readiness.

In these countries, since the 2008 SARS and the H1N1 epidemics, for example, the number of beds has been reduced, whole hospitals closed, and as with many industrial products, the production of drugs and chemical reagents has been moved to China or India, while the PCR reagent production plants in Europe were closed. Moreover, “unnecessary stocks” too costly to maintain and replenish were destroyed. This was typical of the “just in time, just in sequence” policy linked to the world production model. In France, this went to absurd lengths when some stocks of masks were destroyed in February 2020.

It is thus obvious that, with variations from one country to another, national health systems, where they existed, have been under mounting pressure for “cost reduction” and in some places, such as Italy, were brought to the verge of collapse.

## Production Becomes the Goal

This social liberal policy is evidenced by the way that the end of the lockdown is treated. In France, as in other social liberal countries, resuming production for profit as fast as possible is the motto. The reopening of the subways on a large scale with the slogan “you MUST be spaced one yard from each other,” while every video shows people crowding and as packed “as before,” shows how ridiculous this approach is. Governments have deliberately taken the risk of a “second wave” of cases, particularly with the reopening of the schools, despite trade union and other protests. We will see what happens ...

This policy has been carried to the extreme in Brazil, where Bolsonaro a) grossly underestimates the magnitude of the epidemic (see figures above), and b) says 5,000 deaths “are nothing” when compared with the risks of paralyzing the economy by imposing a lockdown and stay-at-home orders. Moreover, his minister of commerce warns of the risk of food shortages, which in fact have already taken place in the urban slums.

And of course in countries where there is no global health coverage, the poor and, generally speaking, the working class are left disarmed, facing an epidemic for which they can neither afford the costs of treatments nor the social costs of massive layoffs. This is particularly obvious in several Latin American countries, but it is becoming more and more evident in the United States if one compares the situation of even Obamacare and, of course, Bernie Sanders’ proposals, with the present situation under the Trump administration.

Thus we come back to the post-World War II objective of NHS and SS: full health care protection for any individual. This is still largely met in Western Europe but absent in the United States.

## Big Pharma

One must add to this discussion the search for profits made by the Big Pharma companies and also smaller start-ups. (I use this shortcut terminology of “Big Pharma” even though the conspiracy theory crowd also sometimes uses it.) The price of anti-viral drugs, monoclonal antibodies, is totally exaggerated. The example of SOVALDI is typical. It is a good remedy for hepatitis C, but Gilead was widely criticized for the drug’s list price of \$1,000 per pill when it was launched—a total of \$84,000 per course of treatment! As far as COVID-19 is concerned, Gilead sought orphan drug status for remdesivir, an experimental drug that is being tested as a possible treatment. “Orphan drug” is a special designation giving drug companies a seven-year monopoly on sales, tax credits, and expedited approval. Bernie Sanders rightly termed such a request “truly outrageous,” noting that Gilead had received “tens of millions” of dollars from the federal government to develop the drug. The consumer group Public Citizen and other health groups said in a letter, “This is an unconscionable abuse of a program designed to incentivize research and development of treatments for rare diseases.” They stated that “Calling COVID-19 a rare disease mocks people’s suffering and exploits a loophole in the law to

profiteer off a deadly pandemic.”

In fact, what is at stake is the status of research and of the industry. Medical research should be a nonprofit, nationalized sector, and research on drugs should be conducted for their immediate and prospective interest, not for the possibility of large-scale, and if possible fast, profits. This is an approach that leads to, and has led in the past to, the neglect of various fields of investigation, notably for several parasitic and microbial diseases, because the “market” offered by the local populations affected was judged to be too small to produce enough profits.

## Social Protection

A financial crisis was looming before the pandemic since after the 2008 crisis, nothing was really done to cure the problem, except impose more austerity on the working class. At present, we are faced with a typical overproduction crisis in several sectors, coupled, in the case of oil, with a commercial crisis (classical petrol fossil fuels from Saudi Arabia and Russia, versus shale gas and petroleum), hence negative prices for the barrel. But several key sectors are severely hit (aviation, tourism, restaurants, theaters, museums, festivals, and others), hence a massive rise in unemployment. Once again, as in 1929, the working class and middle class are to pay the price because unemployment benefits are too low, as in Europe or some states in the United States, or even nonexistent, as in India.

Another important issue is protection from layoffs. In that respect, the law passed by the Spanish Communist minister of labor banning job termination during the pandemic is an excellent example of what should be done everywhere.

At the very extreme, we have the state of Uttar Pradesh in India, where the Bharatiya Janata Party of Narendra Modi has voted to extend the workweek from 48 to 72 hours.<sup>1</sup> This is emblematic of the policies of many developing countries that are, with tacit or direct approbation of political leaders, implementing policies that

are the opposite of the widespread social solidarity that is needed.

## Research Again

Could the pandemic have been avoided? The response is yes, or at least reduced.

Since the first SARS epidemic, it was obvious that bats and other creatures of the jungles, forests, and grottos were reservoirs for the creation of viruses that would sooner or later infect humans. Incidentally, that is one of the reasons for the creation of the Wuhan P4 laboratory, which does indeed study bat viruses, in part in cooperation with France, in part in cooperation with the United States. U.S. cooperation is via an Obama-era project launched by American scientists through the Eco Health Alliance, which does not provide direct funding to China, and especially not for the highest-level laboratories for P4 pathogen protection. The Trump administration, amongst rumors and claims of the virus originating in the Wuhan P4 laboratory, has cancelled the remaining \$400,000 allocated to the joint program.

France is a typical example of short-term views induced by the search for immediate benefits. The Pasteur Institute in Laos houses a lab dedicated to the study of bat viruses. The renewal of the single virologist there who goes trudging through grottoes to capture bats, sample and sequence their viruses, and culture them, had been delayed throughout 2019, despite protests by no less than Professor François Bricaire, former president of the National Ethics Committee ... Surprise! In March 2020 the position was immediately reopened.

In 2002, French virologist Bruno Canard started working on the crystal structure of SARS-1 coronaviruses, and determined sites that were potential immunogens on the structure and common to the whole corona family and thus potential candidates to produce components of “pan-vaccines.” The program was

reviewed and accepted, but the funds were cut as soon as the SARS-1 epidemic fell into oblivion, [75] and even at the European level, despite a very favorable review, funds for SARS research were cut and the programs to develop a pan-vaccine were halted.

The development of such vaccines needs long-term research (a vaccine can take five to ten years to develop) starting from what in France we call “recherche sur projets” (calls for proposals for research grants). The calls for funding proposals are increasingly devoid of projects without “immediate or short-term benefits.” The establishment has become totally opposed to fundamental research with the mixture of high risks but high rewards it encompasses. As a scientists’ motto says, “Electric lamps were not invented as a consequence of projects allocated to expanding the life or brightness of wax candles.”

Pan-vaccines are not necessarily a utopia. After the 2009-2010 H1N1 epidemics, work has been conducted on a “pan-flu vaccine.” Indeed, the vaccine is now—this year—in a phase-1 trial.

Surprise: French scientists were asked in March to develop “crash programs” on COVID-19 for quick review in mid-May. And, surprise: Bruno Canard, whose earlier work had been stopped, was allocated an emergency allocation of 45,000 euros.

These episodes demonstrate again the need to move away from short-term, quick-profit strategies in medical research.

## Short- and Long-term Strategies

The politics of health science is not necessarily totally blind. A comparison between France and Korea is worthwhile. After SARS [76], a mild epidemic of a new coronavirus emerged in Saudi Arabia and hit Korea. The alert was “mild” (937 cases, 341 deaths worldwide). But even the low toll in South Korea (186 cases, 35 deaths) was perceived as a

warning, and hence the ample provision of PCR reagents and other supplies, together with the creation of 40 or more “mobile diagnostic clinics” in addition to the existing hospital network, for a quick and immediate diagnosis, immediate isolation, and contact tracing, without large-scale confinement of newly appearing clusters. Thus the country that had 7,869 cases at the end of March but only 60 deaths appeared to be a model. Unfortunately, to this day (May 11), with the abrupt appearance of 116 new cases, South Korea might be on the front line of a second wave.

The WHO is not totally exempt from criticism, except from those critiques by the Trump administration that are misplaced. The most severe criticism to be made is the one-week delay in declaring a pandemic because China would not vote for it and was severely opposing it for reasons of its “prestige.” Viewed from France, where Health Minister Agnès Buzyn said in January that the risks of pandemic in France were “low” and in March that “we are ready” for a lockdown, but then permitted the “municipals,” that is the mayoral elections, one day before confinement, the WHO delay appears small by comparison. What remains sure is that many countries delayed, despite the imposition of border and especially airport controls.

## Conclusion

Throughout this paper we have seen the confrontation of two logics. One is a short-term, predatory and destructive production system, destroying the environment and threatening more similar catastrophes, with only one way out: more exploitation, and more destruction.

The alternative is very simple: Power to the people, not to capital. As a French motto says, “Plus rien ne doit Ãatre comme avant” (“Nothing should ever be the same again”). This is the crude lesson of the pandemic.

[New Politics](#)

# We denounce the renegotiation of the debt by Lenín Moreno's government

7 August 2020, by **Éric Toussaint**

**Lenín Moreno, President of Ecuador**

Richard Martínez, Minister of Economy and Finance

Guillermo Lascano, General Legal Counsel, MEF

As former members of the Debt Audit Commission, in response to a call from Ecuadorean civil society organizations and social movements, we file a claim and warn against the express violation of the constitutional mandates related to the external debt renegotiation currently in process.

The Debt Audit Commission, dependent of the Ministry of Economy and Finance, was created on July 9, 2007 pursuant to Executive Decree No. 472. The Summary of the Final Report, presented on September 2008 is an official document of the Ecuadorean government. It is 225 pages long and is a result of extensive research and economic, financial and legal analysis. The members of the Commission were Ecuadorean and foreign experts on debt.

The decision to pay the 2020 bonds and to bring forward the payment (through margin calls and penalties) of the repo operations with Goldman Sachs and Credit Suisse between February and June 2020 in order to recoup around \$3 billion in global bonds amid the pandemic, was a huge liquidity drain as part of the debt renegotiation (dubbed "consent solicitation"), admitted as such by the Ministry of Economy and Finance in the press releases on May 28 and July 7, 2020. This decision was taken against unanimous parliamentary Resolution RL-2019-2021-063 on March 24, 2020 and against the unanimous pronouncement from all parliamentary blocs' leaders. On top of this, the forward payments brought

about full recovery of the abovementioned creditors' disbursements, which anchored the expectations of the rest of the commercial debt creditors in the June-August 2020 negotiations.

The proposed renegotiation, although it was framed as good news for Ecuador on July 7, 2020, omitted the fact that debt renegotiation started out from the par value of the bonds, as if the coronavirus crisis had not existed, against what Ecuador's Constitution's article 290#5 states. The financial conditions proposed by the Ministry of Economy and Finance on behalf of the Republic of Ecuador do not take into account the market value of the foreign debt bonds, that were priced between 20 and 25 cents on the dollar on March 31, 2020 and were priced at 35 cents on the dollar at the Credit Default Swaps auction on May 19. Creditors' ledgers had already updated those losses. In the Final Report of the Debt Audit Commission, the fact that Brady Plan and the Global Bond exchange did not take into account the market value of the Ecuadorean bonds was already stated as hurtful and as a source of illegitimacy.

Ecuadorean foreign debt is thoroughly regulated by article 290 of Ecuador's Constitution. The Constitution prohibits anatocism in debt renegotiations. The "Invitation Memorandum" delivered by the Ministry of Economy and Finance on behalf of the Republic of Ecuador includes the interests becoming principal as a PDI bond, with the potential of payment of compound interests in case arrears occur. Committing to such an arrangement means anatocism and implies the express violation of article 290.4 of Ecuador's Constitution. This will imply legal action we shall take in the

respective jurisdictional organs.

Ecuadorean citizens have not been aware that in the Invitation Memorandum shared with creditors Ecuador commits to announce a staff-level agreement with the IMF until July 31, 2020. This will mean subsequent violations of economic social and cultural rights of the Ecuadorean people. The principle of progressivity of the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the San Salvador Protocol of the Interamerican Convention of Human Rights establish that public services that guarantee human rights cannot diminish its quality or coverage. In order to comply with this, both of these human rights international treaties establish that States pursue the maximum available resources.

This renegotiation proposal does not contribute to the pursuit of maximum resources available to the State. It is tied to a new program with the IMF and macroeconomic assumptions in the Invitation Memorandum that are not aligned with the required financing for the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. What the government intends to approve would directly contradict article 290.2 of Ecuador's Constitution, that says that "public indebtedness will be overseen so as to not affect sovereignty, the rights of good living and the preservation of nature".

In the current international context, in which dozens of countries are in debt crises, it is the opportunity for the birth of an international public law framework for sovereign foreign debt restructuring. If Ecuador accepts draconian legal conditions before everyone else, it will become a negative precedent that will affect the rest of the South. It should not



surprise that the same creditors that have resisted agreeing with Argentina have been swift to agree with Ecuador. In the midst of a pandemic – with a health, economic and social crisis – it is the moment to invoke the fundamental change in circumstances and the state of necessity and declare the non-payment of these external debt bonds, until a mutually beneficial solution is not agreed to at the global scale.

We call upon the Ombudsman to oversee MEF General Legal Counsel compliance with foreign debt matters and human rights. Specifically, the Counsel should apply the Foreign Debt and Human Rights Guiding Principles, the UNCTAD Principles for Sovereign Lending and Borrowing and the Reports by the Special Rapporteurs and Independent Experts on foreign debt and human rights of the Human Rights Council at the United Nations.

These are all binding instruments in the case of Ecuador, according to article 93 of the Constitution.

We remind the President of Ecuador that, as Chief of the Executive and as President of the Debt and Financing Committee, his delegate Veronica Artola, the Secretary of Planning Sandra Argotty, the Minister of Economy and Finance Richard Martinez and the General Legal Counsel of the MEF Guillermo Lascano, that article 290.6 of Ecuador's Constitution says that "Administrative and civil liabilities caused by the acquisition and management of public debt will not prescribe".

Article 289 of the Constitution says that "The State will promote the instances for citizen power to watch and audit public debt". For a real transparency, oversight, and audit of public debt, we demand that the

Invitation Memorandum, already published by the US Courts, be made publicly available in Spanish in the benefit of the Ecuadorean people, as established by article 2 of the Constitution.

Finally, but no less important, we call upon academics and social, political, indigenous and rural movements, and the Ecuadorean people in general, to exercise citizen power for the urgent oversight and audit of public indebtedness.

*Sincerely, July 30, 2020,*

Former members of the Debt Audit Commission:

Hugo Arias, Maria Lucia Fattorelli, Piedad Mancero, Alejandro Olmos, Ricardo Patiño, César Sacoto, Eric Toussaint, Ricardo Ulcuango

Source: [CADTM](#).

# 'A queer cry for freedom': Meet the LGBTQ Palestinians demanding liberation

6 August 2020, by **Lilach Ben David**

It happened all at once, without any coordination. Suddenly, all 150 protesters were on the street — lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender, queers, and their allies. All proudly Palestinian, marching from Haifa's German Colony to the Baha'i Gardens. "A queer cry for freedom," they chanted.

Courageous and beautiful, the demonstration, which took place last Wednesday and was organized by Palestinian queer organization alQaws, opened up a new chapter in the internal Palestinian discourse on the rights of LGBTQ Palestinians.

"They say 'out of sight, out of mind,' look, we are all over Palestine," the protesters continued.

The protest organizers were not

interested in speaking with Israeli media, including *+972 Magazine*. It is an understatement to say that their experience with Israeli news outlets has been bad. And besides, their message was not aimed at Jewish Israeli readers. The signs, slogans, and speeches — even the protest flyers — were all in Arabic.

The protest was not sparked by a single event, but rather was a show of force in response to a series of events that have had an impact on the LGBTQ community in Palestine and the rest of the Arab world. Some of the more recent events — such as the Joint List's recent vote on a bill outlawing conversion therapy, and the backlash following the decision of a prominent Palestinian tahini company's decision to donate to an Israeli LGBTQ rights organization — are still controversial

in the Palestinian queer community, and were therefore almost completely absent from the protests' messaging. [77]

To understand Wednesday's demonstration and the shift in Palestinian discourse regarding LGBTQ rights, I spoke with three independent activists who were willing to break down the significance of this moment.

## Rainbow flags in Kafr Yasif

It has been a turbulent year for the Palestinian LGBTQ community and the Middle East writ large. In July 2019, a queer Arab teen was stabbed by their brother outside the Beit Dror center

for LGBTQ youth in Tel Aviv. [78] Weeks later, activists organized the first-ever Palestinian LGBTQ protest in Haifa. [79] Around then, the Palestinian Authority began targeting alQaws, banning the organization from operating in the West Bank. [80]

In May this year, famed Egyptian actor Hisham Selim publicly praised his transgender son, Nour. [81] That same month, Ayman Safieh, a talented dancer and a leading member of the Palestinian queer community, drowned in a beach south of Haifa. In June, Sara Hegazy, an LGBTQ rights advocate from Egypt, took her own life. [82] Hegazy had received asylum in Canada after being imprisoned and tortured by Egyptian authorities for flying the rainbow flag at a Mashrou' Leila concert in Cairo.

"In the last year, we started talking about members of the queer community in the past tense," says [Rauda Morcos](#), a human rights lawyer who help found Aswat, the first Palestinian organization for queer Palestinian women. "Since we are a small community that is still growing, it hasn't happened before. Before Ayman [Safieh], there was Maya Haddad [a trans woman who died by suicide last January, a year after surviving an attempted murder], and after her there was Nada Zaituni, a wonderful Egyptian activist who died of cancer at age 30."

Morcos noted that Safieh's funeral showed a positive shift in how the Palestinian community treats its LGBTQ members. Alongside calls to bury queer Palestinians in separate graveyards, she couldn't ignore the fact that the funeral "felt like a pride parade."

"I believe Ayman's spirit could still sense the love of the hundreds of people who came to and from Kafr Yasif [where his family lives]. It was only right that rainbow flags were waved across town on the day of his funeral, but we also can't take that for granted," Morcos says.

In the last two weeks, the conversation on LGBTQ Palestinians grew even more heated after Julia Zaher, the owner of the Nazareth-based Alarz tahini company made a

donation to The Aguda - Israel's LGBTQ Task Force. The reactions were complicated. Conservative members of the Palestinian community boycotted Alarz and called others to follow suit. Some queer Palestinian organizations saw the donation as a PR stunt aimed at Jewish customers (Alarz tahini sales have indeed [increased](#) since then, despite the calls for boycott), and believed Zaher should have supported a Palestinian organization instead. Then there are those who fully support Zaher and her decisions.

## Respect won't come from the Knesset

"Even though I disagree with Julia Zaher's actions, you can see how the community responded," says Nisreen Mazzawi, a feminist activist, social science researcher at Haifa University, and co-founder of Aswat. "Many Palestinians defended her decision, including well-known activists and public figures."

"I don't think this could have been possible 20 years ago, and it is a sign of success," Mazzawi continues. "These supporters didn't just appear out of thin air. They are a result of 20 years of work that organizations like Aswat and alQaws have been doing, as well as LGBTQ organizations in the Arab world."

In late July, a bill against conversion therapy passed a preliminary hearing in the Knesset. Of the Joint List's representatives, only three — Ayman Odeh, Aida Touma-Sliman, and Ofer Cassif, all from the left-wing Hadash party — voted in support of the bill, while all four of the Islamic Movement MKs voted against. Two Hadash MKs and all parliamentarians from the Balad and Ta'al parties were absent from the vote.

Touma-Sliman has been known for her courageous support of the Palestinian LGBTQ community since 2007, when Aswat organized a conference for Palestinian lesbians. She has also been vocal in Arabic media about her support for the bill and for queer

rights more generally.

But freedom for LGBTQ Palestinians "won't come from the Knesset or from laws enacted there," says Mazzawi. "The debate over the conversion therapy law is an internal Jewish-Israeli one," she added. "Religious opposition to queerness is not based on whether it is a disease, but whether it is a sin. The bill is very much needed because this type of 'therapy' definitely exists, but to be honest I haven't heard about cases in the Arab community of trying to 'cure' LGBTQ people. There are other forms of persecution [in the community]."

Mazzawi says that in order to understand the decision of the majority of the Joint List's Knesset members, one must look to places like Egypt, where the government is using the LGBTQ issue as political ammunition against Islamic movements.

"Secular leaders like [Egyptian President] al-Sisi use the LGBTQ issue to show their people and the world that they are just as Muslim — if not more so — than the Islamic movement," she says. "They persecute queer people as a political stunt to garner votes. The same thing happened with the Joint List. Their absence from the vote was based on concerns over how their voter base would react."

The Joint List MKs who were absent or who voted against the bill did not do so based on any principled position, Mazzawi explains, but rather as a political calculation vis-a-vis how the other parties in the list would use the vote against them. "I'm sorry to see that many leaders in our community are not taking a clear, honest, and brave position on this issue, and that all they care about is internal political considerations," she says.

Liberating the land does not precede queer liberation

Maisan Hamdan, a queer feminist activist, says there is no justifying the silence of the majority of the Joint List on conversation therapy.

"I have no faith in those who demand freedom for a people and want to liberate the land, but are okay with

discrimination,” says Hamdan, one of the founders of Urfod, a movement advocating for draft refusal among Druze citizens in Israel [Druze citizens regularly serve in the Israeli army]. “I don’t believe in this hierarchy in which freeing a country comes before freedom for women or LGBTQ people. I believe everyone has the right to live in dignity. We are not only their last priority, but the LGBTQ issue is not even on their agendas. They are silent when we are attacked, as if we are not part of Arab society. How can we have faith in them?”

“Personally, the national issue is important to me,” Hamdan continues. “I write about it, I take part in protests, and I believe that my people have a right to be free. But I want freedom for all groups in our society. If they think their silence is protecting them from criticism, I want to tell them that we exist and we are part of Palestinian society whether they like it or not. They can’t shield themselves from criticism because we will criticize them.”

**Some say that LGBTQ Palestinians stopped being invisible this past year. Do you sense a shift in the discourse within Palestinian society?**

Mazzawi: “There are changes for better and for worse. More people are participating in the conversation, and that is a good thing because parts of the community are now being exposed to perspectives they had never heard before on this issue. At the same time, the more people talk about this subject, the more extreme the positions become.”

Hamdan: “Change is happening thanks to organizations like Aswat and alQaws, which have been advocating on our behalf in the political arena. On the one hand, they reject the way Israel presents LGBTQ issues both internally and to the world, meaning they oppose pinkwashing. [83] On the other hand, they provide a safe space for people. These organizations are very much part of Arab society, which means we have our own safe spaces that are not within Jewish Israeli society.

“The current debate is very important

because it presented an opportunity for LGBTQ visibility within Palestinian society, and is more daring than in the past. On the other hand, it is also more likely to subject LGBTQ people to violence, whether verbal or physical, especially at a time when social media has become such a pivotal feature of our lives. In that sense, the debate is scary. But if we focus on the positive aspects, there is a positive change in the sense that this subject is no longer taboo.”

## When attacks turn into free publicity

Mazzawi expands on online attacks against the LGBTQ community: “The bullying that sometimes happens on social media is a universal problem, and not one that LGBTQ people face exclusively. It’s very easy to hate on social media because you sit in front of your screen and don’t see the other person. You feel angry and oppressed, so you participate in the bullying and feel like a hero. We should take these attacks with a grain of salt.

“Yet I can’t say that these attacks come out of nowhere. There are Palestinians, whether Muslim or Christian, who interpret religion in a way that hurts others. The first saying in Islam is ‘In the name of Allah, the most beneficent, the most merciful,’ meaning the first thing about Islam is showing mercy. It’s the same in Christianity, turning the other cheek, ‘Let him who is without sin cast the first stone,’ and so on.

“Those who attack others in the name of religion are using faith in a twisted way that serves their goals, they are the same people who attack women in the name of religion. The problem isn’t with religion but with how people interpret it.”

Mazzawi and Morcos see the current debate from a broader historical perspective.

“The discourse in Palestinian society began to change several years ago,” says Morcos. “It isn’t something unique to this year. When we started Aswat, I remember the Islamic Movement issued a boycott against us

as well as a fatwa [an Islamic religious legal order] against me personally, because according to them I was ‘the snake’s head.’ They managed to increase Aswat’s publicity, because every month a new article was being written about us and we were asked to comment. We didn’t have to initiate any media appearances ourselves.

“When we organized the conference, there was a wave of objections and incitement like never before, and I say this as a veteran feminist activist. As feminists, we were called traitors for bringing up issues like gender equality and ‘honor killings,’ as if we were importing these values from the West into Palestinian society. When we started Aswat, we were accused of the same thing.”

Since then, the queer and LGBTQ discourse has entered Palestinian consciousness, explains Morcos. Organizations and publications replaced derogatory names with the terminology that Aswat introduced. “We built a new language, a new discourse. Our struggle was with civil society organizations, which have to have a clear and concrete position regarding gender identity,” she added.

**What are the particular needs that LGBTQ Palestinians have? How are they different from the needs of Jewish Israeli LGBTQ people?**

Mazzawi: “Every LGBTQ person wants their community to accept them for who they are. To be able to live with their family and friends as part of a society and culture that accepts them as they are.

“Regarding LGBTQ Palestinians, we are stateless. Before needing the protection of the state, we need protection from the state. And not just the state — I see oppression, whether conscious or unconscious, also within Israeli organizations. There is no acceptance for Palestinian identity. So how can you free a person when you don’t accept one part of who they are?

“In Palestinian society, you cannot free LGBTQ people if you don’t accept their queerness. In the same way, in Israeli organizations, you cannot free LGBTQ Palestinians if you reject their Palestinianess.

"Today, I don't see a difference between Israeli civil society and Israel as a state. They are one and the same, especially when we mention Palestinian issues. LGBTQ Israelis identify with the state even before their queer identity, and they will not stand with LGBTQ Palestinians simply because both are queer. They will fight against Jewish homophobes, but when LGBTQ Palestinians enter the picture, Jewish Israelis will stand with other Jewish Israelis. Palestinians will remain on their own."

### **What can Jewish LGBTQ and left-wing activists do to support LGBTQ Palestinians?**

Hamdan: "First of all, they must not look at us as separate from the Palestinian issue, people, or identity. Our struggle as Palestinians is different from their struggle. Whoever wants to help us must be aware of all the political and national complexities we live, to understand that Israel isn't really a symbol of freedom and that we do not share a struggle. We live under different layers of oppression."

Mazzawi: "The only thing Israeli Jews who want to support us need to do is end the occupation. The occupation is

your responsibility. As an LGBTQ Palestinian I am under several forms of oppression: national, religious, gender, ethnic, and more. Your part in all these oppressions is my occupation and my Nakba.

"The first thing I demand of the Jewish person who wants to support me is to end the occupation in the West Bank and Gaza," Mazzawi continues. "The second thing is to take responsibility for the Nakba. [84] The Nakba is not something that happened in 1948 and is over. It continues until today. Life in Arab localities is the result of the Nakba. The crime in Arab communities today is the result of the ongoing Nakba of the Palestinian people, because the state works against me, not to help me. [85] Because it does not try to protect Arab society but rather fight it. Take responsibility for the Nakba and the occupation. I'll manage with my family, my society, and my people." A breath of fresh air

We went back to marching toward Haifa's Prisoner's Square. Not a single Knesset member could be seen. The protesters sat on the stairs that envelope the square and listened to a few short speeches.

One of the speeches came with a message of solidarity and sisterhood from an activist with Tal'at, the nascent Palestinian feminist movement that shook Palestinian society last summer with a series of protests against gender violence across the country: "As Tal'at, our feminism comes from the marginalized... These voices build our vision for the kind of justice we want in Palestine and in the world, for safety and liberation for women and queers in all segments of Palestinian society... the oppression we live is also an opportunity for resistance. For joint resistance, for connecting struggles, so we can build a better reality and a better world."

Drenched in sweat, a moment before we went our separate ways, I asked an acquaintance how the protest was. "Like a breath of fresh air," she answered;

2 August 2020

Source [+972 Magazine](#).

A version of this article was first published in Hebrew on **Local Call**. Read it [here](#).

# **A Marxist Guide to Understanding the Gulf States' Political Economy**

**5 August 2020, by Adam Hanieh**

**HC: The Gulf region is viewed in public discourse as an anomaly — a place that has maintained elements of its semi-feudal past but has nevertheless managed to adapt to modern capitalism. The primary framework used to understand this relationship is rentier state theory (RST). Is this approach enough to understand the contemporary economic and political realities of the Gulf?**

**AH:** There are a many different variations of RST, but their common

feature is an attempt to explain social, economic, and political patterns in the Gulf through state revenue derived from hydrocarbon exports. These are called "rents" because they ultimately come from the fortuitous accident of having natural resources in your national territory. The basic idea is that access to these rents gives the Gulf's rulers a very pronounced autonomy and power over other parts of society. This has been used to explain all manner of things in the Gulf — authoritarianism, weak civil societies, a reliance on patronage

networks, rentier "mentalities," and patterns of economic development.

Now, obviously, hydrocarbon exports (oil and gas) are hugely important to the Gulf's political economy. But there have been numerous critiques of how RST is deployed to explain the Gulf and other states possessing natural resources. In my opinion, one of the major problems with RST is that it moves our analysis away from approaching Gulf societies as capitalist; that is, as countries with their own specificities but that



nonetheless have the same underlying dynamics as capitalism elsewhere. By disappearing capitalism, we lose the category of class. Private capital is portrayed as weak and underdeveloped, and the importance of labor and the structure of working classes are downplayed. We also end up with a particularly problematic understanding of the state in the Gulf.

In contrast, I think a Marxian approach to state and class formation is a much more convincing and fruitful way of understanding the Gulf. This approach directs our attention to a whole range of different questions and issues. How do classes of capital and labor emerge in the Gulf, and how do these classes relate to one another? What are the major moments of capital accumulation (e.g., production, commodity exchange, and finance), and how are these connected to one another? What are the spatial dynamics of accumulation in the Gulf, i.e., how does accumulation extend across national, regional, and global circuits? How do these dynamics relate to the specific role of the state in the Gulf? How can we conceptualize ruling families vis-à-vis the capitalist class, and migrant labor vis-à-vis the citizen population? How are classes racialized and gendered in the Gulf? These kinds of questions can reveal much about the Gulf as capitalist societies.

The other thing RST approaches tend to do is abstract the Gulf from wider global processes — questions such as imperialism and the dynamics of the world market are treated as secondary. But how can it make sense to explain the “lack of democracy” in the Gulf without foregrounding the region’s long-standing centrality to US power, or the unflinching military and political support shown by Western states to Gulf ruling families? A really important part of this is also understanding the histories of colonialism and war that are very much part of how the contemporary Gulf exists today.

The basic point is that Gulf countries are not some strange anomaly among capitalist states globally. But conversely — and I think this is a fact not widely appreciated by parts of the Left in Western countries — the Gulf

can teach us a lot about how capitalism actually works in other places, too.

### **HC: What are petrodollars, and are they still an operative factor in today’s global system?**

**AH:** “Petrodollar” is a term coined in the 1970s to describe the revenues earned by countries through their hydrocarbon exports. This capital can be spent inside the country in question or “recycled” back into the world market. Historically, petrodollars were very important to the development of global financial markets, and they remain important today.

An early illustration of this was the emergence of the so-called Euromarkets – financial markets that developed in Europe through the late 1950s and 1960s, which lay outside the jurisdiction of national regulatory systems and were largely exempt from taxation and other domestic financial restrictions. London became the key international center for Euromarket operations, allowing banks and companies to deal in deposits and bonds that were denominated in currencies different from their domestic markets. Following the nationalization of Gulf oil companies in the 1970s and the large increase in oil prices that ensued, petrodollar deposits in North American and European banks operating in Euromarkets reached very high levels.

These flows of Gulf petrodollars greatly increased the capacity of international banks to lend to multinational firms, governments, and other borrowers and helped propel the internationalization of production that began to gain ground from the 1970s onward. Euromarkets were also pivotal to how the “Third World” debt crisis unfolded through the 1980s, with cash-strapped countries in the South forced to borrow recycled petrodollars through Euromarkets, thereby becoming tightly enmeshed in debt relations to international financial institutions. Today, the power of the City of London in the global financial system is a direct legacy of these markets — and the position of the Gulf within this remains significant.

Gulf petrodollars were also important to the emergence and consolidation of the United States as the dominant global power through the second half of the twentieth century. By agreeing to invest oil revenues in US Treasury securities, equities, and stocks — coupled with the denomination of the price of oil in US dollars — the surpluses of Gulf countries helped cement the preeminent status of the US dollar as “world money.”

Gulf petrodollars are also recycled through international markets by other more indirect means. This includes the Gulf’s purchase of foreign goods and services — particularly important here are those connected to the development of urban infrastructure such as machinery and transport equipment, high-end engineering, and construction services. And, of course, a major route of petrodollar recycling is the Gulf’s purchase of military hardware and services. Between 2015 and 2019, the six Gulf states bought more than one-fifth of arms sold globally, with Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Qatar ranking as the world’s first, eighth, and tenth largest arms importers. Saudi Arabia alone purchased one-quarter of total US arms exports during that period, up from 7.4 percent in 2010–14.

### **HC: Could you speak a bit more about the nature of the capitalist class in the Gulf, and its relationship to the state and ruling families?**

**AH:** Big capital in the Gulf is typically organized through large conglomerates that are active across a variety of economic sectors, including construction and real-estate development, industrial processes (particularly steel, aluminum, and concrete), retail (including the import trade and the ownership of shopping centers and malls), and finance. These conglomerates are often controlled by families who have their origins in earlier merchant activities, and are closely linked to the Gulf’s ruling families and state structures.

Now the Gulf states are all monarchies of varying types, and the ruling families control the state apparatus and much of the wealth derived from

oil and gas exports.

Successful capital accumulation in the Gulf is very much dependent upon proximity to the state and the support of the ruling family. This can be seen in a variety of ways — subsidized land and other grants, lucrative state contracts for various projects, joint investments between private capital and the state, and the political and financial support of state institutions for overseas investments by private conglomerates. This kind of relationship with the state is not something unique to capital in the Gulf — it's the normal way of doing business as a big capitalist in any country around the world today.

Now, one of the legacies of RST approaches is a view that private capital in the Gulf is weak and overshadowed by a strong state. This idea rests upon a dichotomous reading of state and capital, which I think is methodologically wrong. In reality, members of the ruling family often control large business groups in a private capacity, and they thus need to be seen as part of the private capitalist class (as well as a core part of how state power is exercised). In Qatar, for example, 80 percent of stock market firms have at least one member of the ruling Al Thani family sitting on their boards — these individuals are acting in their own individual capacity, not as representatives of state institutions. Similarly, Dubai's ruler, Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, holds private stakes in a significant number of the largest companies in the emirate, including some of the largest real estate firms, banks, and a major telecom.

In short, I think it's important to reclaim a Marxian conception of the state/class relation in work on the Gulf, i.e., an approach that views the state as an institutional expression of class power in the Gulf, and a capitalist class understood as inclusive of ruling families and state elites.

**HC: In your book *Capitalism and Class in the Gulf Arab States*, you identify the “spatial fix” as an important tool in overcoming crises of overproduction and fragmenting the Gulf working**

**classes. What are the elements of the spatial fix in the Gulf? How does it play out on the ground?**

**AH:** I borrowed this term, of course, from David Harvey, who used it to describe the ways in which capital often rearranges itself spatially in order to overcome or displace moments of crisis. In the Gulf, I think we can see a kind of analogous process occurring in relation to migrant labor.

Noncitizens make up between 56–82 percent of the labor force in Saudi Arabia, Oman, Bahrain, and Kuwait, and around 95 percent in Qatar and the UAE. These striking figures are fundamental to understanding the Gulf's class structure. Through the infamous kafala system, migrant workers are tied to an individual employer and are prevented from seeking alternative employment or even leaving the country without permission. The vast majority of these migrants are employed in the private sector — across sectors such as construction, domestic work, and retail — and are often poorly paid and subject to highly exploitative and dangerous working conditions. In this sense, the exploitation of migrant labor is an essential part of the accumulation of the business conglomerates I spoke about above.

One of the consequences of these flows of migrant labor is that literally millions of families across South Asia, the Middle East, East Africa, and elsewhere depend upon remittances sent home by workers in the Gulf. There are more migrant workers in the Gulf than any other region of the Global South, and Saudi Arabia alone ranks as the second largest source of remittances in the world (after the United States).

These cross-border flows of migrant workers remind us that class is not simply an abstract category describing a certain relationship to capital and the production of surplus value within national spaces. Concretely, classes come into being through the interlinking of geographical spaces and are continually forged through the flows (and displacement) of human beings across borders. When we think about a category like the “reserve

army of labour” in the Gulf, we need to consider those millions of people who may be living outside the borders of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) — but who are nonetheless constantly moving in and out of Gulf labor markets.

Now, at times of economic downturn, large numbers of these migrant workers in the Gulf are simply sent home, frequently without receiving overdue wages or compensation due to them. We saw this on a large scale in the wake of the 2008 global crisis, and we can see it again today. Indeed, a few weeks ago, the former head of Dubai's Department of Finance tweeted that he was predicting a minimum 10 percent drop in the emirate's population over this year — a remarkable plunge! This is one way that Gulf states are able to partially deal with these moments of downturn as a “fix,” rearranging the ways in which their working class is spatially organized and displacing the impact of the crisis onto poorer zones of the world market.

**HC: The post-Arab Spring period saw significant intervention by some Gulf states in the affairs of neighboring countries. This was most evident in 2013, when Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Kuwait materially supported a military coup that brought Egyptian dictator Abdel Fattah el-Sisi to power. Qatar, on the other hand, backed the Muslim Brotherhood government that was under attack at that time. Is there an economic dimension associated with these political tensions? What is the relationship between Gulf capital and Middle Eastern politics more broadly?**

**AH:** I think it's very important not to divorce the economic processes we see in the Middle East from the region's politics. Over the last couple of decades, there has been widespread adoption of market-led neoliberal economic policies across the entire region. This has been driven by structural adjustment packages linked to loans from international financial institutions (IFIs) — and has involved the usual “reforms” associated with such packages, e.g., privatization, a shift toward export-oriented

production and agriculture, labor market and financial deregulation, opening up to foreign direct investment, and so forth. The pace of these measures varies widely across different states, but countries like Egypt and Tunisia were repeatedly lauded by IFIs as “successes” up until the Arab uprisings began in late 2010.

Now, there are several points that need to be emphasized about these economic transformations. First, they were closely associated with hardening forms of authoritarianism throughout the region. It’s no accident that both Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia and Hosni Mubarak in Egypt came to power in the 1980s promising to implement structural adjustment packages — and they were strongly praised by the World Bank and IMF for doing so. This makes absolute sense: in the face of widespread popular opposition to structural adjustment, you need someone in power who can push these measures forward through the use of internal repression.

This is why there has historically been such a close association between authoritarianism and neoliberal reform in the Middle East. It’s a reality that runs against the myth, peddled by US policymakers through the 1990s and 2000s, of free markets and free elections.

This relationship between the political and the economic is particularly important to emphasize today, as it points to the necessary connection between political change and real socioeconomic transformation. It’s not good enough to simply change the face of the person at the top while keeping the same economic policies in place — that’s a key lesson of the Arab uprisings.

But the neoliberal measures of the 1990s and 2000s were also closely bound up with the development of new economic and political hierarchies at the regional level. One of the key aspects of this was the internationalization of Gulf capital throughout the region — i.e., cross-border investments by Gulf conglomerates into neighboring Arab countries. In this manner, the large business conglomerates I spoke about

earlier, as well as state-run Gulf investment vehicles, were primary beneficiaries of the neoliberal turn in the Middle East. We can see this across numerous key economic sectors — real estate and construction, infrastructure and logistics, banking and finance, media and telecommunications, retail and trade, agribusiness. I’ve tried to detail these processes in my latest book.

These regional capital flows have occurred through a variety of mechanisms, including mergers and acquisitions, minority portfolio investments in other Arab stock markets, the establishment of cross-border subsidiaries, and control over licensing and agency rights. Through these and other means, the internationalization of Gulf capital increasingly acts to shape production, consumption, and financial activities across various Arab states. The political economy of various Arab countries has become closely attuned to the dynamics of capital accumulation in the Gulf itself.

The upshot of all of this is that the Gulf — and here we need to be cognizant of the rival, competitive tensions between the different Gulf states — has a key stake in the region’s overall political economy. We can’t think about the region’s political order separate from these economic dimensions (or vice versa).

**HC: Can you speak about some of the possible future trajectories of the Gulf and the Middle East, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic?**

**AH:** The region is obviously in major flux. Prior to the pandemic, there were a range of very deep crises across the Middle East. One of these is the massive number of refugees and internally displaced people as a result of the ongoing wars in countries such as Syria, Yemen, Libya, and Iraq. The region is now the site of the largest forced displacement since World War II. Many of those displaced live in rudimentary camps or overcrowded urban spaces, which puts people at much greater risk of infection from the virus. There is also the widespread prevalence of malnutrition and other diseases (such as the reappearance of

cholera in Yemen) — again, these are closely connected to the wars and conflicts that predate the pandemic.

Through 2019 we had seen a new wave of popular struggles across numerous countries in the Middle East — notably Sudan, Lebanon, Algeria, Morocco, and Iraq. These were countries that had stood somewhat apart from the uprisings that took place a decade ago, and there were many reasons to be optimistic about these new mobilizations. They drew in wide layers of society, including the poor and informal sector workers. They effectively resisted attempts at marginalization, and there was a strong anti-sectarian character to these movements — especially important in Iraq and Lebanon.

These movements also clearly articulated the political and economic spheres as interrelated — in Lebanon, for example, the banks were identified as a major target of protest, going beyond the well-rehearsed issues of nepotism and political corruption. The 2019 wave of demonstrations also had an important recognition of regional hierarchies — with slogans raised against the machinations of neighboring powers, including Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Turkey, and Iran.

Now, the pandemic has obviously temporarily set these movements back and restricted the ability of people to come out onto the streets in protest. But none of the key issues that drove these protests in the first place have gone away. In fact, I think it’s pretty clear that questions of poverty, inequality, and corruption — all of which fed the crisis of legitimacy facing established ruling classes across the region — will be accentuated in the wake of both the pandemic and the global economic downturn that is now upon us.

In the Gulf, of course, the big issue is the massive crash in the price of oil that has taken place over the past couple of months. Like all oil producers, this will hit the Gulf’s fiscal capacities in a serious way. There will undoubtedly be cuts to social spending — some of these have already been announced — and a pull back from some of the larger projects associated with the Gulf “vision” strategies

announced over the last few years.

But I think it would be wrong to read this crisis as necessarily marking a permanent reversal of some of the trends I've noted above. Unlike other states in the region, Gulf governments have relatively low levels of existing debt, access to accumulated reserves, and can borrow fairly cheaply on international markets. Although the world oil market has been severely

affected by the pandemic, GCC oil companies could actually strengthen their position if assets in neighboring countries become available more cheaply in a post-viral world.

And, as is so often the case in the Gulf, migrant workers have borne the brunt of both the pandemic and the economic downturn. Saudi Arabia, for example, has begun expelling

Ethiopian migrants and, according to an internal UN memo, is expected to deport 200,000 in total. There has also been a large spike in racist speech against migrant workers across the Gulf, as well as new laws that allow private-sector companies to permanently reduce salaries of noncitizens or force them to take unpaid leave.\$

Source [Jacobin](#).

## **“The people are active” - interview with Bolivian miners’ leader Orlando Gutiérrez**

**4 August 2020, by Orlando Gutiérrez**

**On 10 July we marked eight months of the civil-military coup d'état. What do you make of what has happened so far in Bolivia?**

It has been disastrous for our history. But at the same time it is something that will teach us to take care of what we have not been able to defend at the time. Today we make an assessment of this illegitimate government and say that it is a disaster. Notice that Defence Minister Luis Fernando López, a former military man, a bloody man, threatened a citizen that he could make him disappear in ten seconds if he wanted to. They rewarded him: to his position in Defence they added that of Minister of Health.

**In this the government of Jeanine Añez resembles that of Jair Bolsonaro who also appointed a military minister to Health, right?**

Yes, we know that neoliberal policies have been imposed in America, they have invaded the continent. Suddenly Bolivia was one of the countries that suffering this shock with the overthrow of the government of Comrade Evo and now we are trying to regain democracy. We want to rip it from the hands of the coup leaders, puppets of the North American government and this within less than a

year. With the unity and fighting power of the people. And that is something that for me, who was a miner working for fifteen years in the Bolivian subsoil, is a great responsibility. Hopefully no action will have to be taken, but if they force us, the people are prepared to rise to the highest level of rebellion.

**The Mining Federation you lead is part of the Central Obrera Boliviana (COB) trade union federation. How much have you influenced the confrontation strategy with the coup regime?**

If we talk about miners we are talking about the history of Bolivia. If we talk about the creation of the glorious FSTMB, it is the backbone of the COB. We consider ourselves a spearhead in the fight. So unfortunately we have many martyrs and it is what our ancestors have taught us, our legacy. They have left us that unique principle of struggle to avoid being more oppressed by neoliberal and capitalist governments.

**On their miners’ helmets, on the banners, on the flags, they always bear the image of Che Guevara. What is his significance for you 53 years after his murder?**

Comandante Ernesto means a lot to

socialist ideas and to the principles of dignity and sovereignty. It is what we have learned in the fight for a Guevarist Bolivia, to fight against oppression. We are not violent, those who generate social inequality are violent and not those who fight against it. That is why the image of our Che Guevara will always be present in the miners’ meetings. As an emblem of the COB, our federation and many Bolivian institutions.

**Last Tuesday the workers’ movement marched across the country. Is it the beginning of a plan of struggle?**

It was a warm-up. We cannot leave people sleepy. We lived through fourteen years of government with our comrade Evo Morales. We really had problems, differences, even some sporadic mobilizations. But with this coup we have been surprised. We know that elections are just around the corner and we know the dirty tricks of those in government. But the people are active.

**What happened to the different MAS pre-formulas, your pairing with David Choquehuanca, then the appearance of Andónico Rodríguez and finally the formula headed by Luis Arce Catacora?**



I am the leader of a new generation, the youngest leader of the Federation of Miners and I feel very proud when in a COB general meeting they said that we should have a candidate for the vice-presidency and thanks to the union and advocacy work we do, my name emerged. At that time a good leader appeared, Andrónico Rodríguez del Chapare, from the peasant movement, who like me represents the Bolivian workers' movement, so there were some problems, I cannot deny it, many people who debated. But we did not want to start a fight to get me a position. Hopefully later we can consolidate bigger things for the benefit of our beloved Bolivia.

**You represent the COB, Andronicus the peasants, and who does the presidential candidate Luis Arce Catacora represent?**

The candidacy of our colleague Lucho comes from extensive analysis and it is for the economic issue, for the

experience he has had with our colleague Evo. So who better than him to strengthen the economy. Because the coming four or five years will be devoted to reconstruction.

**What has been the damage to the purchasing power of the average worker in Bolivia in these eight months of the government of Jeanine Añez?**

We have practically decreased more than 70, 60 percent in purchasing value and why? Who previously bought ten things with 100 Bolivians, today only buys four. In the mining sector since the closure of the borders there are no exports, no imports, we are looking at how to survive, even to collect wages, and unfortunately Decree 4272 came out, which is practically the closure and privatization of state companies.

**What do you think about the group of former officials who have**

**sought refuge in the Mexican embassy since the moment of the coup?**

I have already told our comrade Evo when I have gone to Buenos Aires two or three times. And the same to the brothers who are in the Mexican embassy and outside of Bolivia. The only way for us to get everyone out of the embassy is to regain power. Winning the national elections on 6 September, and I am sure that we will do it. I imagine what the reception for Evo will be like at the El Alto airport. This is a class-conscious project and today we are demonstrating it by putting our lives at risk or being persecuted and threatened. We are at the forefront and we are going to fulfil our objective without seeking anything in return. If we win the elections I will say mission accomplished.

16 July, 2020

Source [Página 2](#).

# U.S. Imperialism and Africa's "Perfect Storm"

3 August 2020, by **Lee Wengraf**

For the anti-imperialist left, in the abstract, troop withdrawals would be a welcome development. Many in Africa have long opposed the latest round of militarization on the continent, in particular the launch of the U.S. Army Command for Africa (AFRICOM) in 2007, which the African Union refused to house on their soil. Opposition to a widened military presence is a feature of the African left, both to the outright viciousness of drone warfare and to "boots on the ground," as well as to the substantial aid provided to "their" governments' defense forces. As Jean Nanga argues, "While proclaiming its opposition to the installation of new foreign military bases in Africa, the African Union counted on the financial support of the United States and the European Union for the organization of this army,

which was supposed to enable Africa to resolve itself its security problems ... making Africa a terrain of experimentation and publicity of their new instruments of death." [86] The stakes are high for us to understand these policy shifts as an adjustment to U.S. imperialism but by no means a break from it: The human toll of these "instruments of death" and their related crises threaten catastrophe on a massive scale, all the more so in the context of global pandemic.

In reality, any reduction in U.S. forces in West Africa will be more than compensated for by an expanded presence elsewhere on the continent and globally. The leaked plans for a troop drawdown are consistent with a 2018 shift in U.S. global imperial strategy, from "counter-terror" to a

focus on "peer competitors," chiefly China but also Russia and other powers. Then-Secretary of Defense James Mattis summed up the new "posture" as follows: "To those who would threaten America's experiment in democracy: If you challenge us, it will be your longest and worst day. ... We will continue to prosecute the campaign against terrorists, but great power competition—not terrorism—is now the primary focus of U.S. national security." [87] Thus, tactical shifts in troop levels—rather than a cause for celebration—are an expression of great power competition, one that will only intensify in this latest chapter of the "new scramble for Africa." In the context of what Richard Wolff has described as a "COVID-triggered crisis," [88] the return of interimperial rivalries—and the social and

ecological fallout—breaks open urgent questions of U.S. objectives in Africa and how the left must confront them.

## The New Scramble for Africa

The African continent is an arena today of competition and conflict. Around the turn of the twenty-first century, primary commodity prices exploded, driven in no small part by the Chinese economic boom and a period of very rapid industrial growth. This boom drove an acceleration in extraction across Africa by multinationals from the Global North as well as by “rising powers” such as China, Russia, and India. From the oil fields of Nigeria to the copper mines in Zambia, from cobalt and coltan exploitation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the platinum mines of South Africa, this wave of extraction dramatically transformed the African continent. Unprecedented rates of economic growth and accelerated foreign investment have been accompanied by increased deindustrialization, class inequality, ecological devastation, and militarization. This recent history has been described as the “new scramble for Africa,” one reminiscent of the nineteenth-century Great Power partition and the rush for colonies, markets, and raw materials. The aims of today’s imperial scramble echo many of the objectives of the prior era: the drive for commodities, economic advantage, containment of peer rivals, and the use of military might to shore up political alliances and maintain “stability.” Past colonial powers continue to wield influence in their former colonies; for example, as described by Jean Batou, France views its “credibility” in North and West Africa as key to an expansionist economic perspective into “new” regions of the continent. [89] Yet history does not merely repeat itself, and imperialism in Africa today has its own unique dynamics, not least of which result from new African ruling classes. As Nanga explains, “Africa is continuing its (capitalist) social-historical vocation to be a field of economic competition for the old and new powers of economic globalization, especially with regard to the supply of

raw materials, even though there is now the participation of private African capital in the circuits of neoliberal globalization.”

Investment and trade between African nations and their partners have risen sharply over the past two decades. Washington has long had economic ties to the continent: U.S.-based companies in oil production (such as Exxon and Chevron), agribusiness, mining, power generation, and telecommunications represent some of their key interests in Africa. The rates of investment and construction by Chinese firms on the continent have been exceptionally dramatic, increasing by over 600 percent since 2005, exceeding \$300 billion in that period alone. [90] According to the Brookings Institute, China leads all nations with regards to foreign direct investment in Africa, followed by France, then the United States, the United Arab Emirates, and the United Kingdom. [91] China surpassed the United States in 2009 as the continent’s largest trading partner, with over a third of Chinese oil coming from Africa. [92] As the Intercept reports, “Trade between China and Africa has risen from \$765 million to more than \$170 billion in the last 40 years, and 39 of 54 African nations have now signed on to Beijing’s Belt and Road Initiative—a trillion-dollar plan to link infrastructure and trade via a vast new network of roads, rail lines, ports, and pipelines across Eurasia, the Middle East, and Africa.” [93]

Russia’s trade with Africa has tripled between 2009 and 2017 alone. Russia’s role is dwarfed by China’s; for example, its volume of trade is a tiny fraction of that between the continent and China or the United States. But Russia has been able to forge political allegiances where Washington has faltered, such as in the Central African Republic, Sudan, Eritrea, and Somaliland. Russian arms dealers are among the most active on the continent. [94] In other words, as Tamás Ger?cs writes, Russia’s widening reach in Africa is an expression of both geopolitical ambitions and the need for markets and goods in the face of European Union sanctions. [95]

Capitalism is fundamentally rooted in competition and conflict, and the expansionist dynamics on the African continent today are also an expression of a global interimperial rivalry between, above all, China and the United States. The U.S. foreign policy establishment recognizes that China’s investment in Africa is a long-term, strategic priority, one that it has been pursuing on a range of fronts and from which it will not easily retreat. U.S. imperialism in Africa likewise has long-term objectives to support the interests of its corporate classes and to cultivate the policy tools to do so. Those aims have historically relied heavily on International Monetary Fund- and World Bank-driven neoliberal economic policies of austerity, debt, and terms of trade privileging the United States, and the fostering of allied African ruling classes. As these policies spill over into crises across Africa, the U.S. approach has rested on further austerity and military might, with devastating results.

## A Militarized Continent

Given these accelerating tensions between great powers, the 2018 U.S. “posture shift” and its significant strategic turn toward addressing “peer competitor challenges” comes as no surprise. For the Defense Department, the concern is the “gradual erosion of overmatch,” meaning that China is leveling the imperial playing field. In particular, this concern is likely spurred by the 2017 opening of China’s army base in Djibouti in the strategically crucial Horn of Africa region at the Gulf of Aden, with close proximity to the Middle East and the Suez Canal as well as adjacent to Washington’s own main Africa base of Camp Lemonier. A government report revealed that “[Defense Department] officials told us how China and Russia are presenting growing security challenges on the continent. China, in particular, is expanding its presence throughout Africa, both economically and militarily, and starting to surpass the United States in terms of economic aid, information, and military assistance in many countries

in Africa.” [96]

The United States has long been the world’s preeminent military power, placing a high value on its ability to project imperial force anywhere on the globe. This priority has of course come at great cost in human terms. As Rev. William Barber and Phyllis Bennis have pointed out, the United States has spent over \$6 trillion on wars since the turn of the millennium, with 800,000 lives lost. [97] Over the last three years, U.S. defense spending has jumped by more than \$139 billion. [98] Africa is no exception, and the United States now has approximately 6,000 to 7,000 troops on the continent, not counting private contractors. Outposts and military facilities span the majority of African nations, from small airfields and “capacity-building” training camps for African troops to larger installations.

President Barack Obama vastly expanded military operations in Africa, and the increase in attacks continues under President Donald Trump. Major targets include Somalia, the Sahel, and Libya. Libya, for one, is a site of major instability as well as a corridor for refugees from other parts of the continent; its significant oil resources have transformed the country into a battleground for oil and infrastructure contracts between European nations, Russia, China, and the United States. Department of Defense strategists seem particularly concerned about perceived Russian intervention on NATO’s southern flank, where Moscow’s paramilitary forces support the Libyan National Army (LNA), in opposition to the UN- and (nominally) U.S.-backed Government National Accord (GNA)—though the Trump administration bizarrely gave its blessing to an attack by the LNA on the GNA, exacerbating the chaos. [99]

Horn of Africa trade routes, with their proximity to the Middle East, are among the most geostrategically and economically critical on the globe. Characterized by the Nairobi-based HORN International Institute for Strategic Studies as “one of the most terror-prone regions in the world,” the “Red Sea currently carries more than 10 percent of global sea-borne trade,

feeding the demand for oil and gas in the west and North America (from the Gulf region) and facilitating the flow of goods between Europe and the Asia Pacific.” [100] In its war on the Al-Shabab militants, the United States conducted more air strikes in Somalia in 2019 than in any previous year. Samar Al-Bulushi’s analysis of the 13-year war in Somalia explains the widening scope of U.S. and African Union intervention, and the key collaboration of African states. Al-Bulushi wrote that while “initial rules of engagement permitted the use of force only when necessary, [African Union troops] gradually assumed an offensive role, engaging in counterinsurgency and counter-terror operations. ... Support from the United States has been instrumental in emboldening the Kenyan military to engage in its own ‘war on terror’ at home and abroad.” [101]

According to Amnesty International, the United States has carried out hundreds of military strikes in Somalia, yet has only acknowledged one instance of so-called “civilian deaths.” [102] As Allegra Harpootlian writes at the anti-war Tom Dispatch website,

Almost as alarming as the rate of civilian casualties from drone and other air strikes in the Obama years was the lack of information provided about them. ... Soon after President Trump took office, his administration began to quietly dismantle the safeguards Obama had just created. His administration would subsequently expand the battlefields on which drones would be used, ease combat rules in Somalia intended to protect civilians, rescind most aspects of Obama’s executive orders, and stop publishing civilian casualty data entirely, while telling the public even less about the program. Not surprisingly, drone strikes across the Greater Middle East and parts of Africa would rise and a lot more civilians would start dying from them. [103]

Both the United States and France are heavily involved in counter-terrorism in what are called the G5 countries: the Sahel nations of Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Chad. The United States recently opened the

Agadez base in Niger, West Africa, in a region currently experiencing a surge in attacks by al-Qaida, Islamic State in Greater Sahara, and others, especially in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. France’s major military initiative in the Sahel is Operation Barkhane, and approximately 4,500 French troops currently serve on the continent alongside thousands of G5-nation troops. Protests against the former colonial power’s presence compelled France to shore up the G5 coalition at a January convening where President Emmanuel Macron claimed that “France is not there, contrary to what’s heard sometimes, for neo-colonialist, imperialist, or economic reasons. We’re there for our collective security and the region.” [104]

In spring 2020, a European counter-terror campaign called Takuba—with 11 countries contributing troops—was launched. As Ndongo Samba Sylla points out, military policy allows for expanded “monetary colonialism” and ambitions of expanding the euro-pegged West African currency the CFA franc (now renamed the eco) beyond its former colonies. [105] Much like the United States, France relies on African partnerships to further its own aims and thwart imperial competitors. Thus, as Batou describes, it is “doing all it can to avoid resurrecting the image of France as the ‘gendarme of Africa,’ especially in a context where emerging countries can take advantage of their noncolonial past.” [106] All told, the entire Sahel region is highly militarized; according to the Center for Strategic and International Studies, including those of the United States, the EU, the UN, and an array of regional contingents, the area currently hosts 25,000 troops. [107]

## Displacement and Ecological Crisis

Militarization has compounded already-existing social contradictions. Warfare has fueled a wide refugee crisis, and the number of internally displaced persons in the Sahel has almost tripled from January 2019 to March 2020. [108] Over a decade into



the war in Somalia, approximately 5.2 million people require humanitarian assistance. [109] The rising commodification of land in Africa, meanwhile, has exacerbated land grabs and the displacement of rural communities. In countries such as Ethiopia, governments have signed agreements with multinationals for access to communal land; the Gulf states, vulnerable to food shortages, have actively pursued these “deals” as have U.S. agribusinesses and other multinationals. Mining and drilling likewise threaten communities with eviction, and activists across the continent have mobilized in protest, such as the South African campaign under the banner of “the right to say no.” These movements have often been met with harsh repression, such as the 2016 assassination of well-known leader Sikhosiphi “Bazooka” Rhadebe, who led a years-long struggle with the Amadiba Crisis Committee to stop opencast mining in South Africa’s Eastern Cape. [110]

As a number of reports have made clear, incidents of terror have risen under conditions of war and displacement. Yet for the major powers in Africa today, such terrible costs in human terms are viewed primarily as threats to stability: problems in the competitive drive for extraction and capital accumulation, that is, for the broader imperial project in Africa itself. Nonetheless, Washington continues to funnel large amounts of military aid to key African “security allies,” such as Uganda, Kenya, and Nigeria. For example, the Nigerian government’s U.S.-supported war on Boko Haram and the people of northern Nigeria has escalated terror attacks. As a Socialist Workers League (Nigeria) editorial describes,

There are generalized concerns about the level of insecurity including Boko Haram. ... We should recognize that insecurity and crime are a symptom of inequality, poverty, and high-level corruption. Insecurity cannot be dealt with separately. The money for the Internally Displaced People (IDPs) in camps in and around [the northern city of] Maiduguru is being stolen. Is it any wonder then

that young men continue to join Boko Haram rather than just sitting around in the camps, watching their families starve to death? [111]

Militarism, environmental destruction, and climate change are also inextricably linked. As elsewhere on the globe, civil wars have exacerbated environmental devastation. Likewise, the drive for extraction—and the resulting climate change—have deprived people of access to natural resources, displaced them from their land, and polluted their waterways. All of these dynamics create conditions for further conflict and militarized intervention at the hand of the state. Nnimmo Bassey of the Nigerian ecological think tank Home of Mother Earth Foundation writes extensively of these interrelationships. Again, in the case of Boko Haram, as he writes, “The occupation of the [Sambisa] forest by the insurgents clearly posed threats beyond those on the human population. Their activities posed direct threats to the trees, wildlife, and general biodiversity. Military action to flush out the insurgents from the forest has obviously inflicted harm on the forest ecosystem.” [112]

Yet the origins of Boko Haram itself lie at least in part with the massive water loss in Lake Chad, which has decreased approximately 95 percent in size since the 1960s; Bassey estimates that at least 50 percent of the water supply loss is due to climate change. [113] Farmers and pastoralists have been displaced on a large scale, a major driver in the rise of insurgency. As an official of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification describes,

In much of northern Nigeria, Muslim herders are in competition with Christian farmers for dwindling water supplies. The so-called religious fight is actually about access to vital resources. It is not just about Boko Haram, in the Sahel belt; you will see almost the same challenge in Mali and in Sudan. Furthermore, men who were or would have been gainfully employed as farmers, fishermen, fish sellers, and pastoralists have now been conscripted into Boko

Haram. [114]

Mahmood Mamdani’s *Saviors and Survivors* (Pantheon, 2009) provides a similar explanation about the land-based conflicts underpinning the regional war in Darfur, Sudan.

Again, such crises pose a challenge to U.S. imperial interests where they undermine stability and disadvantage U.S. interests in Africa relative to competitors. A recent strategy document reported that “USAFRICOM has also identified extreme weather as an ‘emergent challenge’ to Africa’s security. For example, thousands of Somalis were displaced this quarter by floods. Displacement, food insecurity, and destruction of livelihoods due to natural events can create conditions that foster the growth of violent extremism.” [115] The rationale for the construction of a U.S. drone base in Agadez, in central Niger, was precisely on the basis of these regional “security threats.” But according to the Department of Defense’s own figures, 2.9 million people in the Lake Chad basin require emergency assistance, yet the region received a mere \$400 million in U.S. humanitarian funding in the last fiscal year. [116] Military intervention at the expense of aid will vastly compound the current human rights disaster.

## Pandemic, Debt, and the Oil Price Meltdown

The imperial and neoliberal agenda of security, “stability,” and capital accumulation have meant the undermining of programs to meet human need. The contradictions of the forty-year global neoliberal agenda of cuts to social programs and privatization are particularly sharp in Africa, and the current pandemic has already exposed these dynamics on a devastating scale. Although at the time of this writing, in spring 2020, confirmed cases of COVID-19 were relatively low in much of Africa, the systemic crises outlined above have created the potential for catastrophic poverty, economic crisis, repression, and militarization.



African nations have long been saddled with immense debt loads as the end-product of neoliberal structural adjustment imposed by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The vast amounts of debt repayments required under these schemes have distorted national budgets so that, in most African countries, payments on foreign debt exceed spending on health care. Oxfam reports, for example, that Ghana spends 11 times more on servicing its debt than on health; continentwide, there are 2.8 doctors and 11 nurses for every 10,000 people, compared with 33.8 and 80.6, respectively, in Europe. Yet the pandemic crisis is half of a “double whammy,” the other half a worldwide oil price collapse that caused a number of African economies to slow down before the pandemic hit, as commodity prices dropped to historic lows and 113 countries worldwide faced IMF-dictated austerity. [117]

In African nations heavily reliant on oil exports, such as Angola, Nigeria, and Ghana, forecasted revenue for 2020 assumed oil prices at approximately \$55 per barrel. Global prices at roughly half that mark spell catastrophe for African budgets; Angola, for example, declared a state of emergency due to these economic conditions as early as March. [118] This picture is magnified by the vastly disproportionate reliance on extraction for export revenue and foreign exchange earnings in African oil-producing states, relative to other sectors of their economies. For some nations, such as South Sudan, oil revenue accounts for up to 98 percent of the country’s foreign exchange revenue. Overall, oil comprises roughly 50 percent of sub-Saharan African exports. The Health of Mother Earth Foundation describes current conditions:

The news from South Sudan ... hits one painfully below the belt. A visit to the displaced people camps etches memories that cannot be easily erased. ... And to this, you add COVID-19. As if they did not have enough in their plate. They had a long war, then a long civil war. It has been misery upon

misery. They have oil but for what? Recently we conducted a study on access to potable water in Juba and found that [the] majority of the people do not have water that is safe for consumption. You may wish that we could wash our hands with crude. ... The situation in the oil field communities here is indeed comparable to the situation in the Niger Delta. The difference may be one of scale, but the ecological damage is overshadowed only by the scars of open violence. [119]

All told, this many-headed catastrophe spells deep economic crisis for the nations of Africa. The World Bank reported in spring 2020 that

COVID-19 will cost the region between \$37 billion and \$79 billion in output losses for 2020 due to a combination of effects. ... The COVID-19 crisis also has the potential to spark a food security crisis in Africa, with agricultural production potentially contracting between 2.6 percent in an optimistic scenario and up to 7 percent if there are trade blockages. Food imports would decline substantially (as much as 25 percent or as little as 13 percent). [120]

The World Bank now predicts an economic contraction of 5.1 percent; [121] given that African nations experienced growth rates in this range in the recent past, this is a drop of huge proportions.

The question of how these and related crises are resolved is fundamentally one of the balance of class forces: the ability of the great powers and “their” capitalist classes to pursue their aims in Africa regardless of the social, economic, and environmental costs. Recent history provides a small clue: The Ebola crisis of 2014-2016, centered in Liberia, Guinea, and Sierra Leone, was characterized by the UN as “a threat to international peace and security.” Tellingly, the U.S. response, under the Obama administration, was to militarize a public health crisis, opting to send soldiers to West Africa over doctors. The strength of forces from below to challenge this agenda and impose new

ones in the interest of the vast majority will determine how this crisis will be resolved.

As with the left worldwide, the African left is confronting profound questions in this nightmarish “perfect storm” of public health disaster, war, and economic meltdown. The Southern African People’s Solidarity Network Secretariat, for one, has called for a debt moratorium, stating,

Capitalist globalization implanted within the legacy of colonialism, neocolonialism, and elite-driven cronyism has locked Southern Africa into a multidimensional economic, social, and ecological crisis and has rendered the region ripe for another social catastrophe. The COVID-19 pandemic is that long-predicted catastrophe. ... The state of health in Southern Africa is rooted in the region’s history of underdevelopment and domination. Structural Adjustment Programs imposed by the IMF and World Bank eroded the initial post-independence gains in building a public health system responsive to the needs of the majority. In the face of harsh economic conditions, health budgets, and the budgets critical to the social determinants of health, were cut, as governments adopted neoliberal programs of austerity. [122]

Of necessity, social movements and working-class organizations will be compelled to take on rising levels of repression in the fight for survival and for justice. As Gacheke Gachihi puts it, “Ordinary people are struggling to cope with the repressive measures which are inherently violent, disorganized, and dehumanizing as the state tries to curb the spread of infections from the developed world. Yet, with limited resources and a corrupt and illegitimate state, the challenges are enormous.” [123] Likewise, as the South Africa-based *Amandla!* magazine describes, rising levels of clashes with police and the army open up the possibility of “a generalized Marikana-like explosion.” Of necessity, the left must build a “movement that can act as a counter-power to the neoliberal state and the ruling and self-serving elites. The battle must be joined now over how the world emerges from this crisis.” [124]

## Conclusion

Today, the U.S. ruling class will not easily cede its preeminence as an economic and military power to its peer competitors—China in particular—in Africa or elsewhere around the globe, and a minor adjustment in troop levels belies that broader agenda. As Washington's imperial project continues to run up against those of its rivals, the particular contours of the crisis in Africa will continue to be revealed and new dimensions will continue to arise. The vicious and racist treatment of Africans in Guangzhou, China, under COVID lockdown has created a diplomatic crisis between African state leaders and the Chinese government,

throwing a wrench into the works of its cultivated foreign policy of recent years. Wading into the dispute, the United States leaned on the long-standing trope of "concern" for Africa's exploitation at the hands of China; a State Department official called the incident "a sad reminder of how hollow the PRC-Africa relationship really is." [125] Thus, while actual levels of U.S. investment and trade with Africa may remain lower than China's, Washington has no intention of giving military or economic ground to its rivals on the continent so as to facilitate their rise on the world stage.

But as we have seen, the majority in Africa will pay the price for the U.S. agenda: war, displacement, devastation, and alliances with African

ruling classes who exploit and immiserate their own working classes. As Femi Aborisade has pointed out, the current crisis is not uniform, and what he calls a "hunger virus" follows close at the heels of the coronavirus. [126] As conditions worldwide approach Depression-era levels—in the Global North and the Global South—the class conclusions will be unavoidable. The left must urgently take up the calls from Africa to drop the debt and demilitarize the continent, to stop the land displacement and pollution caused by multinationals. To confront their imperialism, ours must be the global project of solidarity.

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## Fighting Back against Hungary's Ban on Legal Gender Recognition

2 August 2020, by **Tina Kolos Orban**

**On May 28, the Hungarian government passed into law a transphobic bill. The bill had been introduced on April 1st by vice-Prime Minister Szemjen, at the time as part of an omnibus initiative (the same bill aimed to curtail the powers of city mayors). According to the press release published by your organization, Transvanilla, the May 28 law bans legal gender recognition. It does so by introducing the category "sex at birth" on identification documents for Hungarian citizens. Was the initiative (and then the law) a surprise for your organisation, or is it part of an escalating war of the Orban government on transgender persons and trans rights in Hungary? Would you say that the rights of trans folks in Hungary have been deteriorating for a while or that this initiative is part of a new or new type of offensive?**

The move seems to be part of the broader war of the government on gender. Defining sex at birth as an unchangeable characteristic is part of that discourse and is an obvious attack on the right of trans and intersex people in Hungary. The situation for trans people was getting worse in the past years but we did not experienced targeted attacks before this law proposal. In 2003, the Hungarian Government introduced a procedure for legal gender recognition based on mental health diagnosis with no other medical interventions required. However, this administrative procedure was not codified and requirements (guidelines) were not even available publicly. This procedure for legal gender recognition functioned rather well but was not secure at all because of not being backed up by a piece of legislation. Transvanilla started to advocate on the matter in 2014. The government modified a ministerial decree in December 2017 to solve the issue.

Despite these efforts, the procedure was basically non-functional since May 2018. Still, the introduction of this law amendment as part of an omnibus bill during the COVID-19 pandemic was a great surprise to us.

**Can you introduce Transvanilla, its main goals and activities in Hungary? How does your organization fit (or not fit) within the broader landscape of LGBTQ\* or otherwise progressive organizations in Hungary? In what ways do you see your struggle as connected to other local struggles?**

Transvanilla aims to empower trans and gender non-conform (TGN) communities and advocates for the interests of TGN people in all walks of life. The organization advocates for trans rights, monitors transphobic discrimination and violence, provides counselling, psychological and legal support to TGN people and their families. As a community-based group,

it also raises visibility of issues around gender identity and expression and organizes events, gatherings for the community and the wider public.

Transvanilla and trans people face the same issues as other NGOs and oppressed groups in the country. However, the reactions and strategies of different organizations are sometimes different. Those not fitting into the ideology of mainstream directions often remain outcast and find themselves not belonging to any sides.

Transvanilla believes an independent and strong movement is needed to fight for trans rights, one which works closely with other LGBT groups. The mainstream LGBT and the wider human rights movement often fails to serve those who are most vulnerable and do not take into account socio-economic issues when advocating for change. Therefore, instead of amplifying the voice of different groups, they end up in ignoring and even silencing them.

**What will the new law mean, in practice, for transgender persons and their loved ones in Hungary? What was the reaction to the law in the LGBTQ\* community in Hungary and have trans folks and their allies taken steps to organize collectively? In an interview for Reuters, you mentioned a feeling of panic...**

The law practically forces trans people to out themselves on a regular basis. The fact that sex can no longer be amended in birth certificates has far reaching consequences. In Hungary, there is a 30 day interval to record a birth. In some cases, it is impossible to define the sex of an intersex child in 30 days. That will lead to more unnecessary medical interventions in the case of infants and children.

Also, in Hungary there are closed name lists for male and female persons, and the registered sex and the first name must match. There is no possibility anymore to change a first name to one that matches one's gender identity. Besides, all official and most often non-official documents

must contain the same data as in the birth certificate. This now more rigid system is even more burdensome, considering that in Hungary ID needs to be presented very often to various authorities and persons. It is now more difficult to pick up a parcel at the post office, to use public transport, to go to the bank not to mention in educational settings and workplaces.

We wish we could say this attack has unified our communities, but that was not the case. Even trans activists did not work together and Transvanilla, the only registered trans NGO in the country working on legal gender recognition for many years, was not supported by other LGBT and human rights organisations. They had their own agenda and activities were carried out in parallel and independently by them. This became obvious on the very first day, where besides fighting the law proposal, Transvanilla's team was working under extra pressure because of so called "allies" of our community. However, there was a lot of international support coming from different stakeholders which helped to survive and carry out the work needed.

**The law introduced in Hungary has been called "unprecedented in Europe". Can it be contested in any way in the European Court of Human Rights?**

The law is unprecedented on the global level, is unconstitutional in Hungary and is against international human rights standards. It can be challenged at the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) too. There are already 23 cases launched in front of the ECHR on legal gender recognition in Hungary. These cases were launched in 2017 and 2019 already, and hopefully decisions will come sooner rather than later. New cases are planned to be launched once the new law is challenged in the country. Court cases on the national level, including the Constitutional Court level, are already launched by Transvanilla and other organizations too.

**Despite this setback for gender recognition in Hungary, are there avenues left to improve trans men and women's access to certain types of social rights, such as welfare benefits for facing economic marginalization because of transphobia? Or has the Orban government's focus on families in social policies closed off any existing access?**

The Hungarian government's social support system solely focuses on family structures and provides support to middle and upper class families mostly. Even during the pandemic support was only provided to businesses and not to individuals. Economic marginalization of trans people and others are not part of their agenda. Still there are always ways to be found to improve access to social rights. In this particular case, work can be successful on micro levels, trying to advocate for practices and inclusion on the local level. Building resilience in communities and across communities is a way to cope with situations and collaboration between NGOs from different fields is one way to move forward with that.

**What forms of transnational solidarity does Transvanilla benefit from, now? How can LeftEast readers help your current efforts?**

Transvanilla received extremely crucial support from transnational actors. International NGOs, human rights institutions and media were very helpful in raising awareness on the emerging situation in the country. However, pressure must be constant and the fight has just started with the law coming into effect. Transvanilla has created different opportunities to engage, including a petition for individuals, a joint statement to be signed by organizations and social media content to be shared. There is a dedicated call-to-action page on our website where LeftEast readers can follow these calls: <http://transvanilla.hu/home/news/lgrforhungary-call-to-action-page>

July 30, 2020

Source *LeftEast*.

# Nigerian solidarity with July 20 BLM strike

1 August 2020, by **Baba Aye and Mbenga Komolafe**

## The Coalition for Revolution (CORE) Stands In Solidarity with the Strike For Black Lives, and Against Racism and Police Brutality [127]

As working-class people across the United States embark on a general strike for Black Lives, and against anti-Black racism and police brutality today 20th July 2020, CORE, Nigeria, stands in solidarity with them. We also use this opportunity to condemn racism, ethnicism, and police brutality anywhere and everywhere in the world.

Racism, ethnicism, and sexism are ideologies used by the 1 percent of oppressors who exploit all working-class people to divide us. Systemic racism is ingrained into the dynamics of racism. That is why Malcolm X correctly stated that “you can’t have capitalism without racism.”

The police serve the purpose of the 1 percent to repress the poor masses. They are thus veritable tools for perpetuating systemic racism in multi-racial societies like the United States.

The police are not our friend, anywhere. Not less than 30 people were killed by the police and other security agencies while effecting the (Covid-19) lockdown in Nigeria.

These include Tina Ezekwe, a 16-year old secondary school pupil at Oworonshoki, where CORE activists protested against this dastardly act in May. Earlier in January, the police equally killed Comrade Alex Ogbu. Alex was a journalist and leading member of a CORE affiliate. [128]

He was shot in the head while covering the peaceful demonstration of Shiite Moslems, demanding the release of the leader of the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN), Ibrahim El-Zakzakky. The police tried to lie their way through this murder, claiming he fell and hit his head on a sharp object. It took the clear result of an autopsy to make them own up to the homicide.

We call for #JusticeForGeorgeFloyd and in the same vein call for #JusticeForAlexOgbu, #JusticeForTinaEzekwe and #JusticeForAdamaTraoré. We salute Parisiens who trooped out in their numbers over the weekend to mark the fourth anniversary of the killing of Adama Troaré, who was murdered by the police on 24th July 2016.

We must show the connections between all these attacks of the state, systemic racism, and ethnicism for what they are: attempts of the ruling

class to keep us cowed. But, as the global rebellion sparked by the killing of George Floyd shows, we will not be cowed.

We will fight until we are free. It is not enough for us to lament or to cry. We are angry and correctly so. But even this is not enough. We must be clear about what the solution to racism is, about our continued exploitation as working-class people and youths, and about the despoliation of the environment which has brought about a climate crisis.

That solution is revolution. That solution is for us, the 99 percent to unite and fight until we bring to birth a new world founded on solidarity, equality, and mutual respect.

Once again, we salute the bold initiative of the “Strike for Black Lives”. This must not be merely a moment. We must strengthen and deepen the movement arising before our eyes, and indeed which together we are building, for a new world which will emerge from our self-emancipation.

### **Black Lives Matter!**

Down with racism! Down with police brutality!

Onward forward to Revolution!

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