



IV548 - September 2020

Total support for the mobilizations against Lukashenko's autocracy!

30 September 2020, by **Fourth International Bureau**

1. Despite extremely brutal repression (already more than 12,000 arrests, hundreds of wounded, at least 4 dead), the mass revolt of the Belarusian population is entering its ninth week extending both socially and beyond the capital, Minsk, without succeeding for the moment in turning into a general strike. Since the falsification of the results of the presidential election on 9 August, in this country of 9.5 million people, located between the EU and Russia, every week hundreds of thousands of peaceful demonstrators, notably women, have been demanding:

- The departure of Lukashenko (who organized his investiture on 23 September in the greatest secrecy, under the protection of the army and the police who blocked the centre of the capital);
- Free and fair elections;
- An end to police violence and the release of political prisoners.

This impressive mobilization of popular resistance gained momentum after the first demonstrations following the announcement of the official election results faced government terror. But its roots are deeper: for more than five years – in the context of the Ukrainian crisis and the sanctions against Russia the

economic and social deterioration of Lukashenko's autocratic regime, his neo-liberal policy in the field of labour law (including the replacement of collective agreements by individual fixed-term contracts) and the persecution of the unemployed, the wage freeze since 2015, the increase in the retirement age, the denial of workers' dignity in the face of the pandemic... It is against a regime that treats people like a disposable commodity, that hits, tortures and lies to them about the coronavirus that the Belarusian population has risen up.

2. Coming to power in 1994 with a populist discourse, when the population was mobilizing against the policy of privatization, Lukashenko formed an authoritarian regime to pursue capitalist restoration. It is a peculiar system of semi-peripheral capitalism, in which economic and political power is not fundamentally based on private big capital, but on a bureaucratic-paternalistic state apparatus of which Lukashenko is the symbol (but not the owner). By devoting a substantial part of the state's resources to maintaining industry, the rural sector, infrastructure and the population, this regime subordinated the elements of private capital to its officials, limiting (unlike Russia) the growth of inequality. Thus, it is the

nomenklatura, mixed with private capital, that subjugates and exploits the workers in an economic, administrative, political and cultural-ideological manner. It is this system that entered into stagnation from 2013 onwards. And today it has plunged into a multidimensional crisis.

3. Proclaimed in the late 1990s, the Union of Russia and Belarus, which represented an attempt to re-integrate the post-Soviet space in the last decade, finally turned into a form of economic dependence of the country on Russia while keeping the political autonomy of the Belarusian regime. It became clear that Putin's Russia understands integration of post-Soviet countries only as an opportunity for expansion of Russian big capital and its key role in privatization of former Soviet enterprises. For Lukashenko, such integration would mean not only the loss of control over property, but also the loss of political power that would have passed to Russian bureaucrats and top managers.

Lukashenko's economic and political model in Belarus had to constantly manoeuvre between the European Union and Russia to survive. Thus, the West, despite its dissatisfaction with Lukashenko's authoritarianism, valued him for his desire to maintain his independence from Russia and his resistance to expanding Russian

military bases in Belarus. This neutral status of Belarus allowed Minsk to become the main platform for negotiations between Russia, Ukraine and the EU in 2014. For Putin, on the other hand, Lukashenko remained a leader who would never let his country get closer to NATO and maintained the orientation of a large part of the Belarusian economy toward Russia. Thus, Lukashenko did not enjoy the trust of either Russia or the West, but at the same time satisfied them because he guaranteed the stability of current position of Belarus.

Mass protests that began in Belarus after the presidential election on August 9 have primarily internal reasons. Over the last months we have seen that Lukashenko failed to resolve this crisis on his own and openly turned to Russia for help. Russian political advisers and representatives of special security agencies have arrived in Belarus, and Putin openly expressed his willingness to send Russian riot police to help Lukashenko. Now, if Lukashenko manages to stay in power, his political dependence on Russia will increase dramatically, and he will be extremely unpopular inside his country.

After recent talks between Putin and Lukashenko, it became clear that Moscow sees the current Belarusian crisis as a way to push forward from above a gradual transformation of the authoritarian model. It is a question of modifications of facade (constitutional reform) with the aim of facilitating the privatization of the big Belarussian state companies by the big Russian capital. The EU as a whole is ready to accept such a model, as it cannot offer Belarus any distinct alternative and is afraid of provoking Putin to creating another point of conflict (political and possibly military) in Eastern Europe.

Ultimately, only its people who have risen up to protest are interested in Belarus' deepgoing transformation and democratization.

4. Although after the presidential "elections" of 2001, 2006, 2010 and 2015 - the results of which have always been contested by the opposition (according to a recent statement by the chairman of the

Grodno Regional Executive Committee, there is no "method of counting the votes") - there were suppressed protests, the new wave of mobilizations began in 2017 when the regime tried to impose a tax by decree on the unemployed, who were accused of "parasitism". Not only in Minsk, but also in regional cities thousands of demonstrators chanted "No to Decree No. 3! Lukashenko get out!" forcing the regime to replace taxes with a reduction in state subsidies. This appeared to be a first step backwards for the regime.

When the Covid-19 pandemic began, although Belarus has a public health system superior to many developed countries (5.2 doctors per 1000 inhabitants, compared to 3.9 in the Eurozone and 2.6 in North America), the bureaucratic system was unable to adapt to the crisis. The regime called the pandemic a "psychosis", failed to provide protective equipment and medical supplies to health care workers and faced a shortage of ambulances, while Lukashenko cynically called the first official death (a known actor) a "poor bastard" who "could not hold out". And caregivers who dared to talk about the pandemic were repressed. It was then that the self-organization of the population began: the ByCovid19 campaign was able to substitute for the incapacity of the State, providing equipment and volunteer workers, setting up a coordination network in each region. The regime then oscillated between repression and collaboration with these volunteers, whose initiative "highlighted the need for change," as the coordinator of the ByCovid19 campaign put it.

Fearing that "they will come after me with pitchforks" (26 April 2020), Lukashenko decided to prevent his main liberal opponents - Viktor Babaryko (CEO of Belgazprombank), Valery Tsepkalo (former ambassador, deputy minister and administrator of the High Technology Park of Belarus) and Sergei Tikhanovsky (entrepreneur, blogger and host of the popular YouTube channel A Country to Live) - from running in the presidential election. Fundamentally macho, he believed that a female candidate "unable to carry this burden, would collapse" and had the

hundreds of thousands of signatures accepted allowing Sergei's wife, Svetlana Tikhanovskaya to run. This teacher, an "ordinary woman" who claimed not to aspire to power, whose image corresponded to that of the majority of voters, supported by Tsepkalo's wife and Babaryko's campaign manager, was able to gather tens of thousands of people in her pre-election meetings throughout the country. And her official score - 10.9 per cent of the vote - could not be admitted by anyone.

The extremely violent repression of the first popular protest rallies on 9, 10 and 11 August did the rest: as the Belarusian sociologist Andrei Vardomatsky said, "when someone shoots at your window, the whole building sees it". Against injustice and terror, the extension of the protest movement was immediate: the Lukashenko regime is now only able to hold out thanks to the forces of repression. How long can one reign while "sitting on a bayonet"?

5. By responding with terror, the Lukashenko regime hoped to prevent concentrations of demonstrators. It actually pushed the protesters to demonstrate in front of their homes, in the courtyards of their buildings and in suburban villages, thus multiplying the protests and pushing for forms of local self-organization around neighbourhood relations - very strong because the bureaucratic system of building management and social services is malfunctioning and forces neighbours to solve urgent problems among themselves. With the role of social networks and internet channels - popular with young people and the main source of information in a country where the regime controls and censors the media - the result has been the appearance of a huge network of local, spontaneous protests, which has no centre and no assertive leadership, but a "fluid leadership": as soon as one person appearing as a "leader" is repressed, another naturally takes their place locally. What characterizes this movement is great creativity, the protesters are constantly inventing new forms of control, of peaceful struggle, and all this circulates, spreads and enriches itself through social networks.

From 10 August the workers **as such** joined the mobilizations. Healthworkers (mostly women, doctors and nurses) of the wounded took to the streets protesting against torture. Work stoppages took place in a large number of enterprises (sometimes with the support of owners in the private sector) and, above all, in at least a dozen very large state-owned enterprises, leading to gatherings of workers in the factories, sometimes polemics with the management and local representatives of the regime and even with Lukashenko (dismissed by the workers of the Minsk Automobile Plant with the cry of "get out" on 17 August), strike committees appeared, but it seems that nowhere were there any attempts at an occupation strike. On the contrary, the workers came out of the factories to demonstrate. And with repression (sometimes massive layoffs as in State Television or the National Theatre of Minsk, or threats of layoffs, arrests often followed by imprisonment of real or imaginary "leaders"), the weakness or absence of real unions, and sometimes the "advice" of directors to go on the "Italian strike" (that is, a work to rule, invisible, leaving the workers atomized), the strike movement retreated, the proletarians dissolved into the vast protest movement. The factories have not become the centre of the revolt and the proletariat has not (yet?) managed to assert itself as a class, around its own demands, within the democratic movement that struggles against the regime.

In the face of the brutal repression of the demonstrations, women **as such** organized numerous "solidarity chains", offering flowers to the repressive forces and overflowing them with their masses, very peacefully, which for a time paralysed this very macho sector, before the authorities ordered it to repress women and even their children as well. However, demands for women's rights have not (yet?) appeared in these initiatives.

6. While opposition presidential candidates rejected by the regime (V. Babaryko, V. Tsepkalo and S. Tikhanovsky), as well as Andrei Dmitriev (candidate for "Speaking the Truth", who officially obtained 1.21%

of the votes) put forward liberal economic programs, aimed in particular at the "freedom of enterprise" of the private sector and the need to "stop financing unprofitable companies", this theme almost disappeared from Svetlana Tikhanovskaya's presidential campaign (without being rejected by the candidate). Since August 9, 2020, they have not appeared in the revolt of the masses against the regime either. The demonstrators only put forward the three democratic demands.

The liberal opposition parties, sidelined since 1994 and deprived of any significant representation in the institutions of the regime, are in fact very weak. The same is true of the political parties claiming to be left-wing (often mixed with a dose of nostalgia for the old regime of so-called "real socialism"), reduced to discussion clubs.

Finally, while union membership is compulsory, the official trade union movement has nothing in common with even highly bureaucratized trade unionism but acts as a transmission belt for Lukashenko and possibly as a framework for social advancement for its officials. It is necessary to underline the rupture on this level which was Lukashenko's repression of the very strong workers and trade union mobilization at the beginning of the 1990s at the same time as he put an end to liberal shock therapy: the "social protections" of his statist capitalism were organically linked to the atomization and bureaucratic supervision of the workers. Independent trade unions - such as the Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions (BKDP), affiliated to the International Trade Union Confederation - tolerated while being repressed, are very weak and not very present in large companies. The society modelled by Lukashenko is thus an atomized society. This is what has changed in recent months, especially since the beginning of the popular revolt. The calls for solidarity with the workers and people of Belarus from the ETUC networks - especially from the CGT (France), recently affiliated to the ETUC - mark an important possible turning point.

Whatever the limits, we are witnessing

within this mass democratic movement an intense politicization, a learning of civic self-organization that puts on the agenda the appearance of a completely new political structuring. This movement for democracy will, sooner or later, have to build a project for society. If it succeeds in "getting rid of" Lukashenko and his autocratic regime, it will divide and the conditions may emerge for class and gender issues and discussions about what to build on instead to flourish. Then the role of the working class (whose beginning of the strikes forced Lukashenko, for a time, to limit repression, thus showing his strength), the role of women (whose demonstrations on Saturdays paved the way for the continuation of mass demonstrations on Sundays), ecological questions (Belarus has already experienced a serious beginning of climate change, the south of the country becoming a steppe region whereas fifty years ago it was still a swampy forest) will be at the centre of the discussions.

7. So that all the democratic, health, feminist, class and environmental issues that feed the current politicization of Belarusian society allow the emergence of an eco-socialist front, the internationalist left (trade union, political, associative) must be able to develop concrete solidarity links, from below, with the Belarusian democratic movement as a whole.

Solidarity does not mean alignment with this or that decision of those who today claim to symbolize the movement: the coordinating council around Svetlana Tikhanovskaya (which repression has greatly weakened) or the former political parties that have joined the movement while keeping quiet about their real programmes and aims - pro- or anti-Russian, anti-social and undemocratic privatizations: this issue is now coming more and more into the open, at a time when the economic situation is deteriorating: it will be necessary to oppose both Lukashenko's pseudo-protective rhetoric and his pseudo-democratic opponents.

Solidarity means democratic defence against repression, defence of the pluralist right to free expression,

support for the demonstrations and strikes that take place. Solidarity also implies independence from the manoeuvres of other countries' governments and international finance capital, which try to profit from the mobilizations of the masses in Belarus.

• **International solidarity of**

workers with the democratic movement in Belarus!

- Out with Lukashenko and his regime!
- Free and fair elections in Belarus!

• Free self-organization of the debate on the future of Belarus!

• Move towards an ecosocialist Belarus: transnational links between trade unions, movements of women, youth, workers!

26 September 2020

Johnson crashes Britain towards the abyss

29 September 2020, by **Phil Hearse**

To see how the crisis is unfolding, we have to look at the virus disaster, Brexit and the political aftershocks from the December 2019 election - including the crisis and collapse of the left-wing Labour project around former leader Jeremy Corbyn.

Covid-19 disaster

Britain's record on the coronavirus is shocking. According to official figures, at the time of writing (September 2020) officially there have been 42,000 Covid-19 deaths, almost certainly an underestimate. One third of those deaths have been in care homes for the elderly. To put this in perspective, Britain has almost exactly 20% of the population of the United States, and about 21% of the number of deaths. In other words, the outcome so far is just as bad as Trump's in the United States, probably a bit worse, but in the same league. It is striking how some of the most hard-nosed neoliberal governments - the US, Britain, Brazil- have delivered some of the worst outcomes on Covid-19.

The underlying reasons for these UK results are the same as in the United States - a lockdown started too late, an easing of the lockdown too early, a completely inadequate privatised test and trace regime, and a failure to give clear advice about mask wearing and social distancing.

Britain went into lockdown on March 23, by which time the number of infections was doubling every four or

five days. As the virus overwhelmed hospitals, with 120 deaths among healthcare professionals, the government told hospitals to make space by sending elderly Covid-19 patients who were apparently 'recovering' back to their care homes. The predictable outcome was a eugenic massacre of the old and sick. Deaths reached alarming levels among essential workers, especially in the public transport sector - for example 29 deaths among London bus drivers.

The lockdown had a devastating effect on the economy in Britain, hugely dependent on the hospitality/tourism sector and retailing. And when people don't go to shops and offices, neither do they buy from sandwich shops, cafes and burger chains. Pubs and restaurants took a massive hit.

In March the government chief finance minister Rishi Sunak decided to pump up to £500 billion into supporting businesses large and small, and into a furlough scheme that paid 80% of the wages of millions of laid-off workers. Even so, the lockdown detonated an explosion of redundancies, now in the hundreds of thousands. It is expected that as the furlough scheme ends next month, unemployment will rise to around five million. During the lockdown, the government put a ban on evictions for non-payment of rent. This restriction is now being removed, and tens of thousands risk losing their homes. Mass destitution is a real prospect.

But at every stage key lockdown

measure have been opposed by the Conservative right-wing, including the rabidly reactionary *Sun* and *Daily Mail*, as a breach of personal liberties that was wrecking business. Thousands took advantage of a partial easing of lockdown in the August sunshine to flock to beaches where little social distancing was in evidence. May thousands took late summer holidays to Greece and Spain, where countries getting on top of the virus had it re-exported to them by British tourists.

Now, with schools and universities allowed to return and people encouraged to go back to work, infections are once again doubling every four or five days. The notion that school kids don't spread the virus has been shown to be absurd - with, for example, more than 100 schools in Greater Manchester alone reporting positive tests and whole year cohorts sent home. The government is responding with local lockdowns, but is desperately trying to avoid another national lockdown.

As in most countries, the social geography of the virus is a map of poverty. Towns in the North West around Manchester have been badly hit, because they are centres of poverty and very crowded housing. This particularly affects the Asian communities, often living in small multi-generational houses. The same is true in other major conurbations.

Brexit turmoil mounting

How is Brexit going to compound the crisis? Britain left the European Union at the beginning of 2020, but little really changed. The country entered a year of transition, during which a trade deal would be hammered out and cross-border travel sorted, to make it as friction free as possible. In now looks as if there will be no deal by the December 31 deadline, as the British side raises more and more objections, so that economic relations between Britain and the EU will be like those with the rest of the world – i.e. with major new tariffs. On the face of it this seems like cutting off your nose to spite your face, and for many sectors of British capital it surely is. But Brexit nationalism and xenophobia has reached levels that override even capitalist rationality. How so?

To stay in a trading bloc with the EU, Britain would be forced to accept many of the Union's regulations concerning the environment and working conditions, which the ultra-neoliberal Tory right wants to get rid of. Perhaps more importantly the Conservative right is staunchly pro-American, and wants a trade deal with the United States, opening up a sort of North Atlantic free trade area. To do that of course means accepting not EU regulations, but those demanded by US government negotiators, bluntly explained in an astonishing US government document. [1] Britain will have to open up its National Health Service (NHS), indeed all government financed bodies, to bids from US corporations, and outcomes must be decided by commercial criteria only. Joint oversight committees must be established to ensure 'fair accesses' to the whole of the British economy. For a government obsessed with asserting Britain's 'full sovereignty' it seems obvious that lots of it will be given away to US capitalism.

After the end of 2020, with a 'no deal' Brexit there will be chaos. Many businesses depend on EU workers, who will not be able to come. There are likely to be massive queues of lorries at Dover and other key ports as customs documentation is checked.

Britain depends on hundreds of trucks a day delivering food and other key supplies from the EU, and shortages of some food items are on the cards.

Trouble at the borders

But a 'no deal' Brexit has many other implications, particularly in Ireland. Northern Ireland is of course part of the United Kingdom, but economically very integrated with the Irish Republic. Travel across the border is unrestricted and in many places it is difficult to detect where the border actually is. But the Irish Republic is a staunch member of the European Union, which creates a thorny problem for Brexit, if goods and services can flow freely across the border, and then across the Irish Sea to mainland Britain.

The deal worked out so far is that Northern Ireland will remain economically in the EU, but goods and services going between the North and the rest of the UK will have to be checked and EU goods given the appropriate tariff. For hard-core Brexiteers this is an outrage since it means that Britain no longer has full sovereignty over Northern Ireland. In a no-deal Brexit, a 'hard' border with the Irish Republic will be re-established, with border posts and customs checks. The conclusion is – expect big trouble and a massive resurgence of the Irish national question, putting the 1997 Ireland Peace Agreement in question. As veteran Derry socialist Eamon McCann puts it, "If they re-establish border posts, within six weeks there will be people shooting at them." The border will be widely defied, with local business people, cross-border workers and Dublin shoppers all finding informal routes to evade it.

Brexit is also causing a surge in support for the moderate social democratic Scottish National Party (SNP), which leads the devolved Scottish government, and for its proposal for a new referendum on Scottish independence. The politics of the SNP are moderate social democratic, not right wing nationalist. Scotland's First Minister, SNP leader

Nicola Sturgeon, is seen as having dealt with the pandemic north of the border much better than Boris Johnson in London. Actually Scotland's death rate is only marginally better than England's, but Sturgeon is seen as more open and honest than the evasive and blistering Johnson.

For the moment the devolved government has limited sovereignty over some Scottish questions only. A new referendum for full independence would have to be agreed by the British government and for the moment this seems unlikely.

At first blush it seems unlikely that leaving the European Union could have been the key mechanism for the hard right seizing control of the Conservative Party, or indeed pushing British politics overall sharply to the right. The key to the Brexiteers' long offensive was to link the European Union with immigration, summed up in the Brexiteer slogan at the 2016 referendum 'take back control'. Wilfully and obviously misconstrued by sections of the British Left as meaning taking back control from European capitalism, in fact it was (rightly) understood by the electorate as 'take back control of our borders', i.e. keep the immigrants out.

Anti-immigrant racism

Fifteen years ago Brexit was very much a minority concern inside the Conservative Party, but pushed forward by a coalition of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) and its then leader Nigel Farage. Farage was strongly backed by Rupert Murdoch's newspapers and indeed the whole of the right wing press. Farage became the leader of a sort of 'external faction' of the Conservative Party, which was highly effective in shifting the balance of forces within the party and pressurising public opinion, especially after the 2007/8 financial crash and the ensuing years of austerity.

Today the anti-immigrant hysteria is focussing on the alleged flood – in reality a trickle – of 'illegal' migrants taking advantage of mild summer seas

to cross the English Channel from France in rubber dinghies and makeshift rafts, the so-called 'death route'. [2] Home Secretary Priti Patel has mobilised the navy to aid the border patrol in pushing them back into French waters. Britain and France accuse one another of being responsible. Patel has also announced a new programme to rapidly remove thousands of asylum seekers whose claims have failed.

Labour's weak response

Government disarray continues mainly unscathed because of the failure of the opposition Labour Party, now led by Jeremy Corbyn's replacement, Keir Starmer, to effectively oppose it in Parliament. That has to be explained in terms of labour's electoral defeat in December 2019, and the collapse of the Corbyn project. While there were key policy issues on which Corbyn and his leadership team fumbled, in fact their whole approach was flawed from the beginning, undermined by structural weaknesses disguised in the left-wing euphoria following his 2015 election as party leader.

In the first place, Corbyn's election was partly an accident. In 2014 the right-dominated party bureaucracy agreed to a new method of election for the leader, which allowed anybody to register as a party member online for £3, and then vote in the leadership election. Hundreds of thousands did, and most of them voted for Corbyn. This of course represented the radicalisation of many young people in the face of grinding austerity, the other side of the polarisation boosting the radical right. But the right wing of the Labour Party, hugely dominant in the Parliamentary Labour Party, never accepted the Corbyn leadership and determined to do anything, anything at all, to get rid of it.

The Corbyn team set up an inner-party campaign arm, Momentum, which rapidly recruited more than 40,000 members. But they failed to do anything useful with it, restricting it mainly to mobilising support in inner-party elections and getting out the vote in national elections. Corbyn and

his team failed to grasp the need to wage war on the Right in Parliament and attempt to 'reselect' right-wing MPs at local level. While replacing all right wing MPs was an impossible task, this would have thrown the Right onto the defensive and made them less willing to attack the national leadership.

But more generally, Corbyn and his key deputies like MP John McDonnell and communications chief Seumas Milne, based their strategy on a fatally flawed assumption - that a compromise could be reached with the party's right wing, which would be forced into conceding support for the existing leadership and radical policies. It could not, and would not. There was never any hope of a Corbyn government pushing through radical left policies against a right-dominated parliamentary party, in turn supported by entrenched right-wingers in the national bureaucracy and among many local party officers.

A first attempt at a new leadership election was easily beaten back in 2016; then right wing MPs and union leaders pinned their hopes on Corbyn suffering a humiliating defeat in the snap election called by then premier Theresa May in 2017. To their chagrin, and that of the right wing press, he didn't. Although the Tories remained the biggest parliamentary party, Labour made substantial gains and the Conservatives lost their overall majority, having to rely on a parliamentary stitch-ups with the Northern Ireland Democratic Unionist Party to get their measures through Parliament. The prospect of Corbyn being the next prime minister was widely discussed.

This was the major turning point. From then on a major political slander campaign was launched against Corbyn accusing him of anti-Semitism, a campaign co-ordinated by the Conservative Party, the Labour Right and Jewish Board of Deputies, with strong links to Israel. What united all those slandering Corbyn was support for Israel and opposition to Palestinian rights, but also a simple desire to say anything that would undermine the Labour Left. In 2018 for example right wing papers accused Corbyn of having been a Russian agent in the 1980s, but

in a libel court Conservative vice 'chairman' Ben Bradley admitted that it had been a simple invention of Conservative Party Central Office.

The Labour membership figures after 2015 had shot up to more than half a million, and they all had access to the Internet. There were, it turned out, some dozens of people in the party who had posted anti-Semitic sentiment on social media. But that was a long way from saying the party as a whole, the Left or Corbyn himself was anti-Semitic, or presiding over an anti-Semitic party. The Labour leadership made a fatal error. Instead of robustly rejecting the slander, they decided to apologise - the worst thing you can do when accused of an egregious offence. This was a tactical move disastrous in itself, but irresponsible towards the whole Left, and the Palestinian solidarity movement, who could all be tarred with the anti-Semitism slander.

A second failure was Labour's total incomprehension of the national question in Scotland, which has been boosted by a revolt against neoliberal austerity, seen as emanating from London. Because Labour strongly opposed independence or substantial greater autonomy, it has collapsed north of the border. Twenty years ago Labour elected 71 MPs in Scotland. Now that figure is down to one. No Labour government has ever been elected without a strong contingent of Scottish MPs. Now the left-of-centre ground is dominated by the SNP, including in Glasgow, one of the most radical cities in Britain. Corbyn failed to break through Labour's image as a 'unionist' party.

Third, the Labour leadership was incapable of dealing with the Brexit issue, as was a whole swathe of the Left to the left of Labour. Caught between older white working class communities that were strongly pro-Brexit, and many inner city multi-ethnic communities with large numbers of young people that were strongly anti-Brexit, the Labour leadership dithered. In the 2019 election campaign, Corbyn came up with the preposterous position that Labour would hold new negotiations with Europe, and then organise a new referendum, but refused to say in

advance which way he would vote which would depend on 'circumstances'.

In truth many older Corbynistas, in the party and the unions, were in favour of Brexit. Opposition to the EU - 'bosses' Europe' - had a long tradition in the British Left since the 1975 referendum which confirmed Britain's membership. Indeed the EU is a capitalist alliance, but a left-wing exit ('Lexit') was not available. Lexiteers, who included the Communist Party and the biggest far left organisation the Socialist Workers Party, failed to grasp that Brexit was the key banner of the Tory right, would deliver Britain to further political and economic domination of the United States, and was justified above all by anti-immigrant racism, in particular immigration from countries like Poland and Romania, allowed to live and work in Britain by the terms of EU free movement. [3] And that opposition to EU regulations from the Tory right focussed on the most progressive aspects of the EU's regulations on the environment and

workers' rights. Turning Brexit into a left-wing Brexit was impossible, and the Left's relatively tiny voice was drowned out in the avalanche of anti-immigrant racism. Reflecting changes in the ethnicity and occupational structure of the working class, all the major cities with the exception of Birmingham returned big anti-Brexit majorities in 2016. Former industrial towns in the North and Midlands, much less ethnically diverse and like the US rust belt including many areas of desperate economic and social desperation, voted heavily for Brexit and did many rural areas and middle class suburbs. Brexit successfully split the working class and polarised many older white workers towards racism. Three days before the Brexit referendum, SNP leader Nicola Sturgeon astutely characterised it as 'an attempted putsch by the right wing of the Conservative Party.'

In any case Labour would have done better in the 2019 election with any definite view on Brexit; Corbyn's dithering made his leadership look weak and incompetent, and contrasted

with the Conservatives' simple 'Get Brexit done' slogan.

With the Left reeling from the 2019 election defeat, a much more moderate social democrat, Keir Starmer, was elected leader. His decision to engage in only 'constructive' criticism of the government has let Johnson off the hook in his many failures. The Left, much of which has remained in the Labour Party, faces a long period of political and organisational renewal and some of it is clearly shell-shocked. It will have to engage in campaigns to defend the NHS and other public services, as well as oppose anti-immigrant racism and new signs of fascist mobilisation in anti-lockdown rallies organised by anti-vax and conspiracy theory groups. [4] And the Left will have to grasp the central strategic lesson of the last period: a moderate social democratic party cannot be seized by the Left and used as an instrument for radical social change without a bitter internal civil war. Such a fight for change can only be successful in a period of working class upsurge and mass radicalism.

For the defence of democratic and trade-union rights in Algeria

28 September 2020, by National Secretariat of the PST (Socialist Workers Party) Algeria

Regime continuity

Contrary to the propaganda of the de facto government, resulting from the masquerade of December 12, 2019, the continuity of the regime is striking. Neither its populist outbursts against corruption and the "3issaba", nor its attempt to appropriate the Hirak, sometimes referred to as "moubarek", have changed one iota its nature as an oligarchic liberal class, authoritarian and anti-social. Nor have they alleviated its chronic lack of legitimacy.

But the regime's latent crisis, which

the fifth term [5], had sharpened and the popular Hirak had deepened, made possible a reorganization of state power around the army. The shattering return of the General Staff to the centre of political decision-making, after its relative "marginalization" following the defeat of its protege in the 2004 presidential election, is the most striking fact of the evolution of the crisis of the regime.

Against submission to the interests of foreign powers!

This continuity of the regime is also striking in its relations of submission to the foreign imperialist powers. Their support for the regime as well as their compliments are well rewarded. To be convinced of this, it suffices to recall the gifts offered to multinationals in the new law on

hydrocarbons or the abandonment of sovereignist and protectionist provisions such as the 51/49% rule, etc. On the military level, it is also necessary to recall the constitutionalisation in progress of the possibility of intervention of the ANP (Algerian armed forces) in other countries or its very recent participation in the latest military manoeuvres of NATO in the Mediterranean.

A constitution at the service of the regime

Taking advantage of the outbreak of Covid-19, which had forced the popular Hirak to take a long break, the de facto power of the army has become permanent. Indeed, its new constitution, drawn up without the slightest democratic participation of the Algerian people, will be the subject of a mock referendum on November 1. It is, as it was before, under the corrupt and authoritarian power of Bouteflika, aimed at simulating a popular plebiscite in the hope of attributing some legitimacy to Tebboune and to the high military hierarchy which appointed him. But, what legitimacy can such a referendum bring when the Algerian people are subject to curfew and democratic freedoms are violated and muzzled? What credit can we give it when the public and private media are closed to free and adversarial debate? What "freedom of choice for the Algerian people" can we take advantage of when the arrests and convictions of young Hirak activists, political and union activists, journalists and simple bloggers are multiplying?

No, the constitution is neither a matter of a commission of experts, nor a subject of one-sided debate between "douktours" in constitutional law as

they want to make us think. The constitution is not a technical question. It is an eminently political question which must be discussed in complete freedom by all the Algerian people. All political sensitivities and all currents of opinion, which traverse our people, must be able to express their opinions freely and fairly in the media and to present their ideas to the people without any constraint.

The PST unequivocally rejects this alleged referendum on 1 November and calls for the democratic election of a sovereign Constituent Assembly which will be representative of the democratic and social aspirations of workers, women, youth and the masses of our country. It is to this democratically elected constituent assembly, after a free national debate in a context where all obstacles to the effective exercise of democratic freedoms are lifted, that the task of writing our constitution will fall. It will then be presented to a vote of the Algerian people by democratic referendum.

Tebboune is at the service of the bosses of the private sector!

On another level, it is in this same context marked by the Covid-19, and its heavy economic and social consequences on workers, small peasants, small traders and the popular masses in general, that Tebboune and his government decide to grant the equivalent of 20 billion dollars, or 1900 billion dinars of public funding, to private employers, presented as - private - investment for the current year. At the same time, after the insignificant and miserable increase in the SNMG (minimum wage) of 2000 DA, more than 500,000 workers have lost their jobs without

any compensation. Of course, this figure would be much higher if we count the workers who found themselves overnight forced, by these same bosses, into technical unemployment or forced to take unpaid leave. But, on this subject, Tebboune and his government let these same bosses dismiss and trample on the few provisions of the laws relating to union rights as well as court decisions favorable to workers. As such, the examples of Cevital, whose boss has fired hundreds of workers from Numilog in Béjaia, and the firing of workers at Smaha-Brandt in Sétif, who however only wanted to set up a union section, are edifying as to the inclinations towards slave labour of the "productive" private sector in our country and its political protectors.

Let us build unity of action and the convergence of democratic and social struggles!

For the defense of democratic freedoms!

Stop repression and arrests!

Demand the release of all political prisoners!

Let us stand in solidarity with the struggles of the workers and with the popular resistance!

Let us impose in the private sector and everywhere else the respect of trade union freedoms!

No to the undemocratic constitutional referendum on 1 November!
For the election of a sovereign Constituent Assembly!

The National Leadership

19 September 2020

*Translated by **International Viewpoint** from "Pour la défense des libertés démocratiques et syndicales ! ...".*

Belarus: the beginning of what end?

27 September 2020, by Catherine Samary

The breakup of the USSR was decreed on Byelorussian territory on 8 December, 1991 by Boris Yeltsin as President of Russia and his two counterparts from Ukraine and Byelorussia - although the population had voted overwhelmingly for the maintenance (and reform) of the Union on 17 March of that year. [6] But the neoliberal shock therapy driven by Yeltsin and initially also advocated by the pro-Western "Byelorussian Popular Front" (BNF), was halted by the ouster (for corruption) of the incumbent president and the election of Alexander Lukashenko to the presidency in 1994. If he adopted the old name of Belarus, the new leader proposed to reject (by a referendum in 1995) the red and white flag of the first pre-Soviet republic of 1918 in favour of the "Soviet flag" - but without the hammer and sickle surmounted by the red star.

His blocking of neoliberal shock therapy and maintenance of a strong public sector was aimed at consolidating his regime which became increasingly autocratic. And it was accompanied by the repression of powerful strikes which were underway. As David Mandel points out (comparing the situation and workers' and trade union struggles in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus in the 1990s), the Lukashenko regime "subjected the unions to a much more systematic repression" than was the case in countries inflicting "stronger social decomposition" through privatization - another means of breaking any challenging of the old bureaucratic system by its own social base, the workers. [7]

This anti-union and political repression was accompanied by an initial search for stabilization of the new regime through socio-economic gains. In 2018, Belarus was ranked 53rd out of 189 countries according to the Human Development Index with one of the lowest inequality rates in Europe. Its GDP per capita has quadrupled since 1990 (20,000 dollars

compared to 9,000 in the Ukraine in purchasing power parity). But the social gains linked to employment, and the "cult of work" (not of workers!) have gone from traits borrowed from "Sovietism" towards a strong neo-liberal logic such as the obligation to accept any job (public or, increasingly, private). [8]

Since 2004, individualization of employment contracts has replaced collective agreements; and the pension scheme does not take into account time spent in military service, nor that of maternity and study leave. The country suffered less than others which were more open to financial globalization from the banking and financial crisis of 2008/2009: growth fluctuated but was maintained until the Ukrainian crisis of 2013 (ending the regime of the oligarch President Yanukovich). [9]

It was the latter which inflicted on the country's its first recessions since 1995, due to its close ties to both Ukraine and Russia.

The road to 9 August

This Ukrainian crisis and Russia's "recovery" of Crimea were traumas for the Belarusian regime as well as for many other "post-socialist" autocrats, in multiple senses - and also polarized the left. [10] The thesis of a "coloured revolution" fomented by the Western powers (and moreover identified with the fascistic currents which were very active there) became for the autocrats the formula for denunciation of the social movements which opposed them. But leaders of former non-Russian Soviet republics, such as Lukashenko, have also been suspicious of Russian power and its very asymmetrical plans for union. The regime's repressive top-down course grew stronger and, as in Russia, it identified all opponents as foreign-funded pawns... Except that, for Lukashenko, this "foreigner" could also be Russian.

That's why he chose to diversify his cards and play mediator in the negotiation in Minsk of agreements between the then Ukrainian president, Putin, Merkel and Macron. This "neutrality" earned the lifting of European sanctions in 2016. [11]

In practice, early treaties signed by Lukashenko and Yeltsin provided for a "union of states" between Russia and Belarus - and Putin would like to make this a reality. And he wouldn't mind replacing Lukashenko with a leader who is more docile and open to new privatizations: the last negotiations in December 2019 were indeed met with resistance from the Belarusian leader. [12] At the same time, plans for a Eurasian Union, founded by Kazakhstan, Belarus and Russia in 2014 (with the "model" of the EU as reference point) are floundering. [13]

But Belarus' public debt has gone from less than 10 per cent of GDP in 2005 to around 50 per cent now. Pressure from both Russia and the IMF has aggravated all the tensions. For five years, the regime has applied a wage freeze while many prices are increasing. The generalization of fixed-term contracts was imposed in 2017 along with a project for a tax on unemployment (identified as "social parasitism"), a project which was finally dismissed in the face of the first social protests involving in particular young people and bloggers. Covid-19, initially treated with derision by Lukashenko, was a factor aggravating the growing discredit of the regime. [14]

Women, youth, workers ...

The elections of 9 August were held against this internal social background and when tensions with the Putin regime were high, despite popular proximity and lasting dependencies. The shadow of Moscow was thus behind two of the three candidates excluded by Lukashenko before the elections but also behind 33 recently

arrested mercenaries, members of a “Wagner group” active on behalf of the Russian regime in Ukraine, Syria, Libya and Central Africa according to Vincent Pr sumey. [15]

But the unforeseen entered into this context. Lukashenko began by invalidating in various ways his three main opposing candidates (Siarhei Tsikhanovski, Viktor Babaryko, and Valery Tsepkalo) - “all socially linked to ‘business’ sectors”, according to Pr sumey. But the autocrat wanting to demonstrate his “pluralism” by accepting the candidacy (which he supposed harmless) of the imprisoned Tsikhanovsky’s wife, Svetlana Tsikhanovska  a (then those of the wives of the two other ousted candidates) - all of whom, without political experience, decided to take on the legacies of their spouses.

The opposition campaign was marked by Svetlana Tsikhanovskaya who expressed her fears (for her family) in a manner that had a popular resonance. She was quickly supported by the other two women, Maria Kolesnikova (the head of Babaryko’s campaign) and Veronika Tsepkalo. Both her courage and her fragility “spoke” to the people. Young people got involved massively, with a pivotal “moment” on 7 August, when Lukashenko decided to encourage a rock concert - which Svetlana Tsikhanovska  a attended. The surprise came when in her presence, the disc jockeys at the event played an unexpected song, *Peremen* (Changes), by Victor Tso   (who died in 1990) from the old Russian group Kino - a cult track from the days of

perestroika. [16] The proclamation of the results (giving only around 10 per cent of the vote to Tikhhanovskaia and 80 per cent to Lukashenko) produced anger and protests. The violence of the repression - in particular that by the special forces, the OMON - only accentuated a popular shift to “getting rid” of this regime, and this throughout the country, well beyond Minsk.

A major turning point, from 10 August, was the involvement of workers in emblematic workplaces and calls for strikes and demonstrations - demanding an end to the violence, the release of those arrested and contesting the election results. [17] Several leaders of strike committees were brutalized and/or arrested, such as Nikolai Zimine, a metalworker and a veteran of independent trade unionism (BKPD), severely beaten in August then arrested and sentenced to 15 days in prison.

Internal and international uncertainties

It was by keeping quiet about their (pro or anti-Russian) privatization program that the candidates campaigned against the regime, its frauds and its violence. But the “front” of the candidates has already cracked while remaining opaque. A Coordination Committee of this opposition was established. [18] But on 31 August, Maria Kolesnikova (a

supporter of Viktor Babariko), a member of the praesidium of this Committee, unilaterally announced the creation of a new party, opening the door to a scenario of new elections without the prior departure of Lukashenko. [19] Which Svetlana Tikhhanovskaia (who had taken refuge in Lithuania) radically rejected. [20]

At the same time, after denouncing Russian interference, Lukashenko decided to seek Russian help - after returning to Russia the 32 Russian citizens among the 33 mercenaries arrested. Putin would not want to support a loser - nor encourage a popular movement that would produce his downfall (without certainty about the succession). The Navalny affair makes it harder for (Macron and Merkel’s) plans to rely on Putin to manage this crisis (against pressure from Poland, the Baltic States and the United States). For the time being Lukashenko has been granted a loan of 1.3 billion euros (probably accompanied by a debt restructuring and deliveries of hydrocarbons at reduced prices).

For the moment, no one on the ground is in a position to “represent” and defend popular aspirations which look neither to Russia nor to the EU, but to the demand for fundamental rights and freedoms, at the political and social level. The trade union and international political left must support these demands, independent trade unionism - weak under such a regime, but real - and all forms of popular self-organization which alone can limit “instrumentalization” from all sides.

Pandemic, Polarization, and Resistance in the US

26 September 2020, by **Ashley Smith, Joseph Daher**

Joseph Daher: Can you tell us about the current situation in the US regarding the COVID-19 Pandemic?

Ashley Smith: We are in the midst of a humanitarian catastrophe with distinctly US characteristics. Over 7 million people have been infected with

the virus, more than 200,000 people have died, and experts predict that as many as 400,000 could lose their lives by the end of the year. The vast

majority of those that have died are the elderly in nursing homes, people of color, and essential workers required to work through the outbreak of the pandemic.

Of course, no capitalist nation state has been spared from the ravages of the pandemic. All of them have been compelled by the logic of capitalism to reopen their economies from lockdowns to get profits flowing again. But the US, along with other states also led by right wing governments like the ones in Britain, India, and Brazil, have been particularly callous in putting corporate interests before life.

In the US, as the revelations in Bob Woodward's new book *Rage* document, President Donald Trump deliberately disguised the severity of the crisis and even went so far as to block a plan developed by the Post Office to distribute masks free of charge through the mail.

Trump put profits, his re-election campaign, and frankly his ego first, and the lives of workers and oppressed people last.

From the beginning he was reluctant to support any lockdown and quickly pressured states across the country to reopen as quickly as possible. Why? Because the economic expansion under his watch was the only chance to secure his reelection to the presidency.

Those crass economic and personal political interests drove him to deny then mismanage the crisis, and deflect blame for the catastrophe onto everyone else from China to the Democratic Party. He has stooped to science denial, toxic macho posturing against the wearing of masks as a sign of weakness, and plain old misanthropic contempt for working class people and especially people of color to justify his criminal misbehavior.

Meanwhile, the bodies pile up in the morgues across the country.

Joseph Daher: What about the socio-economic situation of the US economy? What have been the effects of COVID-19?

Ashley Smith: It's important to understand that the world economy was headed for a recession even before the pandemic struck. Its three powerhouses—China, the US, and the European Union (EU)—were already showing all the signs of an onrushing crisis.

COVID-19 was thus the trigger, not the cause, of the global recession. The pandemic then exacerbated the depth of the recession in countries throughout the world. In the US, it forced states and cities to impose lockdowns on all but essential economic activity.

The scale of the economic crisis is staggering. Real GDP in the US contracted by 31.7 percent in the second quarter and by 5 percent for the year. The collapse in the economy threw 20 million people out of work, raising unemployment to close to 15 percent.

While the economy has started to recover and unemployment has dropped to around 8 percent, millions of workers remain unemployed, survive on reduced income, and face mass eviction for failing to pay their mortgages on their homes and rents for their apartments.

The US government rushed to stop the economic freefall just like did they during the Great Recession in 2007. The Federal Reserve poured over \$2.3 trillion into the economy—slashing interest rates, printing money, buying securities, and extending loans to banks, corporations, and state and municipal governments.

The Federal Government poured another \$2 trillion into the economy to keep it alive. While the Democrats got some important benefits for workers like increased unemployment and one time individual payments of \$1,200 per person, Trump and the GOP ensured that the bulk of the bailout went to corporations, keeping alive all sorts of zombie firms that otherwise would have gone belly up.

But, contrary to bourgeois hopes and predictions, this bailout has not produced a sharp recovery. The ongoing pandemic has forced states and cities into periodic lockdowns,

preventing normal economic functioning.

But Trump and the Republicans have refused to pass another stimulus package. They are reluctant to drive up the government debt and deficit and oppose increased unemployment benefits and individual cash payments based on the myth that they will stop workers from looking for jobs.

Nevertheless, the US state has yet again saved capitalism. But in doing so, it has prevented the cleansing of the system's unprofitable corporations, ensuring that we will not see a deep recession followed by a sharp rebound in growth, but a protracted slump, plagued by too many corporations producing too much stuff that they cannot sell at high enough profit rates.

These conditions have intensified the deep political polarization in the country. On the right, Trump, while not a fascist, has lurched further to right with his law and order racism against the Black Lives Matter movement. He has also greenlighted the far right and fascist formations, which are developing rapidly in the petty bourgeoisie, a section of the working class, and the lumpen-proletariat.

Despite Trump's disastrous mismanagement of the pandemic and economy, he retains support of about 40 percent of the country. This new right is here to stay, no matter what the outcome of the fall elections.

On the left, pandemic and recession has powered the surge in membership of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) as well as all sorts of emerging formations on the left. Those form the core of a new socialist movement amidst sections of students, the working class, and oppressed groups.

Joseph Daher: What is the status of the Black Lives Matter' movement? Is it still dynamic? Is it structured as a movement? What are its main demands?

Ashley Smith: This summer's Black Lives Matter movement is the single largest wave of protests in US history.

As many as 26 million people have participated in the demonstrations that swept the country since the racist police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis. The video of his killing rocked the consciousness and conscience of the entire country driving people into a mass rebellion.

This is the second major wave of the movement. The first erupted in 2014 in the wake of the racist cops killing Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri and Eric Garner in New York City, and then exploded after the police killing of Freddie Gray into a full scale rebellion in Baltimore, Maryland that forced the city and state to call in the National Guard to impose order.

This second wave is far larger and, in some ways, more radical than the first. This time Black activists have galvanized far more support from white people than the last time. Demonstrations against police racism have occurred not only in Black and brown urban areas, but in majority white suburbs and small towns all across the nation.

This Black-led multiracial rebellion appears largely spontaneous, but at its core are activists networked in national and local formations. Black militants are organized in formations like the Movement for Black Lives, Critical Resistance, and many other national and local groups.

Beyond this core, there is an informally organized mass layer of young students and workers who have read and discussed anti-racist books and staged various actions in their schools and communities since the first wave of protests. As a result, there were pre-existing activists-in-waiting armed with ideas and also Black Lives Matter posters, banners, and t-shirts.

The movement's central and radical demand is to defund the police. The left wing of the movement is very clear that the goal is police abolition as part of a fight for system change through mass collective struggle in the streets, communities and workplaces.

By contrast, liberal currents and the Democratic Party aim to contain this

radicalism, redefine defunding as merely budget cuts to police departments, and redirect it into the dead-end of police reform and increased investment in police training. The Democrats hope to get the movement off the streets and into campaigning for Biden in the presidential election. Thus, there is a struggle at the core of the movement over its politics, strategies, and tactics.

The movement has proved yet again that mass social and class struggle is far more effective than electoral politics in winning reforms. It has scored more victories in a few short months than decades of voting for and lobbying Democrats. It has forced cities to cut police budgets, expel police from schools in various cities, and redirect money into social services and education.

Despite these advances, we are still far from winning the defunding of the police let alone their abolition. They continue to brutalize and kill Black people with impunity. Frustration with this situation compelled perhaps the most radical action yet—the strike led by Black professional basketball players in the NBA.

They shut down the NBA playoffs and triggered a wave of job actions by women players in the WNBA as well as by athletes in sports with few Black players like baseball and even hockey. This multiracial strike by worker-athletes electrified the nation.

With the sports industry facing spreading work stoppages, former president Barack Obama intervened to help broker a deal to get the NBA players to go back to work. The sports bosses promised to support the movement for Black lives and Obama encouraged the players to help turn out voters for Biden.

At this point, the movement is in an ebb, but the constant killing of Black and brown people by the police continues to provoke explosions of protest in various localities. The cops' endless murder spree guarantees that the movement will explode again and again over the coming months and years until systemic change is won.

For now, though, most organized forces are being pulled into the fall elections to campaign for Biden. But, far from being an advocate for the movement, Biden opposes its main demand of defunding the police. Nevertheless, most see no alternative but to support him in order to defeat Trump.

Meanwhile Trump has demonized the movement and rallied his base to support the police. He placed law and order racism at the center of his reelection campaign and stooped to some of the worst white supremacist demagoguery in the history of modern bourgeois politics.

Joseph Daher: Any other major movements you want to mention having any influence? Labor Movement? Women's Movement? Migrants' Movements?

Ashley Smith: Since the Great Recession, we've seen episodic explosions of struggles. These began with Occupy, the Black Lives Matter movement, and a handful of strikes most importantly the Chicago Teachers Union strike in 2012, which set the model of teachers strikes in the following years.

Since his election, Trump has provoked a new round of protest beginning with the Women's March right at the start of his rule. Since then, we have seen protests against his attacks on immigrant rights and Muslims and a strike wave among teachers, beginning with the Red State Teachers Revolt in 2018 when teachers illegally struck in several Republican controlled states. That revolt inspired teachers to stage strikes in Democratic Party controlled cities like LA, Chicago, and Denver.

The pandemic and recession have compelled workers, especially Black and brown workers, in essential industries to take job action to protect their health. Workers at hospitals, schools, Amazon, and meat processing plants to name a few have staged protests and, in some cases, strikes to secure personal protective equipment and hazard pay.

We are clearly in the early stages of increasing militancy after decades of

retreat, defeat and disorganization. But the major institutions of our side—social movement organizations, NGOs, and the unions—are transfixed by the election. They are subordinating the building of struggle to electoral politics in the vain hope that the election of Joe Biden and the Democrats will provide a solution to the catastrophes of US capitalism.

Nevertheless, the growing and deepening class and social inequalities of US capitalism will compel the rank and file of the unions and movements to build organizations willing to push for higher levels of militancy to take on the bosses and the growing far right. We are in the early stages of a whole epoch of crisis, political polarization, and struggle.

Joseph Daher: Is there anything left of the Sanders' movement? Was the Left able to build on the dynamics of Sander's candidacy? DSA?

Ashley Smith: Bernie Sanders' dramatic runs for the Democratic Party presidential nomination were contradictory expressions of this episodic explosion of social and class struggle. On the one hand, Sanders cohered students and young multiracial workers radicalizing through activism behind the idea of socialism as an alternative to capitalism. He helped make socialism common sense for a whole generation.

On the other hand, Sanders trapped the project of fighting for socialism inside the Democratic Party. But that party is a capitalist one, not a social democratic party or labor party. It is tightly controlled by its wealthy funders, party bureaucrats, and bourgeois politicians.

Sanders running in that party had two negative impacts. First, Sanders diverted energy from building a new party of our own into the dead end of trying to take over the Democrats. Second, in the process of trying to get votes in that party, Sanders redefined socialism as Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal liberalism.

The DSA positioned itself as the prime beneficiary on the left of Sanders' campaigns. They grew from a

moribund organization of aging reformists committed to the Democratic Party into a new, young organization of 70,000 socialists, inspired by the struggles from below and attracted to Sanders' version of socialism and his proposal for social reform like Medicare for All.

Tragically and predictably, however, the Democratic Party blocked both Sanders' attempts to win their presidential nomination. In 2016, the establishment rallied to Clinton and then did the same behind Biden. In fact, Sanders did considerably worse in 2020 than he did in 2016, proving that while the Democrats are happy to tolerate leftists in their midst to keep them from building a new socialist party, they block every attempt by them to take over the party.

After his defeat, Sanders fulfilled his promise to support the Democrat's nominee, and rallied his supporters behind Biden. Even worse, he's giving Biden a facelift, predicting that he has the potential to become the most progressive president since FDR. Any even cursory reading of what Biden and his handlers say to his Wall Street backers makes a mockery of this claim.

As a result, Sanders has largely disorganized his movement and attempted to reorient it and its organizations into supporting Biden at best as a progressive and at worst as a lesser evil to dethrone Trump. DSA has been challenged in this changed situation to reorient the organization.

While DSA chapters and members have been active in the waves of struggle, the Sanders campaign and similar down-ballot electoral runs inside the Democratic Party came to occupy a central focus for the organization. While DSA has continued to score some electoral victories especially in New York City, it has lost its orienting focus with Sanders' defeat.

And the organization's overwhelming electoral focus has led it to take its eye off the ball when it comes to the new waves of struggle. For example, while its members have joined the Black Lives Matter protests, DSA as a national organization and most of its

chapters have not played a prominent role in the movement.

Joseph Daher: How is the Left in the USA positioning itself for the presidential elections?

Ashley Smith: The November presidential election is not what the Left and DSA expected. Many if not most wrongly expected Sanders to win the Democrat's nomination. Now, DSA and the Left face the unappealing and classic trap of an election between a right wing Republican, Trump, and an establishment Democrat, Biden, who's committed to restoring bourgeois norms through a government of national unity.

Faced with this "choice," the Left breaks down into three predominant currents. First, the liberal left is all in for Biden with varying degrees of illusions in his program. Some are fooling themselves into thinking he will be as progressive as Sanders claims while others more soberly are voting for him in full recognition that he is a neoliberal capitalist but the only way to get Trump out of office.

On the socialist left, the main current is one that accepts the traditional position of lesser evilism—of voting for the lesser evil to stop the greater one. The best of this current is promising to campaign and vote for Biden and then fight him on day one, while others are sowing illusions that having Biden in the White House will make it easier to win progressive reforms.

A small current of revolutionary socialists, which I'm part of, argues against both these positions. We contend that you cannot fight the greater evil by voting for the lesser one for three reasons. First, once the Left accepts the choice and lines up behind the lesser evil, we get taken for granted and our demands ignored.

Second, if and when the lesser evil wins, the Left that has supported that evil will be tempted to cooperate with it in office, some even going so far as to join the administration, and others that remain outside giving it a honeymoon hoping it will deliver reforms. That leaves the far right as the only opposition.

In that case, the Left will be tempted to defend the administration, completing the Left's cooptation and neutralization. Meanwhile the lesser evil in power will cut deals with the greater evil. Biden has made a career of making just such rotten deals.

Third, campaigning for the lesser evil is not an individual decision but a collective one with enormous consequences. If the Left backs Biden it will aid and abet the bureaucracies that control the unions, social movement organizations, and NGOs in redirecting activist's time, money and energy from building struggle to fight for what we want into campaigning and voting for what we don't want—a neoliberal lesser evil.

DSA as the main organization of the Left has all these currents inside it. It is barred as an organization from endorsing Biden by the "Bernie or Bust" resolution it passed at its last convention. But members of some of its caucuses are actively campaigning for Biden and many if not most of its leaders and members will individually vote for Biden however much they distrust or despise him.

Joseph Daher: What future for the DSA and more generally the Left in the USA?

Ashley Smith: We are in the midst of a profound crisis of the capitalist system, one with multiple interconnected features—a protracted global slump, an ongoing pandemic,

climate change, and intensifying inter-imperial rivalry between the US and China. It is the gravest systemic crisis since the 1930s.

In the US, it is producing profound political polarization to the left in the form of DSA and the new socialist movement and to the right in form of Trump at the top of the GOP and the growing ranks of organized far right and fascist militias. The capitalist establishment is increasingly oriented to the Democratic Party in the desperate hope to stabilize what appears to be a failing state and economy.

In conditions of a deep recession and pandemic, workers and oppressed people are being driven to fight for their very lives from the Black-led multiracial uprising against police brutality to strikes. The emerging left will have to cohere itself into a force, eventually a new socialist party, that can help lead these struggles from below and provide an alternative to challenge both the capitalist establishment in the Democratic Party as well the Trumpite GOP and far right.

DSA is best positioned to launch the effort to build a new party. But its many currents are not united behind that project: some remain committed to Sanders' project of taking over the Democratic Party; many hope to use the Democratic Party ballot line to build a force of elected politicians to eventually launch a new party in the

future; and most are oriented on an electoral road to the formation of that new party.

The question will be whether the revolutionary left inside and alongside DSA can argue for a different strategy, one focused on class and social struggle and local electoral work independent of the two capitalist parties, with the goal of launching a new socialist party as soon as we possibly can. Everyone inside the Left and in DSA are debating these ideas now in the run up to the election.

In the unlikely though possible event of a Trump victory, we are in for the fight of our lives against an emboldened right. In the more likely event of a Biden victory, we will have to agitate for DSA to engage in a two-front struggle—one focused on forcing the Biden administration to deliver what we want and another against a right far more radical, militarized, and dangerous than the Tea Party was under Obama.

If Biden wins, the biggest danger is that Biden is given a honeymoon by the Left, opening the door for the right to go on the offensive and set the terms of struggle in politics, on the streets, and in the workplaces. We are midst of a deep crisis of historic proportions, one fraught with great dangers on the right and pregnant with enormous opportunities for the Left. Our future hangs in the balance.

Source [New Politics](#).

Strengthening of normalization process of Israel after agreement with the UAE

25 September 2020, by **Joseph Daher**

An American-Israeli delegation, led by President Trump's son-in-law and White House adviser Jared Kushner, flew from Tel Aviv airport to Abu Dhabi airport in early September, for two days of discussions on security, trade, scientific cooperation, tourism

and visa procedures for future travellers.

A first in the Gulf

The UAE is the first country among the Gulf monarchies to normalize relations with Israel and the third Arab country to do so, after Egypt and

Jordan. This agreement does not come as a surprise, however, as the two states have maintained (less and less) informal ties for years. Israel, for example, lent a hand with Emirati surveillance systems - such as Falcon Eye, a civil mass surveillance system in Abu Dhabi installed by an Israeli company. The UAE was also the Arab country most enthusiastic about Trump's so-called "peace plan", dubbed the "deal of the century", despite the disapproval and rejection of the overwhelming majority of Palestinians. The League of Arab States has stood out for its lack of reaction and has not condemned the Israeli-UAE deal. Bahrain and Saudi Arabia have accepted that Israeli planes fly over their territory to reach the Emirates.

Some Gulf monarchies, such as Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Qatar have also maintained contacts with Israel since the 1990s, out of economic and security interests, but also, for some, because of a common hostility towards the Islamic Republic of Iran and a refusal to democratize the region. Qatar, for example, hosted an Israeli trade office from 1996 to 2000 and does not hide its contacts with Israel.

Bahrain goes with the flow

US Foreign Minister Mike Pompeo tried following the August 13 deal to convince other countries in the region to follow the Emirati lead, in a Middle East tour which took him to Sudan, Bahrain and Oman. This agreement is in fact being used by President Trump in preparation for the presidential election, to demonstrate these foreign

policy successes.

For the moment, and after an initial refusal, only the Bahraini monarchy has established a similar normalization agreement with the State of Israel, which it did on 11 September 2020. Bahrain had already hosted the conference announcing the economic component of the so-called "deal of the century" in June 2019, and has not hidden since then its support for this diplomatic initiative, while in May 2018, the Bahraini authorities had affirmed the "right of Israel to defend itself", after Israeli strikes against Iranian positions in Syria. The Egyptian dictator, Abdel Fatah al-Sisi, hailed a "historic" agreement and an important step for stability and peace "which will make it possible to find a just and permanent solution to the Palestinian cause".

Economic integration

The Saudi kingdom, for its part, has expressed its refusal for the moment of any form of normalization with Israel without prior settlement of the Palestinian question, but without criticizing its UAE ally's agreement with Israel. Riyadh does not wish to directly and officially normalize its relations with Tel Aviv for fear of fuelling disputes among its population and to try to maintain an image of leader of the "Muslim powers".

This normalization process is also a means of strengthening the economic integration of the State of Israel into the Middle East. Over the past 20 years, Israel's Foreign Ministry has claimed to have helped more than 500

Israeli companies wishing to trade with Gulf countries, leading to millions of dollars in contracts, but all of these transactions took place in secrecy and with certain obstacles. Now that the way is clear, Israel may be interested in the UAE's hydrocarbon resources, while the Emirates are prepared to invest in the tourism and high-tech sectors in Israel. Quite symbolically, Abu Dhabi repealed a 48-year-old boycott of Israel following the agreement.

Refuse normalization

In reaction to this formalization with great fanfare of relations between the UAE and Israel, protests have taken place in the occupied Palestinian territories to denounce this agreement and reject the process of normalization with the State of Israel.

These new processes of normalisation confirm the necessity of linking the question of the liberation of Palestine and of its popular classes with the liberation and the emancipation of the popular classes of the region, against their ruling classes, and also against the different imperialisms, in particular the United States and Russia, as well as regional forces.

We must refuse this new process of normalization of the racist and colonial apartheid State of Israel, which involves major actors of the counterrevolution in the region, such as the UAE, and the others who will follow. We must affirm our internationalist solidarity with the Palestinian cause and the popular uprisings in the region.

Democratic space reduced, Italian government given breathing space

24 September 2020, by Dave Kellaway

An attack on democratic rights is successful

Nevertheless 70 per cent contrasts with the 95 per cent vote in parliament by all the official parties in favour of the reform. After the results the Five Star Movement (M5S) leader, Di Maio, focussed entirely on the success of the reform his movement had been championing for 10 years. He was careful not to mention the rather poor results his movement won in the regional and local elections where their score was generally 50 per cent or more down on their 33 per cent which propelled them into government in 2018. Given the relentless austerity managed by both the supposed 'left of centre' parties, primarily the Democratic Party (PD), and the right wing alongside the endemic corruption and popular rage against MPs luxurious expenses, it is not surprising that a big majority voted Yes. The M5S campaign against a political caste abstracted from any system of exploitation or the state apparatus has had an effect. The rise of Salvini's Lega and of Berlusconi before him also channelled disillusionment with these career politicians who reigned from Rome. Even the vote to cull the caste reflects a big fall in citizen participation in politics - nearly 50 per cent abstained. The effects of the Covid pandemic and putting the vote on the same day as the regional and local elections meant the big debate on the constitutional change never really began.

The Right fails to land its punches

The battle for the six regional governments (the Aosta special region also voted and was won by the right) ended in a score draw, 3-3. Tuscany and Puglia were the two key marginals that initial exit polls suggested were close. They ended up being clearly won by the centre left 48-40 and 46.9-38.9 respectively. After the failure to win Emilia Romagna pre-lockdown Salvini's confident prediction that he could storm the

'red' strongholds has slithered to a halt. All the incumbents won and where the governors were seen to have taken a firm grasp on controlling the Covid Pandemic - De Luca for the left in Campania (Naples region) and Zaio, for the right in the Venice region - they won with around 70 per cent of the votes. The one region that changed hands was the Marche (the area behind Ancona) where the post-fascist Fratelli d'Italia (Brothers of Italy) won 49-37 - it had been governed for 25 years by the left of centre. Many commentators had suggested that if Tuscany and Puglia had fallen to the right then the government could well have gone into crisis and certainly Zingaretti would have had to resign as PD leader. The PD vote held up well and its weight in the coalition will be strengthened. So the government looks safe for the moment and could well serve out its full term, another two years. Prime Minister Conte, who deliberately kept quiet and above the fray during the election, immediately made a post-election intervention proclaiming the stability of the government. But there remain four serious challenges for the ruling PD/M5S coalition which can still result in a victory for a right wing coalition at the next general election.

Recovery in whose interests?

Firstly, there is the deepening recession whose devastating effects on employment and living standards will begin to hit hard this autumn as the Italian equivalent of furlough comes to an end. Although the EU has assigned a considerable amount to the government's Recovery Fund this is not without any strings and the country already had one of the biggest deficit/debt to GDP ratio in Europe even before Covid. The bosses confederation is keen for the money to go to help companies modernise and restructure and for the state to provide infrastructure that will benefit profits. There is no significant political force that defends the interests of working people. The PD was the most enthusiastic support of EU constrained funds and has had little to say about how working people will be protected. All the debate in these

elections focussed on the constitutional change or mostly on regional or local issues - how 'our area' was going to compete for resources from the government or the EU. Building a class struggle opposition to the government on post-Covid recovery had hardly any hearing at all.

Five Star Movement fragmenting and in decline

Secondly, despite their 'historic' victory in cutting the number of MPs there is a collapse in the M5S vote and its developing split. Unless there is an unlikely leap forward in PD support the numbers just are not there to defeat the right at any upcoming election. The fundamentalist wing, led by Di Battista, is very sceptical of alliances with any party and wants to maintain the 'purity' of the movement around issues like limiting the number of terms a representative can serve. During the election for example he campaigned for the M5S candidate in Puglia who had refused any deal with the PD for a common slate. A number of the local M5S MPs campaigned for that slate rather than for the M5S candidate. Similar situations existed elsewhere. Dozens of MPs and Senators are with Di Battista. Zingaretti rather naively suggested if there had been a unified slate everywhere then all six regions would have been won. Maybe he had not checked that they did just as badly where there was a joint slate - in Liguria (Genova area). In fact the score draw is partly explained by split voting, many M5S voters chose the centre left slate for governor and their party slate for the regional MPs. Whether this would work in a general election is more doubtful although Conte has taken note of this and it may well be he could work up his own political current in any upcoming public vote. He would receive serious help from the business establishment and the EU.

Electoral Reform...again

Thirdly there is the thorny question of reforming the electoral system, a process that has been dragging on since the end of the traditional party system based on Christian Democracy and the old Communist party. I was struck by how all the journalist pundits on the Corriere delle Sera TV elections special kept on about the need for a form of first past the post so that 'Italians would know who was in government on the same day as the election'. Obviously they are not concerned about the fairness of political representation for smaller parties. Any electoral system that did not include a form of PR (at least with a threshold of 5 per cent) would be suicidal for parties like the M5S with their present level of support, for Renzi's Italia Viva party and for LEU (Liberty and Equality party) who are all in the current government. Government crises linked to changing the electoral system are not unknown.

Right remains strong and Salvini stumbles

Finally the right wing might not have delivered a body blow but they still

control 15 regions and are more united than the left of centre. Their electoral support more or less held up and in a national election would appear to constitute a majority. However there are several years in which new configurations in the centre of Italian politics could change that. Inside the right there is a continuing political recomposition with the continued rise of Meloni's Fratelli d'Italia and particularly her personal ratings. Salvini took over the leadership of the right from Berlusconi but now is being challenged by Meloni. His star has waned a little since he is no longer 'capitano' minister of the interior on the front line against the so-called 'migrant invasion'. Covid and local /regional issues dominated these elections rather than migrants. His flippancy about the pandemic has lost him some support. Even within the Lega he is faced with the rise in popularity of Zaio, the Veneto governor whose slate won three times the votes of the Salvini for Prime Minister one. No doubt the upcoming trial of Salvini for misconduct in office over refusing a migrant ship entry to Italian ports will provide him with the necessary circus of protest he needs to put himself at the centre again.

What about the left of the PD?

Unfortunately it is very weak. The focus of many of their activists is about getting an electoral slate together rather than serious work in the community and the workplaces. Sometimes this obsession means joining in slates led by the PD. These elections once again show the futility of this approach. Moreover the groups are fragmented and fail to get together in activity or elections. This was overcome to some degree in Tuscany where Toscana a Sinistra (Tuscany on the Left) which grouped together forces like Sinistra Anticapitalista (Anticapitalista Left) and Rifondazione (Refounding Communism) did get nearly 3 per cent. Even there another two communist slates got another a few percentage points. I witnessed a fairly dynamic campaign by Potere al Popolo (Power to the People) in a town near Naples but it stood alone and got just over 1 per cent - similar to their Governor candidate. They raised the opposition to the constitutional change but a lot of their campaign seemed to emphasise their youth and purely local issues, there was nothing about building a nationwide class struggle opposition. We can only hope that the scale of the attacks on working people will provoke some opposition in the workplaces and the communities where the class struggle left can begin to rebuild a political opposition.

23 September 2020

US Postal Service in Crisis â€” Why?

23 September 2020, by David Yao

As payments and correspondence have shifted in the last decade from the mail to digital platforms, postal revenues have not matched expenses, despite parcel delivery expanding with the increase in online commerce.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the weakening of postal finances. As businesses and institutions shut down, advertising and business mail

plummeted correspondingly. At one point, internal estimates forecast cash reserves running out in summer or fall of 2020, although revised forecasts have pushed the cash crunch to sometime in 2021.

When the first pandemic stimulus bills were being debated, the Postal Board of Governors (comprised of Trump appointees!) requested \$75 billion. By

comparison, annual postal revenue is around \$70 billion. The final legislative package initially earmarked \$25 billion, but it was jettisoned due solely to opposition from the White House and in its place a \$10 billion loan was authorized.

The animus of the current President to the Postal Service has been ascribed to his fear of voting by mail, which

draws larger participation and thus runs counter to the voter suppression espoused by the Republican Party.

Another commonly cited motivation, bizarrely constructed, has Trump's dislike of the Washington Post, owned by Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, resulting in a demand for the Postal Service to drastically raise its rates on parcels it delivers under contract for Amazon. (Raising rates would merely shift work to Amazon's own rapidly growing delivery network, or subcontracting to Fedex or UPS instead).

But prior to the pandemic, the Trump White House had issued recommendations, no doubt produced by the many Heritage Foundation alumni working there, that the Postal Service be examined for its potential privatization, at least in part.

Several countries, Great Britain for example, have wholly privatized their postal systems, resulting predictably in higher prices, worse service, degraded wages and working conditions, but greater profits to shareholders.

The potential for damage to the Postal Service has been heightened by the presidential appointment of a new Postmaster General, Louis DeJoy, a major donor to the Trump re-election campaign. Alex Greene, a postal worker in Tennessee, comments:

"Even many Trump-supporting postal workers are questioning why the administration is so dead set against mail-in voting and apparently the Postal Service itself. The new Postmaster General's policies, which value minor savings over quality service, are widely unpopular among both the public and the postal work force."

DeJoy was CEO of New Breed Logistics, which was under contract with the Postal Service for over 25 years, meaning he should know well which portions of the USPS would be attractive for privatization. The official announcement of his appointment notes his role on the Board of Trustees of the Fund for American Studies, whose self-described vision is "To win over each new generation to the ideas

of liberty, limited government and free markets."

As to the prospect of a Republican Party mega-donor in charge of the system that delivers mail ballots "well, draw your own conclusions. The Historical Background

Few people know that the modern version of the Postal Service came about as the product of a worker revolt. In 1970 the Post Office was just another federal agency whose employee unions lacked collective bargaining rights. Instead, they relied on "collective begging" "lobbying Congress for wage increases.

After six years without a raise, postal employees were given a much smaller increase than Congress voted itself. The result was the largest wildcat strike in American history, as workers in many cities walked out, followed by their union leaders.

The pre-Internet reliance of American business on the mail brought the country to a standstill. Troops sent in by President Nixon as strikebreakers could not adequately move the mail.

As a result, Congress passed the 1970 Postal Reorganization Act, making the U.S. Postal Service semi-autonomous (with a corporate-style Board of Governors but under congressional oversight).

Importantly, unions were granted collective bargaining rights with binding arbitration to settle any disputes, but conservatives blocked union shop status, meaning membership was voluntary, not obligatory. The Postal Service was required to be self-funding from the payment of postage and fees, separate from the federal budget, unsubsidized by taxpayer dollars and operating on a non-profit, break-even basis.

After decades of decent increases in negotiated postal wages supported by increases in postage rates, the mailing industry found a way to derail this in the 2006 Postal Enhancement and Accountability Act (PAEA). It enacted a price cap on most rates, thus limiting postal revenue. It also enacted a requirement that healthcare premiums for postal retirees be

funded decades in advance, in part through yearly payments of over \$5 billion for a 10-year period.

The long recession that began in 2008 from speculative housing financing, combined with the beginnings of a shift from paper to digital payments and correspondence, undermined postal finances to the point that running out of cash became a concern in the mid-2010s. But increases in parcel delivery and revenue offset that, to the point that some years became profitable ones if you looked only at operational costs.

But the Postal Service announced losses every year, based mostly on the "pre-funding" retiree healthcare obligation from the PAEA, which unions pointed out were unique "not imposed on any other federal agency or private employer. At least a dozen years of lobbying finally resulted in the U.S. House passing a 2019 bill to repeal this pre-funding, but it was never considered by the Senate.

Funding in 2020 and Beyond

Advocates for preserving the Postal Service as an important part of the nation's infrastructure are pushing for \$25 billion outright in the Heroes Act being considered by Congress in August. But aware of the competing interests and ideologies that are battling to shape that stimulus bill, there are other bills being presented, such as one that would provide \$25 billion for electric postal vehicles, fallback plans as there is a high possibility of postal exclusion again.

The American Postal Workers Union (APWU), the more militant of the four craft unions, working with MoveOn.org and other progressive groups, encouraged a series of local actions on June 23 in support of a car caravan in Washington D.C. to present two million signatures in support of postal stimulus money. On July 23 it organized a national call-in day to put pressure on senators of both parties.

If hopes fade for stimulus in the current Congress, undoubtedly the

unions' strategy will be to get Biden elected as well as Democratic Party control of Congress. Previous corporate Democratic presidents and their ilk "Obama and the Clintons" have been notably unresponsive to postal unions' concerns, so a vigorous public pressure in any event will be required.

The upcoming debates, regardless of who holds political office, will revolve around competing visions for the future of the institution. One vision, in line with centuries of tradition, holds that the USPS is a public service with a mission to provide equal and affordable service to all "rich and poor, urban and rural.

The pandemic has highlighted the need for a strong and affordable postal service to efficiently deliver basic goods as well as important items like medicines, face masks and mail ballots. Furthermore, the reach of its services could be expanded in socially positive ways.

Postal banking, which existed here from the 1930s until the bank lobby succeeded in eliminating in the 1960s, could raise as much as \$9 billion per year, according to an internal study. It could help underserved communities while serving as an affordable alternative to the predatory lending industry.

Converting the postal delivery fleet to electric vehicles and providing publicly available charging stations at post offices "socially valuable moves worthy of public subsidy" could give momentum to the lagging changes needed to fight climate change.

There is social value in 630,000 decent-paying jobs spread throughout the country. Fair hiring procedures have resulted in a workforce with a high percentage of people of color "21% of postal workers are Black, compared to 14% of the national workforce.

The other vision for the future is a too familiar one in the public sector "cost-cutting, reduction in services, increased prices, favored treatment to more powerful customers and attacks on the unions.

The new Postmaster General has announced plans, with details just emerging, to reduce retail hours and change delivery practices in ways that seem likely to delay mail and create customer complaints. As postal worker Alex Greene puts it:

"Dejoy, or 'Delay' as some are sarcastically calling him, has moved quickly to implement what he calls a 'pivot' that amounts to intentionally

delaying the mail and reducing quality of service. Ostensibly this is to reduce overtime and save money, but in reality it will save little and the greater effect will be to throw the Postal Service into chaos - and cast doubt on its reliability just before an election where many will rely on the mail in order to safely vote."

It's the old formula of denying resources to a government service, declare it a failure and began to privatize in part or in whole.

Fortunately, the postal workforce still has large unions, although they are not on the whole as effective at mobilizing their memberships to the degree that activists would like. Organizations that support mail balloting have emerged as allies.

The public currently gives very favorable ratings to the Postal Service and the pandemic has increased foot traffic and awareness of its value but that still needs to be converted into political capital on its behalf.

The coming year may prove a crucial test for the survival of the U.S. Postal Service in its current form, in a moment that could prove as pivotal as the 1970 postal wildcat strike.

Source: September-October 2020, ATC 208.

Hong Kong in Revolt: A Conversation with Au Loong-Yu

22 September 2020, by **Au Loong-Yu, Ivan Franceschini**

Ivan Franceschini: Looking back at the protests over the past year and a half, and further back to the other mass movements that have taken place in the city over the past decade, is it possible to find a single thread that unified all these instances of civic unrest? In other words, what was it all about?

Au Loong-Yu: One can summarise all the main protests in the past decade in one word, namely 'disillusion'. Increasingly, Hong Kong people have been disillusioned with Beijing's empty promises of 'Hong Kong people running Hong Kong' and universal suffrage. In 2010, under pressure from the pan-democrats for universal

suffrage, Beijing made the concession of granting five more directly elected seats in the Legislature. However, this was rejected by the radical democrats because the increase in directly elected seats was to be balanced by an equal number of indirectly elected seats, which would facilitate Beijing's manoeuvring. The Basic Law of Hong

Kong, unless Beijing revises it, is only valid for 50 years. In 2010 one fourth of this validity period had passed, but universal suffrage was still nowhere to be seen. Since then, Beijing has begun to roll out a greater offensive against Hong Kong's autonomy. Firstly, in 2012 they made the Hong Kong government push for compulsory 'national education' to promote their version of 'Chinese identity'. This was followed by the imposition of Mandarin as a teaching medium in Chinese language lessons, which amounted to denying local students the right to use their mother tongue—Cantonese. This was bitterly resented by students, and the most radical of them, led by Joshua Wong, founded Scholarism to oppose the new policy. Even parents organised themselves to support the students. Both campaigns succeeded in stopping the government from implementing its plan. Beijing's offensive has served to convince the more radical democrats and the young generation that they must act quickly and resolutely to fight for universal suffrage, which eventually led to the 2014 Umbrella Movement. This was the first time in post-war Hong Kong that there was such a massive and peaceful civil disobedience, and it started with the high hope that if it could win the support of local people, then Beijing would have to listen. The movement did indeed get massive support, but Beijing refused to listen, and this broke the hearts of many, who felt deeply that their 79-day occupation had ended with nothing. Behind this lay a deep disillusionment with Beijing as well. A mixture of anger, demoralisation, and despair descended upon the young generation.

The protesters would not have been able to launch a second big wave of protests if in 2019 Beijing had not started another round of offensives, this time with the Extradition Bill. The protests, with millions of participants and the young at the forefront, were larger, sometimes violent, and lasted much longer than the 2014 movement, continuing for eight months until the onset of the pandemic. They knew the bill implied the end of Hong Kong's autonomy and hence the term 'end game' (終極) repeatedly appeared among protesters.

But there is another dimension of 'disillusion'. The last decade saw a growing disillusionment in relation to the pan-democrats, firstly among young people, followed by a significant section of the pan-democrat's traditional supporters, either middle- or lower-class people who once believed in moderate politics—that we should not push Beijing too hard, that civil disobedience was too radical, etc. Most pan-democrat parties had been so pacified by the (partial) electoral politics that they had lost sensitivity to how common people felt about Beijing and also lost the appetite for confrontational actions. Their poor performance in 2014 made the young despise them. The largely spontaneous and leaderless 2019 Revolt was a response to their impotency in initiating a movement from below. It signifies the death of the old politics and the (difficult) birth of a new one.

IF: The new National Security Law is being looked upon as the end of Hong Kong as we used to know it or, in the most optimistic readings, as the dramatic conclusion of this latest, extraordinary season of popular mobilisation. Do you think that such pessimism is warranted? Is there any silver lining?

ALY: I think that if a strong dose of pessimism, at least in the short term, is warranted, it is more because of the reason for the defeat rather than the defeat itself. We were defeated simply because of a severe imbalance of power—in this type of confrontation we would never be able to match the monolithic state. The absolute majority of protesters, although very sympathetic, continued to stand by and watch 'the braves' (勇者) physically confronting the police without ever joining their fight. There is a rationale here. Even common people know by intuition that a successful revolution in a single city was inconceivable. The vanguard of the movement, the '1997 generation', themselves had no answer to this question. Herein lies the greatest weakness of the Revolt—the lack of a strategic outlook. The movement was very good at tactics, but not so much at strategy.

In my view, the Hong Kong movement must seek its allies not only

internationally but also, more importantly, in mainland China as well. We also have to admit that Hong Kong's freedom is a long-term struggle. This implies that the Hong Kong movement has not been able to resolve the tensions in its relationship with mainlanders, and needs to figure out how to avoid alienating mainland Chinese, including those who immigrate here.

My book discusses one big protest on 7 July 2019 that aimed to approach mainland visitors to persuade them about the cause. The activist who called for this march expected only 2,000 protesters, but 230,000 people turned out. They went to the terminal of the high-speed train that runs between Hong Kong and the mainland so as to meet mainland visitors. While the police expected clashes, it was amazing to see protesters approach mainland visitors in a friendly way. Therefore, we can say that seeking allies in the mainland was still in the minds of many. As a whole, however, while it was natural for the movement to seek allies in the West and Japan, this was not the case for finding allies in the mainland, hence the voices advocating for the former was always much stronger than those for the latter. Surely this should not be a choice of either the former or the latter, we could, and should, do both. But as a whole the movement failed to pursue a conscious alliance with mainland Chinese people and groups. If it had done that, whatever the direct result, it would still have been beneficial—less in the sense of any immediate success, more in the sense that we could have avoided making mistakes such as tolerating the right-wing localists' attack on all Chinese as supporters of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and it would have fostered longer-term potentials for solidarity. Beijing jumped to seize the opportunity to attack the whole movement as anti-Chinese so as to alienate mainlanders from the movement and stop them from sympathising with Hong Kong protesters. To a certain extent it succeeded.

The movement did have a loose strategy, or its 'vision of Hong Kong', reflected in the slogan of gong zung keoi gaak, (香港) or 'segregation of

Hong Kong from China'. Behind the slogan is also a pro-West sentiment. All the evil comes from Beijing and all the sympathy for our struggle against Beijing comes from the West or from Japan—this is what many have felt. The role of mainland Chinese does not appear in this political formula at all. There are rationales to this sentiment, but since it was, and is, not backed by any serious analysis, with no clear boundaries ever laid down, it often plays into the hands of the right wing, who have tried, sometimes successfully, to channel certain protests into potentially Sinophobic attitudes and openly pro-US establishment sentiments. Unless we can come up with a clear strategy to seek an alliance with the mainland Chinese as well, Hong Kong people will remain isolated.

The rationale for optimism in the medium term is that people do learn over the course of struggle. Since 2014 the Hong Kong people, for the first time, have been greatly politicised and have mobilised to take back what has been owed to them. From a historical point of view, this is just the first stage in a new era of popular re-awakening. The movement's 'five demands' speaks for this. In terms of party politics, although the right wing has been more vocal, neither they nor other opposition parties are big. This implies that all political tendencies visible in the 2019 Revolt are far from consolidated. The struggle for a progressive course of actions is still in front of us.

IF: With the benefit of hindsight, do you think there was ever any chance that Beijing would ease up and heed the demands coming from the people in Hong Kong? What lessons would you draw from this whole experience?

ALY: I did not subscribe to the idea that Beijing would really accommodate Hong Kong people's wishes to run their own domestic affairs. What it has done since the handover of Hong Kong in 1997 is a clear indication. Six years after the handover it tried to impose the National Security bill on us. We defeated it. For a while it was a bit quiet but actually its offensive only

took a more concealed form. More than a decade ago I noticed two things that symbolised the new offensive. Firstly, Beijing began to organise thugs to confront the Falun Gong people here, whereas previously it just ignored them. Actually, not many people were attracted by their beliefs, but with the rapid increase of mainland visitors to Hong Kong, Beijing now seemed to be concerned that these people might be converted by the Falun Gong, hence a change of tactic. Secondly, Beijing began to coordinate between its Hong Kong Party machinery and mainland local governments to found hundreds if not thousands of 'Fellow Villagers Association' (同鄉會) to rope in those who had migrated from the mainland to Hong Kong. These organisations proved to be vital in getting votes for pro-Beijing parties. The pan-democrats hoped to soften up Beijing's autocracy through closer ties, but what happened is that it is we who were changed.

Similarly, Western countries had pursued 'engagement' with Beijing, in the hope that they could give mainland China a push towards political liberalisation through more trade. In general, I have never been optimistic about this. I describe Beijing's regime as overly rigid in its version of 'Chinese characteristics', which is essentially a return to the political culture of imperial China. Xi Jinping's 2017 speech about power having to be passed down to people with 'red genes' (i.e., the second red generation), is a manifestation of that practice. Fei-Ling Wang's 2017 book *The China Order: Centralia, World Empire, and the Nature of Chinese Power* well captures the pre-modern aspect of this regime, but he left out the modern aspect of the CCP, namely its ambition to modernise China, or in Mao's word 'surpassing first Britain and then the United States' (超英趕美). Behind its faith in its pre-modern values, also lies a very modern, very material thing, namely the fundamental interest of its rule. It combines both the coercive power of the state, armed with the most modern weapons and technologies, and the power of its industrial and financial capitalism. It succeeds by running simultaneously on two sets of rules, the law and the hidden rules of

the bureaucracy, with the latter always overriding the former. Its rulers find this regime serves their interests well. From the top to local level, Party officials have enriched themselves tremendously because of this. The more they do this, the dirtier secrets arise that they need to hide. This, in and of itself, is a reason why the Party officials cannot tolerate dissident views. The Party requires the construction of an Orwellian state in the mainland and, imperatively, this must expand to Hong Kong as well. I believe that the rigidity of the hard core of the Party-state, formed and hardened through its particular type of revolutionary history, its return to the imperial political culture, and its entrenched interest in a total state, makes it impossible for a self-reform to occur.

To sum up, in order to have a less erroneous appraisal of Beijing's regime, instead of just looking at the appearances of the CCP or its top leaders at the time, we have to have a holistic point of view accompanied by historical and relational approaches. The bright side of my narrative is that the CCP, in the course of its modernising China even further, has also fundamentally changed the initial set of relationship of forces within China. For the past 70 years, all other classes and social groups within China have been at the mercy of this monolithic Party-state. In appearance this remains unchanged, but its actual composition has greatly changed. In addition to this, a big portion of the Chinese upper middle class, the new working class, and those exploited sweatshop workers, are economically connected to the global markets as well. The breaking up of the relationship between China and the United States now puts the Orwellian state to a difficult test, making its situation increasingly fluid. Will a new domestic political force arise out of this fluidity and begin to challenge the hard core of the CCP? That is the riddle of this new stage.

IF: In your book, you also spend considerable energy explaining what the mobilisation was not about. A couple of misconceptions you try to dispel are that the protest was racist, targeting mainland Chinese, and that they

were about demanding independence. Why have these ideas taken hold among the public and why should they be rejected?

ALY: First, we must remind ourselves that today's media corporations are all very powerful in shaping the so called 'public opinion'. At the beginning of the revolt last year, when individuals waved the independence flag, other protesters who were not in favour of it would try to convince them to stop by reminding them that the movement was about the five demands, not about independence. In some cases, the persuasion might work. However, both Western media and pro-Beijing media loved focussing on people waving the flag instead—although for quite opposite reasons—ignoring the fact that most protesters did not wave it. This is how a small minority of protesters became emboldened by the media, while the majority, feeling discouraged, chose to remain silent at later protests.

The wonderful thing about this revolt is that it had hundreds of big and small protests exhibiting great diversity and contradictions. What unified these diverse protests were the five demands, not any other requests. There were only a few protests which were potentially targeting mainland immigrants or visitors here, but they were much smaller in size and also only took place in more remote areas—as such, they cannot represent the movement. But it is also true that most people, who did not approve of the right-wing localists, often chose to remain silent about them. I argue that without an organised progressive force consciously fighting for an inclusive Hong Kong identity, this will continue to be the case, unfortunately.

IF: Finally, you criticise a certain idea that has taken root in some leftist circles in the West: that the Hong Kong protests were right wing and manipulated by foreign imperialists. What is your response to these insinuations?

ALY: Just as the media loves to put a spotlight on protesters waving pro-independent flags, it also loves to do the same to protesters waving pro-US flags. Yet few people are aware that

protesters also waved the Catalanian flag, and once held a pro-Catalonian independence rally. Those pro-US forces tried to stop the holding of such a rally because 'Spain is a US ally'—an argument that was rebutted. This piece of news went largely unnoticed, however.

Last year, I was at a Berlin conference where a participant condemned the movement as being manipulated by the United States by referring to protesters waving the US flag. My response was that her condemnation itself might be seen as manipulated as well, only this time by the media, as she uncritically accepted the media's preference for the flag-waving minority.

The pan-democrats have always had strong ties to the US and British establishments, but they were marginalised in this most recent revolt. There were organised pro-US forces, but they were small. The mass movement is led by no one. Most young people waving the US flag did not belong to any political party, they were generally new hands in the social movement and only wanted to call for international support.

That said, the problem with last year's revolt was that most protesters did not have any idea of 'left versus right', and everything in their world is squeezed into a worldview of 'either Beijing or us'. For this reason, they just accept any foreigners with some power to help, without ever asking the question 'are they your real friends?' This lack of understanding allows protesters to occasionally be depicted as part of the pro-Trump current, which is then magnified by the media.

We must be aware of another facet of this discussion on 'foreign forces', though. Western governments, with the United Kingdom and United States at their head, are being recognised as legitimate stakeholders by no one other than the CCP itself, as enshrined in the Basic Law. This law lays down in detail that Hong Kong people would be able to keep their own British law, enjoy the right to the British passport, and even allows foreigners to be employed as civil servants, from the lowest to the highest ranks (except for the very top), including foreign judges,

and so on and so forth. This should have given both the United States and United Kingdom a lot of leverage, at least for the remaining 27 years before the Basic Law expires, unless it is further revised. With the Extradition Bill, Beijing did nothing less than break its promise in both the Sino-British Joint Declaration and the Basic Law. I never endorsed these two documents. Actually, Hong Kong people have always been excluded from negotiations over their fate, but if Beijing wants to decolonise Hong Kong's colonial legacy, it should replace it with even better protection of human rights, and honour its promise of universal suffrage for the city, not replace it with its own even worse legal system or annihilate the city's autonomy. If the US government is not our real friend, right now Beijing is our real enemy. That is what matters.

IF: In the book, you explain how the youth has played a fundamental role in the mobilisation. What makes the '1997 generation' so different from those who came before?

ALY: Now Beijing wants to take full control of Hong Kong's education to make sure the young would not be influenced by dangerous ideas. This is laughable, and actually counterproductive. I was a secondary school teacher for nearly 20 years. I failed terribly in trying to instil a spirit of rebellion against the colonial education among my students. The time simply had not come yet. Only with the coming of the '1997 generation' did a significant section of society begin to stir.

It is a generation that is full of anger and hope. They are angry because they felt lied to by Beijing. Since their birth, they have been hearing about Hong Kong people challenging Beijing to honour its promise of universal suffrage. As they grew up, the suffrage was nowhere to be seen, and Beijing launched wave after wave of attacks on Hong Kong's autonomy, hence the anger. On the other hand, they think there is still hope, if only they are radical—or at least more radical than the pan-democrats. A new way of fighting back must be found, and they found it 'by any means

necessary', by 'being water', 'being brave', etc. If civil disobedience and occupying major streets in 2014 was not enough to make Beijing yield, then let us fight the police and occupy the legislature! Their bravery also came from their 'end game' mentality—this will be our last struggle for our autonomy so let's spare no effort!

Another factor at play was the relative liberties the new generation enjoyed while growing up. Under British colonial rule, our generation grew up in quite a repressive atmosphere and learned to be apolitical to avoid trouble. Hence the 30-year-old democratic movement was always very timid, so you see how different the new generation is from the old. The young were inexperienced, but this also enabled them to think outside the box of the pan-democrats. Now they have seen with their own eyes that even a revolt as massive as last year's did not make Beijing yield to them; on the contrary the latter now retaliated with an even more lethal weapon, the National Security Law. The young now finally understand that it is going to be a very long struggle, and there is no such thing as an 'end game'. It is going to be a very hard fight as well, because Beijing's agenda is to destroy this generation. They did it before, in 1989.

To sum up, one may say that the contribution of the young is that they, like the boy who pointed out loudly that 'the emperor has no clothes on!', were able to identify where the real problem lies. They also tried to fix it, even if events proved that it was a task for which they were not yet fully prepared.

IF: We recently published an article by Anita Chan about the extraordinary mushrooming of trade unions in Hong Kong over the past year. You also dedicate part of your book to this phenomenon. Can you please delve a bit more into the role of the workers during the protests? What are the prospects for this nascent labour movement under the New Security Law?

ALY: If one compares last year's revolt to the Umbrella Movement then one witnesses a step forward for labour.

The pro-democracy Confederation of Trade Unions (CTU) was founded in 1990 and nowadays it claims to have 95 affiliated unions representing 190,000 members. It always follows the pan-democrats' political line and this eventually alienated the young generation, which is one of the reasons why it played nearly no role at all during the Umbrella Movement. It called for a strike, but I used to say that only two and a half unions heeded the call, because the teachers' union was only half-hearted about it. It was a reflection of the fundamental weakness of the labour movement in Hong Kong at that time. Last year, when the movement had just begun in early June and right after the two-million-strong march, the CTU called for another strike but was unsuccessful. History seemed to be repeating itself. But no, the young did not allow that. The following months saw an ever-stronger mobilisation, but the young were increasingly aware that they alone would not be able to make Beijing yield, so they repeatedly called for a general strike.

This was also the moment when a new segment of young employees began to emerge as activists. Together with the CTU, the allied forces were able to call a successful general strike, for the first time in many decades, on 5 August 2019. Among others, pilots and flights attendants responded en masse, and half of all flights were grounded leaving air traffic in chaos. Although later strike calls were unsuccessful after Beijing retaliated by forcing Cathay Pacific to sack a few dozens of its strikers, the August strike went into the memory of many as a proof of the power of labour. This also laid the foundation for a new union movement where dozens of new unions were founded. The spread of the Covid-19 pandemic gave a chance to the newly founded Hospital Authority Employee Union to test its strength. The union accounts for 20 percent of the workforce of 80,000, and in February 2020 it went on strike for five days to demand that the government temporarily close the borders between Hong Kong and mainland China to stop the pandemic from spreading further in the city. The upside of this strike is that one witnessed that the new leadership has the guts to fight, which is very rare

among local trade unions. The downside, though, is that on several occasions it seemed that the membership was not ready to take a more militant line.

With Beijing retaliating with its National Security Law, this new union movement now faces the greatest challenge since its founding. Unions may not be Beijing's top target, but the mainland authorities definitely dislike a militant union movement. I hope that the young unionists will have enough time to consolidate themselves before Beijing starts its next offensive.

IF: One aspect that I don't find mentioned often in media coverage is how the National Security Law will likely impact civil society on the mainland. For three decades, Hong Kong has been the funding gateway for wide array of civil society organisations in mainland China, including labour NGOs, human rights lawyers, and other kinds of activist groups. With Chinese civil society already under unprecedented assault, will Hong Kong be still able to play such a role?

ALY: Right now, it is already very difficult. Some Hong Kong groups that have been supporting Chinese labour have had to either shut down their operations or significantly scale down and lay low. The more severe the economic crisis and the more the conflict with United States is escalated, the more likely Beijing will be to seek the total obliteration of labour groups in the mainland, especially those with ties to Hong Kong. I remember a dozen years ago we rented a bus in Shenzhen and took a whole bunch of German grassroots labour activists to visit factories where strikes had occurred. We did not dare step outside the bus though, but the German activists were still impressed with the stories we told and happy about being able to see the factories. This is unimaginable today. The narrow but real space for NGO activism in the Pearl River Delta is long gone.

We still have another form of leverage, however. For decades, the picture of Hong Kong people standing up for

their rights has inspired many in the Mainland. In this new period of repression, Hong Kong could still promote a movement from below in the Mainland in an indirect way, i.e. through its own struggle for autonomy and democracy. This is important as Hong Kong's advantage lies in its 'soft power' rather than the non-existent 'sharp power' which certain 'braves' were looking for. Making the city unwelcoming to mainland Chinese is suicidal. Unfortunately, in last year's revolt Beijing made full use of the right-wing localists' presence to depict the whole revolt as being about independence and China-bashing, not to mention pro-Trump. This alienated potential mainland allies. The problem for Hong Kong lies less in the existence of right-wing localists however, and more in the lack of a strong labour left wing which, if present, could put the right wing under check. The good news is that with the new trade union movement there is now a whole new group of labour activists to win over to a labour left wing, although it will take time.

Secondly, the seeds sowed by mainland and Hong Kong labour activists in the past two decades will continue to grow in the future. Twenty years ago, most rural migrant workers did not have any idea of their legitimate rights. Through their own struggle, plus some help from NGOs, today many of them are much more informed and ready to demand their rights. In 2018, for instance, more than a hundred silicosis victims from Hunan spontaneously organised to go to Shenzhen (where they had contracted the occupational disease while working) to petition for

compensation. Under harsh repression, workers cannot do any long-term organising, but through these kinds of defensive struggles they are still able to be partially empowered.

IF: What comes next for the people of Hong Kong? What venues are left for us who live abroad to express solidarity?

ALY: Since you sent me these questions, the Hong Kong situation has been further worsening, day by day. The absolute asymmetry of power between Beijing and Hong Kong implies that we will be in a dire situation for years to come, unless the mainland situation takes a surprising change of direction. Some protesters are now celebrating the success of their so called 'scorched earth tactic' after the United States nullified Hong Kong's special status. I don't subscribe to their idea of 'success' because turning Hong Kong into a battlefield between Beijing and Washington is going to make things worse, not easier. I do not intend to place too much blame on these 'scorched earth' advocates though, as from the very beginning Hong Kong has been too small to play any leading role in shaping its own fate. Sadly, its fate is always determined by outside forces. No matter how flawless our resistance, once Beijing makes up its mind to finish our autonomy, we are done in this regard. Daily resistance to stop things worsening is still necessary, but we have to prepare for the day when organised opposition will be barred from elections altogether if not totally wiped out.

Local people are aware of this coming catastrophe and are hence looking forward to more international support. However, as a small city this may also imply that the fight to defend our autonomy has slipped away from our own hands.

Precisely because of Hong Kong's uniqueness—small but significant in its geopolitics and international finance status—international pressure is vital for us. But it has to be the right kind pressure. We all know too well that governments are more an establishment force than an engine for progressive changes. It is just too dangerous to leave the solidarity campaign with Mainland and Hong Kong democratic movements to foreign governments alone, not to mention ceding it to Trump. We need international progressive labour and civil associations and individuals to press their governments to do the right things while stopping them from doing wrong things. The prerequisite of this endeavour is to grasp the actual situation going on here. My suggestion is that we should be guided less by ideology and more by objective investigation and simple empathy—and here I mean ideology in the sense of a 'socially necessary illusion' which is divorced from reality. What unified the massive movement was the five demands, with four related to the opposition to the Extradition Bill, the fifth being universal suffrage. How can anyone who claims to be left or progressive not support these demands?

10 September 2020

Source [MadeinChina](#).

WikiLeaks: Defend Assange and Civil Liberties - History, Great Britain, and Julian Assange

21 September 2020, by [Against the Current](#) Editors,

Clifford D. Conner, Dianne Feeley

In 2010 Assange had the audacity to post a video showing a U.S. Apache helicopter indiscriminately murdering a dozen civilians and two Reuters' journalists in the streets of Baghdad.

Daniel Ellsberg, the Pentagon Papers whistleblower, testified in court on September 16 that Assange could not receive a fair trial in the United States. When he pointed out that the Collateral Murder video was clearly a war crime, the prosecution maintained that Assange was not wanted by Washington for it but for publishing documents without redacting names. Ellsberg pointed out that when he leaked the Pentagon Papers, he did not redact a single name.

Assange's lawyer has since informed the London court that in 2017 former Republican U.S. Representative Dana Rohrabacher and Charles Johnson, a far right political activist, relayed Trump's offer to pardon Assange if he provided the source for the hacking of Democratic National Committee emails. This was described to Assange as a "win-win" situation for all involved.

A National Committee to Defend Assange and Civil Liberties, chaired by Noam Chomsky, Daniel Ellsberg, and Alice Walker has been set up. For further information, go to www.facebook.com/CommitteeToDefendJulianAssange.

Dianne Feeley for The Editors
Against the Current

To be published in November-December 2020, ATC 209

History, Great Britain, and Julian Assange

I AM HERE at the British Consulate

today to protest the incarceration and mistreatment of Julian Assange in Belmarsh Prison in Great Britain, to demand that you immediately release him, and above all, to demand that you NOT extradite Julian Assange to the United States.

As a historian who has written extensively on the case of the most persecuted journalist of the 18th century, Jean Paul Marat, I am in a position to make historical comparisons, and in my judgement, Julian Assange is both the most unjustly persecuted journalist of the 21st century and arguably the most important journalist of the 21st century.

Julian Assange is being hounded and harassed and threatened with life in prison by the United States government because he dared to publish the truth about American war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan for the whole world to see. *This persecution of Julian Assange is an assault on the fundamental principles of journalistic freedom.*

The sociopathic Donald Trump and his accomplice, Attorney General William Barr, are demanding that you deliver Assange to them to face false charges of espionage. Every honest observer in the world recognizes Trump and Barr as utterly incapable of acting in good faith. If they succeed in suppressing Julian Assange's right to publish, *it will be a devastating precedent for journalists and publishers of news everywhere — and above all, for the general public, who will lose access to the information necessary to maintaining a democratic society.*

If you allow yourselves to become co-conspirators in this crime, *History will not look kindly on Great Britain for that.*

Last November, more than 60 doctors from all over the world wrote an open letter to the British government saying that Julian Assange's health was so bad that he could die if he weren't moved from Belmarsh Prison, where

he was being held, to a hospital, immediately. Your government chose to ignore that letter and he was not hospitalized, then or later. *History will not look kindly on Great Britain for that.*

Of all crimes against humanity, the most unforgivable is torture. No nation that perpetrates torture has the right to call itself civilized. United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture Nils Melzer has unequivocally characterized Julian Assange's treatment in Belmarsh Prison as torture. *History will neither forget nor forgive that terrible moral transgression.*

Furthermore, the exposure of the widespread use of torture by the United States military and the CIA at Abu Ghraib in Iraq, at Guantánamo Bay, and at so-called "black sites" all over the world, absolutely disqualifies the United States from sitting in moral judgement of anybody. If you deliver Julian Assange into the hands of torturers, history will not look kindly on Great Britain for that.

So I join together today with human rights advocates and advocates of journalistic freedom around the world.

I stand with the Committee to Protect Journalists, which declared: "For the sake of press freedom, Julian Assange must be defended."

I stand with the Center for Constitutional Rights, which said that the attempt to prosecute Julian Assange is "a worrying step on the slippery slope to punishing any journalist the Trump administration chooses to deride as 'fake news'."

And I stand with the ACLU, which said: "Any prosecution by the United States of Mr. Assange for WikiLeaks' publishing operations would be unprecedented and unconstitutional, and would open the door to criminal investigations of other news organizations."

History will not only record the names

of the countries that collaborate in this travesty of justice, but also the names of the individuals — the judges, the prosecutors, the diplomats, and the politicians — who aid and abet the crime. If you, as individuals, choose to ally yourselves with the likes of

Donald Trump and William Barr, be prepared for your names to be chained to theirs in infamy, in perpetuity.

History will certainly absolve Julian Assange, and it certainly will not absolve his persecutors.

Clifford D. Conner

Source [Against the Current](#).

Despite disasters and crimes, the Bolsonaro government continues

20 September 2020, by João Machado

The government is criminal, even from a strictly legal standpoint. Several of Bolsonaro's actions are crimes, and his family has close (and well-known) ties to "mainstream" organized crime in the country, particularly with the so-called "militias" of the state of Rio de Janeiro. Bolsonaro's resignation from the government is therefore urgently needed. Until June, things seemed to be heading towards his overthrow. But the situation has changed.

Until June

Polls showed that rejection of Bolsonaro was increasing, especially after the start of the pandemic, although he still had the support of about a third of the population. The plan to create a new party, entirely led by the Bolsonaro family and its most loyal allies, "Alliance for Brazil", had failed. Until June, recurring threats to democratic and human rights were compounded by Bolsonaro's gamble on confronting Congress and the Supreme Court, as well as state governors and mayors, motivated by his irritation at his inability to impose his policies and the various criminal investigations which threaten him (for crimes committed by his supporters, even by armed groups, and by his sons, such as the dissemination of fake news and threats against the authorities).

weekly protests, mainly in the country's capital, Brasilia, to attack (and sometimes directly threaten) the Supreme Court and Congress, as well as the press and other institutions, and Bolsonaro was present on a number of occasions (which was already sufficient legal reason for his removal from the presidency). According to a report (not denied by Bolsonaro) in *PiauÃ* magazine, the culmination of Bolsonaro's aggression came on 22 May, when he decided to intervene against the Supreme Court to replace its judges, with the aim of "restoring the authority of the president". According to the magazine, this plan was not implemented because Bolsonaro's own military ministers convinced him it was not viable.

Everything indicated that the continuation of this line of confrontation followed until then by Bolsonaro would end up causing his resignation. But Bolsonaro started to change his line. He abandoned a campaign theme, that of the fight against corruption, which allowed him to start forming a base of support in Congress with the group of right-wing MPs called *centrão*, the most corrupt MPs, who literally sell their support, and who had been heavily attacked by Bolsonaro during the campaign.

After 18 June

On 18 June, a close friend (and

accomplice) of Bolsonaro, Fabrício Queiroz, was arrested. He is accused of corruption (in association with one of Bolsonaro's sons, Flávio, and presumably with Bolsonaro himself and his wife, Michelle). Bolsonaro understands he runs the risk of being directly involved in the investigations and then convicted. Since that day he has ceased to participate in the protests against the Supreme Court and Congress - and soon the Bolsonarists ceased to organize them. The political involvement of his sons (who are part of the far right wing of his supporters) has been drastically reduced.

In Brazil, it is the President of the Chamber of Deputies who decides on the opening of the impeachment trials of the President of the Republic. The current president, Rodrigo Maia, even after receiving more than fifty requests to start this process, has not followed up. In early August, in a television interview, he finally spoke out against it. He said he does not believe Bolsonaro has committed a crime that can justify his impeachment.

What Maia's statement means is that most of the Brazilian "political class", reflecting the predominant position of the bourgeoisie, has chosen to keep Bolsonaro in power. This can be explained by the (more than dubious) idea that he can be "controlled", or simply by the fact that this class does not resent the more undemocratic and genocidal aspects of government.

Pro-Bolsonaro activists organized

Moreover, even though Bolsonaro has not yet been able to offer most of the unpopular measures the bourgeoisie expects from him, it hopes he can still be of use. Likewise, the mainstream Brazilian media have relativized their critical position with regard to Bolsonaro, even if they maintain it.

The impact of “emergency aid” and the government’s reorientation

On 14 August, according to a poll, government approval rose from 32% to 37%, and disapproval fell from 44% to 34% compared to the previous poll (June). The trend of gradual decline in the popularity of the government has reversed. It is among the poorest voters, and in the northeast of the country (so far the biggest base of support for Lula), that hostility to the government has subsided the most. Perhaps the most surprising change is that 47% of those polled believe that Bolsonaro is not culpable for the deaths caused by the pandemic. 41% believe he has some responsibility, and only 11% believe he is the main culprit. It is not difficult to deduce that the main reason for this favourable change in government has been the reception by a large part of the population, since April, of “emergency aid” to compensate for the contraction of the economy due to the pandemic.

The government had offered aid of 200 reals. Congress, however, forced it to increase this aid to 600 reals (just under 100 euros at the current exchange rate) or, in a few cases, to 1,200. The economic impact of this measure has been enormous, much greater than expected. It has benefited more than 65 million people (out of a population of 210 million). With this, the incomes of the poorest part of the Brazilian population increased during the pandemic, despite the very severe economic crisis (in the second quarter, the GDP fell by 9.7%). In the northeast, the poorest region of the country, average

income increased by 26%; in the north, it increased by 24%. Even in the richest region of the country, the south east, it increased by 8%. The share of the employed population with recognized employment rights is less than 38 million people - just over half the number of those receiving emergency aid.

Another very relevant comparison: the “Family Purse” program, responsible for much of the electoral support that Lula had in his government, currently reaches just over 14 million families, who receive from the program on average less than 200 reals per month. So emergency aid is reaching a lot more people, with much higher values. The exact counts are not known, but the monthly cost of emergency aid is about twenty times that of the Family Grant. Bolsonaro has profited from a social program he did not propose; his defeat benefited him. Likewise, the fact that his line of action in the face of the pandemic has been prohibited by the judiciary and the legislature makes it easier for him to say that “the responsibility for the pandemic lies with the governors and the mayors”. The biggest setback and the greatest threat he has suffered so far - Queiroz’s arrest - caused him to (partially) change his behaviour in relation to the main institutions of the Brazilian state, which allowed the bourgeoisie to collaborate with him again.

A “left” Bolsonaro?

Until recently, Bolsonaro was critical of the social programs instituted by the PT governments. He has changed his stance dramatically, and is now involved, in some cases, in expanding these programs, changing their names to place his brand on them. The housing program, which was called “My House, My Life”, has undergone some changes and is now called “Green and Yellow House” (these are the colours of the Brazilian flag). The Family Grant program will be expanded and will be called “Renda Brasil”. Emergency aid during the pandemic has been extended until the end of 2020, although in the last four months of the year the amounts paid have been cut in half.

Bolsonaro’s alliance with the ultra-neoliberal Paulo Guedes (Minister of the Economy) was never founded on conviction; it has always been practical. Now, however, he has started to clash with his minister and the sectors of the bourgeoisie he represents. Completely absurd characterizations have begun to be made: the Bloomberg corporate news site has published an article claiming that Bolsonaro’s “internal leftism has resurfaced”, which has been taken up in the Brazilian press. The Sao Paulo newspaper *Folha* has published an appalling editorial under the headline “Jair Rousseff”, linking Jair Bolsonaro with the deposed president.

It is obvious that Bolsonaro has not become a “leftist” at all; social assistance policies are not “left”, even if they are broadened. In PT governments, moreover, these policies cost the budget very little and have been hailed by the World Bank and other similar institutions.

“Emergency aid” costs much more, and has only been supported by the ruling class in the context of the pandemic. In the post-pandemic period, the bourgeoisie will push for the resumption of the ultra-orthodox austerity that was Guedes’s promise; and Bolsonaro, who has gone from adversary to enthusiast in relation to welfare policies, has already begun to oppose Guedes, whose future in government has become uncertain.

Perspectives

Bolsonaro has grown stronger, although he continues to face several very significant risks - in particular the various investigations into him and his relatives. The recent support he has garnered (such as that of the *centrão*) is not firm, and the benevolent tolerance of most of the bourgeoisie for him is not certain either. In addition, some of those responsible for his electoral victory, such as former judge Sergio Moro, have become his enemies. Although public rejection of the government has waned, much of society maintains a strong oppositional position; even in the conditions of the pandemic, there were mobilizations against the government, and there still are.

Bolsonaro's position, on the other hand, is not only favoured by the tolerance of the bourgeoisie and the complicity of the right-wing parties. It also takes advantage of weaknesses in the opposition, which works with the

government on fundamental issues. The governors of the PT and the PC do Brasil, for example, have forced through "social security reforms" in the states they govern similar to those approved at the federal level, and suppressed opposition movements.

The challenge of strengthening a more coherent opposition remains open, on the part of popular movements and the parties which are to the left of the PT and which defend a line of class independence.

What future for Mali?

19 September 2020, by Paul Martial

The proportion of the population living below the poverty line reached 41.1% in 2019 and could increase by another 800,000 people in 2020. The course of the coup proves that it was carefully prepared. On 18 August, the mutineers simultaneously seized the Kati and N'Tominkorobougou barracks, while troops were sent to arrest key figures of the regime, President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita (IBK), his prime minister Boubou Cissé as well as Foreign Minister Tiébilé Dramé, Finance Minister Abdoulaye Daffé, and general Ibrahim Dahirou Dembelé, the Minister of Defence.

A putsch amid popular discontent

Immediately, the authors of the coup d'état proclaimed the creation of a National Committee for the Salvation of the People (CNSP) and arranged for Keita himself to announce his resignation and that of his government, as well as the dissolution of the national assembly, thus allowing the maintenance of a constitutional veneer, even if that does not fool anyone. If the putschists are for the most part senior officers, they are not however integrated into the inner circle of the regime's personalities. Some of them led the war against the rebels in northern Mali, such as Colonel Assimi Goita, president of the CNSP, who was the Commander of the autonomous battalion of special forces and fought the jihadists in the north of the country from 2002 to 2008. The number two in the CNSP,

Malick Diaw, was deputy commander of the military zone of Kati, and is considered as the linchpin of the coup. CNSP spokesperson Ismaël Wagué was the deputy chief of staff of the air force.

To paraphrase an advertisement from a high-tech multinational: the people dreamed of it, the putschists realized it, except that in this case, the people did not only dream, they massively mobilized against the regime with massive demonstrations. The trigger for this mobilization, which began at the beginning of June, was the decision by the Constitutional Council to modify the results of the parliamentary elections in some thirty constituencies in favour of regime candidates. The abstention rate for the first round of the 2018 presidential elections was 57% and for the second round it was over 65%. This abstention was maintained during the last parliamentary elections demonstrating the lack of interest of the population in a largely discredited political class. The massive mobilizations were organized by the Mouvement du 5 Juin - Rassemblement des Forces Patriotiques (M5-RFP), an aggregation of different parties, unions and activist civil society organizations, against the government and for Keita's resignation. The only response from the government was a fierce crackdown with a death toll of 11 and more than a hundred injured. IBK did not hesitate to use the Special Anti-Terrorism Force (FORSAT) which fired live ammunition into the crowd in an attempt to quell the protests.

While in 2013, IBK had represented hope and won the presidential elections easily, he continued to disappoint by failing to make any important decisions capable of solving the country's problems. His government and his relatives have been tainted by corruption cases that have ripped through political life. Among others, the overbilling of the purchase of the presidential plane, the purchases of luxury 4X4s distributed to his entourage, not to mention his Patek Philippe watch at more than 80,000 euros and the behaviour of his son, Karim Keita, who shamelessly displays his luxurious lifestyle on social networks, while nearly half of the population lives below the poverty line. A UN investigation revealed that the high military hierarchy like General Kéba Sangaré, chief of staff of the army, has continued to torpedo the Algiers peace accords, and to take irresponsible decisions by lifting the protection of the village of Ogossagou, which was nevertheless threatened by armed militias. Hours after the Malian army left, the village was attacked, killing 35 civilians and 19 missing. This village was already mourning the massacre of 160 people a year ago. If General Sangaré has been relieved of his post, this type of individual continues repressive policies at the highest level of the state. It is therefore a beleaguered, corrupt and incapable regime that has come to an end.

A dramatic situation for the people

Whether in the economic, social or security areas, all the indicators are red. According to the latest report from the United Nations Secretary, the situation is deteriorating considerably. "The number of internally displaced persons in Mali increased to 239,484 from 218,000 in March". The Algiers peace accords which date from 20 June, 2015 have stalled, and the two most important measures have not been carried out: "delays in the administrative and territorial restructuring and the challenges facing the redeployment of reconstituted units of the army to the north of the country were identified as the main obstacles to the implementation of the Agreement". The situation in the north of the country is now a sort of grey area where armed groups, whether or not they are signatories to the peace agreement, Islamists or communal groups, are mostly engaged in various trafficking activities. A situation which results in part from the French military intervention within the framework of Operation Serval. Indeed, the first consequence was the scattering of Islamist fighters over the entire Sahel region, the second is linked to reliance on the armed forces of the MNLA separatists and then, with operation Barkhane, on pro-government militias to fight against the jihadists at the expense of a policy of general disarmament.

There are two Islamist groups: the Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (The Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims - GSIM) affiliated with Al Qaeda and led by Iyad Ag Ghali and the Islamic State of Greater Sahara. In addition, there are armed groups that are federated in several organizations. On the government side, there is the Platform of Self-Defence Movements called "the Platform", while on the rebel side there is the Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA) and finally, the Coordination of Entente Movements bringing together fighters from the first two groups. Between all these groups, the borders are largely

porous and alliances are forged and untied at the whim of the clan chiefs.

The violence that was confined to the north has spread for several years to the centre of the country and the situation is only worsening with inter-communal clashes but also within communities. Conflicts are mainly due to access to resources, whether water or grazing, between the Fulani, who are mostly pastoralists, and other communities that depend on agriculture or fishing. The clashes become bloody because weapons of war are numerous and circulate easily in the country, the absence of a state which can act as regulator and mediator allows the Islamists to prosper by inserting themselves in conflicts and by exacerbating them. Not a month goes by without witnessing attacks and reprisals from community armed militias such as "Dan Nan Ambassagou" or Islamists. In any case, it is the civilians who pay the heaviest price.

The stronger the military pressure, the more the country sinks into crisis with dramatic consequences for the people. Human rights violations, such as killings, looting, kidnappings, disappearances, and forced recruitment including that of children are committed by armed groups but also by government forces: "MINUSMA documented 535 violations and abuses, 412 more than in the previous reporting period, including 275 abuses by armed groups and 163 by the national forces." [21] The cases listed only partially reflect the situation due to the multiplicity of government armies operating in the Sahel: the Malian army, the G5 Sahel joint force which brings together elements of the armies of Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Chad, the UN force MINUSMA, the Takuba group of forces made up of soldiers from the European Union, the French army forces of Operation Barkhane and the forces of the various Sahelian countries who have a right of pursuit of 50 kilometres, recently increased to 100, beyond their borders. When abuses against civilians are committed, it is difficult to know who is responsible, as the soldiers of the Sahelian armies integrated into the G5 force do not have any distinctive sign. As for the French armed forces, they

work and rely on certain armed groups responsible for crimes, for example the Groupe Autodéfense Touareg Imghad et Alliés (GATIA).

Mali has gradually descended into a spiral of violence. It is no longer a few jihadists who carry out attacks, but rather armed groups who profit from initially political and economic problems. The crisis of capitalism in Africa and notoriously in the Sahel with its climatic, economic, social and now health repercussions exacerbates communal tensions. Military responses, whether Malian or Western, do not change the situation but make it worse. As Sahelian activist civil society organizations point out: "Military resources have so far failed to ensure the protection of all populations without discrimination and have even led to numerous abuses against civilians.... States must be able to analyse the situations which lead people to join armed groups..." [22] This situation of latent war in the north and the centre of the country has consequences at the social level, the health centres no longer function and the schools are deserted, so before the Covid-19 crisis, nearly 1,261 schools were closed for security reasons. The prices of foodstuffs continue to rise due to the difficulties of transport. The Covid-19 epidemic has exacerbated the shortage. The United Nations considers that "food insecurity affects 3.5 million people, of whom 757,000 are in a serious situation". We can better understand the anger of Malians against the government and its president IBK and the favourable reception of the coup d'état in contrast to the positions of the international community.

The hypocrites' ball

The putsch was condemned unanimously; however, certain nuances appear. Thus France is asking for the return of civilians to power without mentioning IBK, unlike ECOWAS. This organization, which brings together the heads of state of West African countries, demands "the reestablishment of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita as President of the

Republic, in accordance with the constitutional provisions of his country”.

Among these great defenders of the constitutional order, we find Alassane Ouattara and Alpha Condé who changed the constitution of their country to stand for election or Faure Gnassingbé who came to power by a coup and who is in his fourth term through rigged elections. Their solemn declaration in defence of the Constitution of Mali would make us smile if there were not significant consequences behind it. ECOWAS has declared “the closure of all land and air borders as well as the cessation of all economic, financial and commercial flows and transactions with the exception of basic foodstuffs, medicines, fuel, and electricity. between member countries and Mali. We invite all partners to do the same”. [23] Mali is a landlocked country dependent on border countries for its supply. An embargo would only make the situation even more difficult.

In Africa coups succeed one another but are not alike. There are coups d'état which put an end to democratic experiments as was the case in 2008

in Mauritania where General Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz took power to end arrests for embezzlement, or that of Blaise Compaoré to overthrow Thomas Sankara. There are other coups that bring down dictatorships or hated regimes that remain in place through repression. Mali is an example. The end of Moussa Traoré's dictatorship in 1991 was through a combination of mass movements and a military coup. Amadou Haya Sanogo's coup in 2012 ended the corrupt regime of Amadou Toumani Touré. This type of coup d'état is always ambivalent since on the one hand it rids the country of corrupt leaders but on the other it replaces the people and their organization, dispossessing them of their victory, and can lead to serious abuses.

A complex situation for struggles

The M5-RFP did not support the coup but has welcomed IBK's departure from the presidency, considering this resignation to be the result of the

people's struggle and declaring itself ready to work with the military. From the point of view of popular mobilization, the situation remains complex. The leadership of the protest remains in the hands of a particularly backward religious leader and demagogue, Imam Mahmoud Dicko. He supported the former dictator Moussa Traoré, fought against the change in the Family Code giving more rights to women and propelled IBK to power in the first presidential election. In the M5-RFP, Dicko's organization, the Coordination of Movements, Associations and Sympathizers (CMAS) has a very important weight and politicians like Choguel Maiga, Mountaga Tall or Modibo Sidibé who have participated more or less in all the regimes are not sizeable enough to provide a counterbalance. Now the military has taken a decisive position in the Malian political spectrum. Between these two poles, Imam Dicko and the coup plotters, it will be difficult for progressive political parties and militant civil society organizations to make their voices heard when substantive political and economic choices have to be made.

Cop Shoots Jacob Blake: Kenosha Intensifies Racial Reckoning

18 September 2020, by **Malik Miah**

ONCE AGAIN A young Black man, 29, is shot in the back on August 23 by a white cop in the city of Kenosha, Wisconsin, about 40 miles north of Milwaukee where the majority of African Americans in that state live.

The man, Jacob Blake Jr., had intervened in a street dispute between two women. The cops arrived and immediately challenged Blake. Two of them shot taser guns at him.

Then when he walked to his car where his three young boys of 3, 5 and 8 years sat in the back seat alone, the

white cop grabbed Blake's shirt and then fired seven shots at his back with four hitting him. Afterwards, the cops said Blake had a knife on the car's floorboard.

Bystanders yelled at the cops throughout the conflict. The cops did not care. A person with Black skin is by definition a “threat” to safety.

Blake survived the shooting. He lies in a hospital, paralyzed from the waist down, his spinal cord shattered. When his father Jacob Blake Sr. saw him, he reported that his son's leg was

shackled to the bed because of an outstanding misdemeanor warrant. Was he a flight risk??

After an outcry the shackles were removed, and the warrant was vacated.

Blake grew up in Evanston, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago. His grandfather had been a leader of the fair housing fight in the 1960s. His family were community activists.

Blake's family said he moved to Kenosha for a fresh start. He was

employed and had a young family. Kenosha is 10 percent African American among nearly 100,000 people.

Immediately after the cop shooting, the streets filled with protests. The Black Lives Matter movement is strong in the area. White and Black protesters demanded that the cop be arrested and prosecuted.

While the protests were peaceful, a few people did carry out property vandalism in the evening. As has occurred in other cities, some of these could be white nationalist provocateurs who came to incite a “race war.” A Facebook post had called on white extremists to come to Kenosha.

Quickly solidarity protests spread to Milwaukee and across the country from New York City to Oakland, California. Signs included, “Justice for Jacob” and “Time for change is Now.”

The cops reacted with excessive force. President Trump tweeted in support of the police and called the Black Lives demonstrators “thugs.”

White Vigilante Killer

Yet when a group of armed white vigilantes arrived to “defend” property from the “rioters,” the Kenosha police welcomed them and passed out bottles of water.

One of the thugs was a 17-year-old white man, Kyle Rittenhouse, from the nearby town of Antioch, Illinois. Carrying an AR-15 long rifle, he joined other white supremacists and the heavily armed police.

The white vigilante teenager then shot and killed two white protesters and a third man. The police did nothing when he approached them, allowing him to drive home and sleep in his own bed.

After public outrage since the killings were on video, Illinois police arrested the killer. The prosecutor in Wisconsin charged him with first degree intentional homicide and five other counts of murder.

Rittenhouse’s lawyers won a 30-day delay of his extradition hearing to prevent his immediate relocation to Wisconsin. They claim he acted in “self-defense.”

The Kenosha police chief said the protesters were at fault for being out on the streets past curfew. The white nationalist murderer was a “victim” according to the far right.

The contrast in treatment by the cops toward the white vigilante and Blake make clear the double standard of “race” and racism in the country. For the cops, skin color is the decisive factor — The “white” man is a legitimate “American” and the Black man less than human.

Blacks understand that skin color defines who’s a “real American.” White skin color confers advantages that even new white immigrants know. Blacks — affluent or poor, famous or not— are treated differently than whites.

President Trump visited Kenosha on September 1 to meet with and praise the cops. He visited some damaged businesses, but refused to contact the Black family or the families of the two white protesters killed by the white vigilante.

Both men killed — Anthony Huber, 26, and Joseph Rosembaum, 36 — were Kenosha residents, unlike the killer from Illinois. Trump said the vigilante had to defend himself, the line of the far right.

Sports Take a Stand

In an unprecedented response to the Kenosha shooting and Trump’s racism, top sports players and leagues reasoned with work stoppages.

In the National Basketball Association (NBA) Bubble (a secure location near Orlando to mitigate the pandemic), the Milwaukee Bucks boycotted their August 26 first-round playoff game against the Orlando Magic in protest of the shooting.

Later that day the NBA and the National Basketball Players

Association announced that in light of the Bucks’ decision to refuse to play, all NBA games for the day were postponed.

LeBron James, the super star of the Los Angeles Lakers put it bluntly, “I’m afraid.”

“People get tired of hearing me say it, but we are scared as Black people in America. Black men, Black women, Black kids, we are terrified.”

On August 26, the game between the Milwaukee Brewers and Cincinnati Reds of Major League Baseball (MLB) was postponed in protest. On August 27, seven more MLB games were postponed.

On August 26, Major League Soccer players (MLS) boycotted five games in a collective statement against racial injustice. All six Women National Basketball Association (WNBA) games scheduled for August 26 and August 27 were also postponed.

Players of the WNBA’s Washington Mystics each wore a white T-shirt printed with seven bullet holes on the back in honor of Jacob Blake. As one stated to the media, it was about more than basketball: “When we go home, most of us are still Black.”

The National Hockey League (NHL) announced the postponement of their four playoff games for August 27 and 28. The NHL’s players are majority Canadian, with only a few Black players.

In tennis, the 2020 Western & Southern Open announced that all matches scheduled for August 27 would be rescheduled for the following day after Naomi Osaka threatened to boycott her semifinal. Osaka’s father is Haitian.

The 57th Anniversary March

On August 28 in Washington D.C. tens of thousands marched and rallied at the Lincoln Memorial under the banner of “Commitment March: Get Your Knee Off Our Necks” in reference to George Floyd’s death.

The date marked the 57th anniversary of the 1963 March for Racial and Economic Justice where Martin Luther King Jr gave his "I Have a Dream" speech.

King's son Martin Luther King III, president of the King Center in Atlanta, told the participants:

"We must never forget the American nightmare of racist violence exemplified when Emmett Till was murdered on this day in 1955, and the criminal justice system failed to convict his killers."

"Sixty-five years later (after Till's murder), we still struggle for justice — demilitarizing the police, dismantling mass incarceration, and declaring as determinately as we can that Black lives matter," King III said.

Family members of victims of police killings and shootings including Jacob Blake's father spoke. The father spoke the obvious truth: "There is two systems of justice: One for whites and one for Blacks."

Rev. Al Sharpton, whose civil rights organization the National Action Network planned Friday's commemoration, had a message for naysayers of public protests against police violence.

"Some say to me, 'Rev. Al, y'all ought to denounce those that get violent, those that are looting,'" Sharpton said. "All of the families (of victims of police and vigilante violence) have denounced looting. What we haven't heard is you denounce shooting."

Sharpton asked, "We will speak against the looting, but when will you speak against wrong police shooting?"

Many speakers focused on demands to arrest the cops and prosecution of the cops. Others emphasized the need to

vote in the presidential election November 3.

The local leaders of the BLM emphasized that mass protests are the primary way to make change. In fact, the modest reforms made to date have been because of the movement.

The white backlash led by Trump and his enablers and the white vigilantes he inspires, including the white Kenosha killer, is intensifying. A group of protesters marching from Milwaukee to the August 28 protest were shot at in rural Pennsylvania by a white gunman.

"The activists were at the Hampton Inn in Bedford Township Tuesday when a man allegedly showed up and began firing a gun, according to state police." (York Daily Record)

The shootings and clashes by cops and vigilantes are just beginning. Trump and his followers seek more violence to justify his re-election. The stakes are high.

What Next

The three cops involved in the Kenosha shooting have been placed on paid administrative leave. The law in Wisconsin immediately sets up an "independent investigation" that reports to the Kenosha district attorney to decide if charges should be filed.

Although that law resulted from another Kenosha police killing fifteen years ago of an unarmed civilian, Michael Bell Jr. — who was white — the reality is that the local DA works closely with the police.

Jacob Blake may face charges for resisting the cop who shot him. His misdemeanor arrest warrant was vacated after he survived the cop's

murderous attack and the family posted bond, but the charges may still stand.

As so often happens, the police and right-wing media emphasized Blake's alleged crimes. "Such allegations are a common and patently unfair response to tragic events that need to be corrected," said Daniel Medwed, professor of law and criminal justice at Northeastern University School of Law and a board member of the Innocence Network.

None of this is relevant to the shooting. Yet in every case of cop brutality, shootings and murders, the victim's alleged crimes and flaws are used by the cops to justify their violence.

"So many people have reached out to me saying they're sorry that this has been happening to my family. Well don't be sorry because this has been happening to my family for a long time, longer than I can account for," said Letetra Widman, Blake's sister. "It happened to Emmett Till, Emmett Till is my family. It happened to Philando (Castile), Mike Brown, Sandra (Bland)."

"I don't want your pity," Widman said. "I want change."

Donald Trump's re-election strategy is simple and deadly: to mobilize and win the white electorate that remains 67% of the population and suppress the votes of nonwhites. White fear has worked in previous elections.

The ruling class must decide if racial conflict is its "solution." What the Movement for Black Lives shows is that only popular struggle, strikes and mass action can turn back the racist white nationalist forces.

Rebellions work, as history teaches us.

Source [*Against the Current*](#)

Opening Up the Schools?

17 September 2020, by Robert Bartlett

Until mid-March, when governors and mayors took drastic steps, with orders to shelter in place, closing businesses and schools to slow the spread of the virus, many people continued their lives with a growing sense of fear of what would happen. Most schoolteachers had just a few days of warning before their schools were (rightly) closed.

Let's imagine how a socialist society would confront this crisis.

First, it would have already prioritized the infrastructure that people need. Hospitals and neighborhood clinics would have been built on a public health model. That is, it would develop sustainable and preventive measures as opposed to the high tech and expensive approach used in the country today.

Studies would examine how the virus is transmitted and what measures could be taken to interfere with transmission. Until a vaccine is developed, infected people would be isolated to prevent them from spreading it. This means they would be supported with food, lodging, and appropriate care while their immune system dealt with the infection. For those whose immune systems trigger an excessive response, quality medical care would be available.

Second, schools would have already been reorganized. All the old weaknesses of public education — crumbling, poorly ventilated buildings, funding inequalities, overcrowded classrooms, insufficient social and emotional supports — would have been replaced by a well-maintained and resource-rich school and its gardens. By significantly reducing class size, small clusters of students (five to seven students) might be able to continue in-person classes.

Third, the work week would have been reduced with paid time off. When people got sick they would not be expected to go to work.

Fourth, learning would be viewed as a

lifelong process. A variety of teaching and learning styles would be assumed. Control of the curriculum and the ability to change it would no longer be driven by national “common core standards” or local school boards, but by teams of teachers who are the real experts in how to adapt their subject in terms of the needs of their students and the challenges of remote learning.

Fifth, industrial food production would be dismantled and the destruction of forests halted. This would minimize the danger of transmitting viruses from animals to humans.

Instead, in today's capitalist economy we are faced with multiple dilemmas that are more political than scientific in nature. Most importantly, the economic closures have produced the greatest mass unemployment since the 1930s Great Depression. And because the economy is based on what is profitable — not what is needed — we now face the pressure to reopen business.

In order to do that, schools need to be opened so parents can get back to work. Yet there are no clear conditions for what measures need to be taken to make schools safe. The fact that this is happening two months before the presidential election adds to the pressure Trump is imposing.

As the number of U.S. positive cases remains over 50,000 a day, the Trump administration piously declares that education is essential. In other words, children, educators and maintenance staff are all expendable.

What Is Known About SARS-CoV 2?

We now know that up to perhaps 40% of infected people never show outward symptoms, yet are still infectious. [24] To detect these people requires testing on a much larger scale than has been developed six months into

the pandemic.

Tests are limited because of the type being used, a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test that requires swabs, pipettes, and chemical reagents to process it, and because it is costly (\$150 or more per test). Yet capitalism has centralized production to low-cost locations and uses “just-in-time” distribution, insuring that with any crisis, these vital supplies are in short supply.

The tests also depend upon automated, but expensive, machines to process the samples and produce a bottleneck. It may take days or even a week to receive the result. Even were there an adequate number of trained tracers, such a delay makes that too late to do any good. Privatization of health care in general leads to a form of “lean production,” where decisions on staffing, number of beds, and number of hospitals are based upon profit margins.

The rate of deaths among people who contract the virus is estimated worldwide at between 0.5-1.0% and recorded deaths currently are over 750,000, with the United States at 175,000. But even the majority who survive are not ensured a complete recovery. [25]

Prolonged illnesses, evidence of blood clotting leading to strokes, permanent damage to the lungs and neurological abnormalities are among the serious side effects. A few have undergone surgery to have their lungs replaced. Mortality is highest in older people, but people of all ages have died from COVID-19.

Study of the virus has led to some conclusions on transmission contrary to what was initially stressed. This is a respiratory virus, and the main means of transmission is through droplets expelled when those infected (including asymptomatic people) spread viral particles as they talk, breathe, cough or sneeze. The bigger particles quickly fall, while the smaller linger in the air and drift farther away.

Studies have shown that a six-foot separation distance is reasonable for avoiding the larger droplets but the smaller ones are likely to continue spreading. However, as of now there are no conclusive studies on differentiating between these modes of transmission. We do not know what proportion each plays nor what is a safe distance to avoid aerosolized particles. [26]

Cleaning surfaces can't hurt, but wearing masks is far more effective in limiting viral spread. Enclosed spaces are far more dangerous than being outdoors. The cases where numerous people have caught the virus reveal the commonality of being poorly ventilated, with many in proximity to each other over prolonged periods of time.

The Diamond Princess cruise ship, meatpacking plants, prisons, and nursing homes all share those characteristics — along with today's schools. [27]

Disproportionate mortality rates in Black and Brown communities are more a consequence of poverty rather than "poor life choices." Poor people are more likely to be in "essential" jobs, less likely to be able to work at home, have paid sick leave or health care coverage. They are also more likely to share smaller spaces with extended families and when they become sick — since they have little health coverage or paid sick time — less likely to seek medical care.

What is the relative risk of COVID-19 infections and the transmissibility of infected children? A study of 55,000 people who had the virus reveal that almost 80% of the deaths were those over 65; less than one percent were under the age of 18. [28]

The risk of serious illness is also concentrated among older people. But some children have had the virus and died from it, and all who have the virus can transmit it. A recent study from Korea showed that children under the age of 10 transmitted the virus at 50% of the efficiency of adults, while those between the ages of 10-18 transmitted at the same rate as adults. A smaller study of children under the age of five found that viral

loads in nasal tissues were 10 to 100 times higher than that in adults. [29]

This study shows that children are not immune. Schools are not safe havens from the virus. In fact, they pose a risk of transmission from school to home and vice versa. [30]

The Public Health Response

Political wishful thinking, outright stupidity and a focus on Wall Street meant that the federal government dilly-dallied for the first couple of months. The testing debacle is due not only to lack of planning and a slow response by agencies like the Centers for Disease Control, but also due to the hollowing out of the U.S. public health system since Reagan was president.

The federal government's refusal to direct production of needed PPEs and testing supplies allowed price gouging and speculation at every level. Each governor was forced to compete with others in order to obtain the needed materials.

By the middle of August, the average number of daily tests averages are about 750,000, but seems to have plateaued. This is still far short of what is needed to accurately track and curb the spread of this virus.

There are rapid antigen tests akin to those used in home pregnancy kits, which can be used to detect the viral particles that induce antibody production. They are not as sensitive as the PCR tests but have the advantage of giving results within 10-15 minutes and are cheaper, possibly \$1 a test when production gets up to scale.

If production of such a test were prioritized, it would be possible to test every person every day by just having them spit into a tube of saline solution and dip a test strip into the saline.

Alternatively, you could test at-risk populations like agricultural workers and those in food processing plants, prisoners as well as schoolchildren and staff. Rapid test results would allow for quarantining immediately

and effective contact tracing. [31]

Any scenario that would allow safer reopening of schools would have to ramp up testing and tracing. Otherwise it will be difficult to reduce the risk of transmission.

How Effective is Remote Learning?

Even if schools had prepared for a scenario of online learning in case of a public health emergency, no educator would put forward remote learning as equivalent to in-person classes. The reality of online learning has given parents a greater appreciation of how hard teaching is.

True, there are online resources that can be useful in supplementing a curriculum, but the ability to interact with students is almost completely lost. U.S. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos would never enroll her children in an online charter school, and neither should we.

The deficiencies of online learning actually mirror the disparities in society. The lack of school resources in poor neighborhoods or rural areas are replicated by remote learning: lack of laptops, no high-speed access to the internet, little infrastructure to learn new software, a transition to presenting lessons via computer and the effect of large and impersonal classes.

Most important is the lack of empathetic contact between teachers and students, the difficulties that younger students have in focusing, and added burdens students with Individual Educational Plans and English language learners face.

One of the most obvious problems is student engagement. Not a lot of data have been collected, but the Chicago Public Schools released data that showed during the week of May 11th, only 60% of students logged on at least three days a week and 25% did not login at all. These metrics show the challenges educators face. [32]

Punishing students who fail to log in is counterproductive to a learning environment. Yet in Michigan's

affluent Oakland county a 15-year-old student with learning problems was sentenced to a juvenile facility during the pandemic. Her crime: failing to complete her online homework. Taken out of court in handcuffs, Grace was in detention from mid-May until August 11. Of course she was African American. Fortunately the Black Lives Matter movement protested and eventually she was released to her mother. [33]

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) released a report on June 21st that called for a safe return to school in the fall. The thrust of the document is that the negative effects on students from being out of school outweigh the risks of being in school. They pointed out that COVID-19 appears to act differently than the flu in children and that the risk of severe effects and rates of transmission may also be lower.

Since the AAP's report, the careful study of Korean children I mentioned earlier showed a differentiation of transmission between those under and over the age of 10. This contradicts some of the AAP's more hopeful assumptions, as does the July 30 "Children and COVID-19: State Data Report" the AAP and Children's Hospital Association released. It concluded at least 338,000 U.S. children had tested positive, with 97,000 in the previous two weeks. [34]

It was also disappointing to read AAP's suggestion that three-foot distancing of students may be sufficient. The research documenting aerosol spread strongly supports a greater distance. AAP seems to say that the educational needs of students supersede health needs. Why should society be forced to make such a choice? [35]

Staff and the parents of schoolchildren fear school will be a site marked expendable just so the "economy" can resume. No wonder a Chicago Public Schools survey showed about 80% of Black and Latino families said they wouldn't send their children back for in-person instruction. [36]

Precautions to Make Schools Safe?

We know that prolonged exposure to aerosolized viral particles is a key risk. If the numbers of COVID-19 cases in the community were low, or going down, what measures would need to be in place to prevent schools from being another potential hotspot of infection and spread?

Massive amounts of money would be necessary to retrofit schools and hire more staff. The American Federation of Teachers estimates that schools will need \$116 billion to provide for more staffing (instructional, health, and custodial), PPEs, cleaning supplies, transportation, technology and social and emotional support. The School Superintendents Association estimates the cost at \$200 billion.

Currently no money has been allocated by Congress, and many state budgets may lose money this year and next in what was an already underfunded budget.

Measures that need to be taken in schools include dramatically cutting class size, with no more than a dozen children in elementary classes, improving the school building's infrastructure, and hiring more teachers, paraprofessionals, nurses and social workers as well as custodians.

Teachers have always fought for a reduction of class size. Education works better when students get more individualized attention. From personal experience I can say that when the number of students goes above the low 20s in high school, and even lower in the elementary grades, it is no longer possible to check in with individual students. In the middle of a pandemic dramatically lower class size is not only pedagogically better, but the reduction will make it more difficult to transmit viral particles.

Instead, the push to open schools regardless of threats to health is threatening to cause an exodus of older teachers if they are not allowed to work remotely. This comes at a time

when more, not less, staffing will be needed amid a teacher shortage.

Most important is improving the ventilation — enabling windows to open and updating the air filtration system with High Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) or MERV 13 filters capable of removing viral aerosol particles and circulating air between the room and the outside. Additionally, handwashing stations need to be installed in classrooms, and provisions of PPEs like masks and hand sanitizer made available at all times.

There has to be attention to working out details such as how to limit interactions in common areas, creating small cohorts or pods of students that are isolated from other cohorts, providing time for individual students to wash their hands, and installing lids on toilets (yes plumes of virus particles can be emitted when toilets flush). This involves planning and is extraordinarily expensive, far beyond the pale costs suggested.

Many schools are notoriously filthy, a result of cutting staff and/or outsourcing cleaning to private companies like Sodexo or Aramark. While viral transmission through touch is not thought to be as significant as aerosol transmission, maintaining a clean building will help, and reinforce the idea that schools are taking all possible measures to keep people safe. Additionally, many schools have severe structural problems, as the Detroit teachers demonstrated just a few years ago when they struck over rats in the school and crumbling ceilings.

In the ideal return to school, there would be daily or frequent testing of students and staff. That would detect infections earlier and limit transmission, but in absence of mass or targeted testing there will be confirmed cases of infection and protocols need to be in place to deal with that. Smaller class sizes, cohorts, and limited interactions will reduce the number who need to be traced, but anyone who has been in contact with an infected person needs to be retested and perhaps go into 14-day quarantine. Provisions need to be made in expectation this would happen.

Robust social and economic supports for students and their families must exist to enable them to quarantine when necessary. If ever the need for universal health care was doubted, today it is imperative.

What have schools done to prepare for reopening? Generally, they were asked to prepare three plans: for online instruction, for in-person classes and for a combination of the two. To set up the physical school they probably got more sanitizer, masks and thermometers and installed some handwashing stations.

Perhaps they have done some planning about minimizing contact between classes, like canceling music and art and having children eat their lunch at their desks.

The experience of online learning in the spring should have spurred districts and departments of education to be feverishly working to improve access to the internet and to plan for how the content of classes can be better presented online. For the most part that did not happen as they hoped that the virus would “magically” disappear.

However, Betsy DeVos and several state legislatures are attempting to inflict damage on public school teachers who are highly unionized and willing to fight for quality education and for their rights. DeVos has ruled that public and private schools must split federal funds provided under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act, regardless of schools’ economic needs.

A few legislatures are considering bills that would mandate that districts administer testing at all grade levels. Since this would require a report to appropriations subcommittees, it may be used as a hammer over those districts who “fail.”

Such bills show the limitations of a rigid standards-based curriculum where administrators are focused on meeting state learning goals. Actually, students and staff alike are intensely interested in this crisis as it plays out. In biology it would be natural to adapt the curriculum to aspects of viral reproduction, how viruses hijack

cellular metabolism, the cellular nature of life, how the virus enters cells, the immune system response and so on. The nature of the scientific process and research would be demonstrated and studied as it plays out in real time.

Mathematics could look at modelling viral growth rates, economic costs to produce vaccines and tests, and how data are analyzed through statistical analysis. History and literature might study the numerous examples of plagues and pandemics including the Black Death, the 1919 influenza epidemic, and the introduction of smallpox to the Americas and its decimation of the Native American population. All subjects can be personalized and made more meaningful.

Are Schools Ready to Open?

From a safety perspective, no. The lack of testing and public health measures has led to widespread rising COVID-19 cases in most of the country. Counterposing the needs of in-person student education versus safety is unfair to children, parents and school staff.

Proponents prioritizing the reopening of schools range from those like pediatricians who do understand the educational and social needs of children to politicians like Trump and DeVos, who cynically want to open schools to further their agendas. They have never supported adequately funding public education.

Polling released on July 27 by the Kaiser Family Foundation indicates that by a two-to-one margin, the public believes, for safety reasons, schools should open later rather than earlier. Among parents of color the ratio is three to one. By 71% to 22% people believe that schools need more resources to open safely among parents of color the numbers go to 82% to 17%.

Among parents, high or moderate concern over the possibility of teachers, students or family members becoming infected range from 79% to

69% and parents of color show about 10% higher concern. Parents are also worried about their children falling behind academically and need services provided by schools like breakfasts and lunches. [37]

The prudent course is to take the measures necessary to control the virus in the community and provide the resources that will improve remote learning. Meanwhile, the plans should begin to provide the resources for a safe reopening of schools when the viral presence in the community is low and declining.

The less-than-transparent process of how or whether to open schools by local districts and the lack of clear guidelines by agencies like the CDC who suggest social distancing “if feasible,” make these mostly unilateral decisions particularly stressful for parents and school staff. People are rightly distrustful of decisions that are centered neither on science nor safety.

Most importantly, teachers and parents have by and large been left out of school planning. Safety committees containing parents, students, teachers and staff need to be set up and empowered to have public discussions on what measures need to be taken for schools to safely reopen. These need to continue once schools begin again.

Teacher and community pressure have prevented a number of schools from opening, including the large districts of Chicago and Los Angeles. The American Federation of Teachers has taken the unprecedented step of allowing locals to strike if safe conditions are not in place to allow schools to open. [38]

Studying inequities in society that show greater effect in marginalized Black and Brown communities during COVID-19, and the Movement for Black Lives, could empower students to view education as more than subjects they are forced to take without really knowing how they will use them. The relevance of education could be demonstrated. The neglect of both education and public health could be linked to the vast social movement that has grown in response

to systemic racism and inequality.

No one can predict when a vaccine will be developed and how effective it

will be. Until then, we should continue to demand the conditions that will provide a safe and equal education

today and when schools reopen.

Source September-October 2020, [ATC 208](#).

Nonviolence and Black Self-Defense

16 September 2020, by **Dick J. Reavis**

“Sit-ins at lunch counters, Freedom Rides, walking picket lines — these were all direct actions at and inside white-owned facilities, and for tactical and strategic reasons, required an acceptance of nonviolent discipline,” Cobb observes in *This Nonviolence Stuff’ll Get You Killed* (2014). But, he continues, “as the Freedom Movement began to emphasize work in rural communities, it became clear that nonviolence—both the practice and the idea—had its limits.”

While some central movement figures like James Lawson were committed to a pacifist framework, someone like the late John R. Salter, Jr. (Hunter Gray) who sat in with his students at Jackson lunch counters, was definitely not.

In fact, many direct actions were supported by defense squads that discretely stayed in the background, defending activists after the sun went down. This was especially true in Mississippi.

Most defense squads in Mississippi arose from kinship groups or circles of friends who belonged to the National Association of Colored People (NAACP), the state’s largest civil rights organization. Despite its usual hesitation about activism, the NAACP never formally disavowed self-defense. Indeed its most celebrated martyr, Mississippi state chairman Medgar Evers, kept a pistol and a rifle in his car.

Defending Mass Action with Guns

Robert F. Williams, with his wife Mabel, organized to defend their

community against Klan activities, and were forced to flee the country.

The controversy over nonviolence and self-defense began when Robert F. Williams, a World War II Marine, returned to his hometown, Monroe, North Carolina (pop. 10,882), in 1955. He joined a small NAACP chapter, and within two years became president, expanded its membership and persuaded it to take an activist turn. First, “without any friction at all,” they won the right for Blacks to use the municipal library.

The NAACP chapter then set its sights on a whites-only swimming pool, built by Franklin Roosevelt’s Works Progress Administration and maintained with city funds. The NAACP did not demand integration, but instead asked that a pool be built in Newtown, Monroe’s small ghetto, or if not, that the existing pool be reserved on two days each week for Black swimmers. When local authorities refused, the Monroe chapter began months of protests around the pool’s perimeter.

The Ku Klux Klan staged counterdemonstrations; on some days hundreds of white people turned out. Scuffles broke out, guns were flashed and sometimes fired. Williams responded by chartering a National Rifle Association club and recruiting a coterie of veterans as members. Nights were tense as many as 20 stood guard at his house or that of the NAACP chapter’s vice-president, physician Dr. Albert E. Perry.

During the summer of 1957, participants in a Klan motorcade through Newtown fired into Perry’s house. According to Williams, who

recounted his story five years later in *Negroes with Guns*, “We shot it out with the Klan and repelled their attack and the Klan didn’t have any more stomach for this type of fight.”

But the Kluxers didn’t cease their counterdemonstrations and motorcades. During what can only be described as an interracial free-for-all on Aug. 27, 1961, some 300 angry African Americans halted a car that they believed had been seen bearing a banner with the legend “Open Season on Coons.”

Inside was Bruce Stegall and his wife, both white. When the mob threatened the couple, Williams offered the Stegalls refuge in his home. For taking them in, he and several others were later indicted on trumped-up state kidnapping charges.

Forced to flee, Williams, his wife, Mabel, and son were spirited out of the country by defense committees in the United States and Canada.

When to Employ Self-Defense?

The difference between violent and nonviolent actions often took surprising or unpredictable forms. Cobb recounts an August, 1962 incident after he drove 18 people from Ruleville (1960 pop. 1,902) to Indianola (pop. 6,714), the county seat, so they could take the required literacy test. [39] But they were refused permission and returned home. That night raiders fired into the house of Joe and Rebecca McDonald, both in their 60s. Although they had a shotgun, they chose to protect

themselves by lying down in a cast iron bathtub.

One the other hand, one afternoon in early August, 1964, the sons of Janie Brewer — Veto, Jesse, Luther and Haden — attempted to register to vote in Tallahatchie county, Mississippi. Because she expected nightriders to assault her house that night, Brewer, then in her 90s, ordered her sons and a couple of visiting civil rights activists to lie in surrounding cotton fields, shotguns and rifles at the ready.

Meanwhile she and Margaret Block, a SNCC organizer, prepared Molotov cocktails in Brewer's kitchen. Block told Cobb that Brewer was "spilling gas everywhere. And I'm like 'Dam[n] if we get burned up in here, everyone was going to swear the Klan did it [and] it's going to be Mrs. Brewer burning us up.'"

Block reported that "As the sheriff and a 'truckload' of Klansmen approached the farmhouse ... someone shown a floodlight on them. Others fired into the air. Brewer stood on the front porch ready hurl a Molotov cocktail. Everyone, including the county sheriff, fled. Night riders never returned to the Brewer farm."

These two stories illustrate some of the complications of the doctrines of nonviolence and self-defense in the movement. Nonviolence meant finding a way to endure. Self-defense meant using fists or firearms — even Molotov cocktails — to force assailants to desist. But the two were often intertwined; split-second decisions had to be made. And this was particularly true in the rural Deep South.

In his 2013 *We Will Shoot Back* Akinyele Omowale Umoja, a professor at Georgia State University, recounts the history of armed self-defense in Mississippi. Like Cobb, he does not ignore its perils, as when, with others, Johnnie Nobles of McComb (1960 pop. 12,020) spent a night on guard in a dry cleaning shop that was a refuge for activists.

During their vigil, an unseen figure stopped outside and the guard force heard a thump on the porch. Thinking it was a bomb, Noble told Umoja, "we

throw the door open and had guns on him." It took a few seconds for the guards to recognize the presumptive bomb-thrower — as a neighborhood newspaper carrier. Fortunately, no shot was fired.

"Black defenders who could have opened up with killing gunfire usually refrained. In place after place, a few rounds fired into the air were enough to cause terrorists to flee," Cobb notes.

Organizers found that older Mississippians were especially averse to the idea of passive resistance. David Dennis, the state director of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), a national group dedicated to pacifist means, had an early experience when he first visited Canton (pop. 9,707).

A local CORE organizer asked him to speak to a supporter, C.O. Chinn, who habitually sat, armed, in his pickup truck outside the church where mass meetings were held. Dennis recalled:

I went outside to talk to him. He's sitting in the back of his truck with a shotgun across his lap and a pistol by his side. I introduced myself; told him about CORE's nonviolent philosophy. He listened. Then, very calmly he told me: 'This is my town and these are my people. I'm here to protect my people and even if you don't like this I'm not going anywhere. So maybe you better leave.'

Although defense squads did not prevent dozens of assassinations, both Cobb and Umoja argue that they repelled nightriders and prevented assaults on demonstrators.

Despite the formal profession of pacifism by the organizations that organized widely across the state, armed self-defense became orthodox in 1966, when those who sponsored the Meredith March invited the Deacons for Defense and Justice, an armed group from northern Louisiana, to provide protection.

After Medgar Evers' assassination in 1963, his older brother Charles [who

just died in July 2020, age 95 — ed.] came back from Chicago to become the NAACP's state director. He tapped as an aide Rudy Shields, a Chicago friend, former paratrooper and Mississippi native. Umoja pays particular attention to Shields because he sees him as a transitional figure in the Movement's mid-'60s shift from pacifism to self-defense, from civil rights to Black Power.

In Natchez (pop. 24,000) the pistol-toting Shields formed a group composed mostly of middle-aged military veterans to protect a 1965 voter registration campaign and a consumer boycott that Evers called. Shields also deployed a squad of younger men, mostly in their late teens, to harass people who ignored boycott orders.

The names of those who didn't observe the boycott were read in NAACP meetings. According to a local activist whom Umoja cites, "Folks go shop, break the boycott, they didn't get home with the damn groceries... 'cause somebody was waiting for them when they got there."

Umoja probably overstates the charge by asserting that "The Natchez Movement resorted to terror within the Black community to enforce its decisions." But enforcement worked. After three months "twenty-three White businesses conceded to hiring or promoting Black workers to the position of clerk," he notes.

Shields subsequently became legendary for boycotts in some two dozen smaller — and seemingly hopeless — towns. These included settlements like Belzoni (pop. 4,142), Centreville (pop. 1,229) Fayetteville (pop. 16,250), Port Gibson (pop. 2,861), Woodville (pop. 1,856) and even Byhalia (pop. 702).

The Mississippi Sovereignty Commission, whose job was spying on the movement, reported that the 1968 Belzoni boycott was 80% effective. Conservatives in the movement, who initially regarded enforcement not as self-defense, but as "retaliatory violence," soon held their tongues. But boycotts were not telegenic, and they usually took months to win. In 1969

the Mississippi legislature outlawed them.

“For the strategy of nonviolence to work in Mississippi, the federal government would have to intervene with force to provide security from the forces of white supremacist terrorism,” Umoja observes.

Dr. King wrangled National Guard protection from President Johnson for at least portions of the Selma and Meredith marches, but when organizers in the South reported threats to FBI agents, they were usually denied assistance.

Even field staffers for CORE and SNCC turned for protection to armed volunteers. Shields transformed informal self-defense groups into militias, setting up makeshift rifle ranges, establishing discipline and chains of command. He sometimes organized them under the aegis of the Deacons.

Often merely the sight of the Deacons defused dangers, as in 1967 in Centreville, when parties to a white mob trained guns on a voting rights demonstrators. Twenty-five members of the Wilkinson county Deacons showed up. “We pulled in here and started unloading all of this heavy artillery and they loaded up and left,” former Deacon James Young told Umoja.

Defense in the Delta

Most of the actions that Cobb and Umoja chronicle happened in the Mississippi Delta. That designation is geographically accurate, but leftists from an earlier generation would have instead applied a demographic term, the Black Belt, the zone where some 200 contiguous counties once had an African-American majority.

Mississippi in 1960 was divided into 82 counties, 29 of them with Black majorities. Twenty-five of those were in the Delta, a stretch running as many as four counties deep along the Mississippi River, the state’s border with Louisiana. Of three dozen towns

Cobb and Umoja mention as sites of movement campaigns, at least two-thirds were in the Mississippi Black Belt.

Repression had always been more severe in the Black Belt. Self-defense was a tradition there, not anything new. I learned this as a civil rights worker in Alabama. Most Black Belt families kept a shotgun or rifle in their home.

In 1966, a Black farmer in Marengo county — Mr. Agee as I knew him — was sent to Washington D.C. to testify about discrimination in the federal agricultural programs. Teddy Kennedy led him to his Senate office, let him rock in JFK’s chair, and introduced him to an FBI agent, who gave Agee his card, saying “Call us if you have any trouble when you get home.”

Agee did have trouble, the night after he returned. A car passed his house and its occupants fired shorts in its direction. Relatives and civil rights’ workers gathered in the wake of the shots — the relatives with weapons in their hands.

One of the civil rights workers telephoned Kennedy’s FBI man. He said that the drive-by was “a local matter” in which the Bureau couldn’t intervene. The agent then called the county sheriff’s office. None of the locals would have called there because its deputies were rumored to be Klansmen.

Sure enough, deputies came out, four of them. They roughed-up and arrested a pair who had gathered to prevent the shooters’ return: a nephew of the farmer and me.

Changing Circumstances

The passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, eliminating poll taxes and literacy tests, made Black Power plausible in the Black Belt. Black Power meant sweeping what had been White Power out of municipal and county offices, especially police and sheriff’s departments. By the close of the ’60s, most of the doctrine’s proponents were so weary and wary of whites that

both SNCC and CORE had jawboned their white staffers into leaving the Movement.

Although most African Americans in the counties where Shields organized wanted civic and income parity, many did not welcome desegregation across the board. Among other things, it promised to decimate Black-owned businesses and institutions that had struggled for solvency for a century, including the public schools.

Lewis Williams, an army veteran and self-defender, told Umoja that “Rudy felt like if we were separated, we were better and we were stronger, because when you have white people teaching your children, then what they get is the white concept of life.”

In 1974 Shields took his talents to the United League, a Mississippi organization headed by Alfred “Skip” Robinson, a bricklayer and longtime figure in the Black Belt. Robinson’s home had been bombed in 1965, but the following year he’d fearlessly organized a boycott in Holly Springs (pop. 5,621).

As an independent grassroots group, the UL wasn’t incorporated and was therefore was immune to civil suits. That gave it an advantage over the NAACP, which by then had been shackled by suits brought under the anti-boycotting law.

Thanks to the UL, the Mississippi Movement thrived during the ’70s, when liberation efforts were flagging in the rest of the South. But in 1981 Robinson left the United League to join the Nation of Islam. Umoja writes that the UL was unable to survive “the division created in its ranks by the conversion of Robinson and his associates to the NOI and their repudiation of insurgent activism.”

Envisioning a Black Republic

Given the existence of a majority-Black section of the South, the idea of building an independent government there seemed to be an alternative to humiliation and repression. One section of the Northern Black Power

movement called for a Republic of New Africa. At its founding convention in 1968 it chose Robert F. Williams as its president.

Through the years of exile, hosting the short wave program "Radio Free Dixie" and publishing his book and monthly magazine *The Crusader*, Williams had become known as the intellectual author of *Black Power*. As he wrote in *Negroes with Guns*,

"...We must create a black militancy of our own. We must direct our own struggle, achieve our own destiny. ... The traditional white liberal leadership in civil rights organizations, and even white radicals, generally cannot understand what our struggle is about."

Umoja sees the Republic of New Africa as an embodiment of the Black Power idea. Several members living in Detroit moved to Mississippi and began the process of building the economic and political framework to

carry out their program. Chokwe Lumumba, a movement lawyer, was a key player who moved to Jackson, Mississippi with his family.

Elected to city council, Choke worked to develop and publicize the Jackson Program, whose basis was self-determination. But shortly after being elected mayor in 2013, he died. Today his son, Chokwe Antar Lumumba, is mayor. The current Jackson Plan has both electoral and non-electoral components. A group called Cooperation Jackson coordinates several cooperatives. [40]

Robert F. Williams returned to the United States in 1969, but it took six years for the charges against him to be dismissed. He settled near Detroit and spoke on several occasions to political meetings as a Black revolutionary. But he didn't find a way to work with the Republic of New Africa, and died in Michigan 25 years ago. Rosa Parks gave the eulogy at his funeral, saying:

"The sacrifices he made, and what he did, should go down in history and never be forgotten."

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Source September-October 2020 [Against the Current 208](#).

Macron on an imperial visit

15 September 2020, by Joseph Daher

At the end of his latest visit to Beirut, the second in the space of a month after the double explosion of 4 August, Macron notably obtained the commitment of the bourgeois confessional parties of the country to quickly form a government, after the appointment of the new Prime Minister, Mustapha Adib.

A "mission government"

This "mission government", in the formula employed by Macron, must implement the "reforms" demanded in particular by France and the IMF. These "reforms" are based on the terms of the Paris conference of April 2018 which reserves more than 11 billion dollars in loans and grants for Lebanon in exchange for the Lebanese

government's commitment to develop public-private partnerships, reduce the level of debt and enact austerity measures.

All the dominant confessional political parties in Lebanon agree with these measures. The government of national unity made up of all these parties and led by former Prime Minister Saad Hariri, before his resignation following the outbreak of the popular protest movement in October 2019, had moreover provided for the merger or suppression of certain public institutions and the privatization of the electricity sector, as part of its 2020 budget plan. All these measures met the requirements of the World Bank, the IMF and the CEDRE agreement.

The French president announced that he would return to Lebanon in

December to follow the progress made by the Lebanese government, and that he would invite Lebanese representatives to Paris in October to a meeting organized in conjunction with a new conference of international aid.

Macron is therefore continuing his efforts to assist the dominant confessional parties to maintain their power in the country by calling on them to unite to carry out these "reforms" in a government headed by a new prime minister who has the support of all these forces.

In Iraq against "foreign

interference” (sic)

Following his visit to Lebanon with great fanfare, the French president travelled to Baghdad to meet with the country's authorities. Since October 2019, there has been a major popular protest movement in Iraq that challenges, as in Lebanon, the confessional and neoliberal system. Officially, Macron's visit aimed to launch, in conjunction with the United Nations, "an initiative to support a process of sovereignty". The French president notably affirmed his support for Iraq in the face of "foreign interference" (sic).

The country has been the subject of sharp tensions between these two most important partners, the United States and Iran, since the coming to power of Donald Trump in the United States and his policy of "maximum pressure" against Iran, but especially since the double elimination in January 2020 by the White House of the former commander-in-chief of the elite al-Quds unit within the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, Kassem Soleimani, and Abu Mahdi al - Muhandis, former de facto leader of

the paramilitary coalition of Hashd el-Shaabi, affiliated with the Islamic Republic of Iran. Even though there has not been too violent an escalation between Washington and Tehran following the assassinations, more than thirty rockets have targeted American soldiers and diplomats in Iraq since October 2019. Some 5,000 soldiers and US diplomats are still deployed in the country, while Iran has significant allies in Iraq, including paramilitary militias affiliated with Tehran. Washington and Tehran collaborated for years in Iraq following the invasion of the country in 2003 by the occupation forces of the United States and Britain. Moreover, the current Iraqi Prime Minister, Mustafa al-Kadhimi, is trying to balance between Washington and Tehran.

France seeks to extend its influence

During his visit Macron also affirmed that the war against "Islamic State"

is not over and that France will continue to support the Iraqi government as part of the international coalition to fight against jihadist forces. Since 2014, French forces have been engaged in Iraq as part of Operation Chammal. French officials have said they want to quickly resume training and arming Iraqi security forces, suspended during the pandemic period. France also allocated a loan of one billion euros to help rebuild Iraq in January 2019. France's interests in Iraq are not, however, comparable to those in Lebanon, where Paris still has significant political and economic influence

The French imperialist power is trying through the visits of its president to Lebanon and Iraq to maintain and extend its political, economic and military influence in the region. In addition, the French state is also seeking to show its usefulness to US imperialism by playing an intermediary role for Washington with the Islamic Republic of Iran in these countries and on other issues such as Iranian nuclear power.

9 September 2020

Aegean Sea: urgent anti-war mobilization needed

14 September 2020, by **Andreas Sartzekis**

This is known and indisputable - the Turkish and Kurdish refugees in Greece are there to bear witness to it - but is not enough to explain everything about the current situation: basically, we can say that the current problem arises from the Treaty of Lausanne (1923) and other treaties concluded thereafter, restricting the possibilities of the former Ottoman Empire acting as it pleases on the Aegean Sea, even very close to its coast. In 1995, threats of war had been made by Turkey in the face of Greece's desire to extend the limit of its territorial waters, and in 1996

there was the episode of the uninhabited islet of Imia, near Kalymnos, during which nationalist and militarist outbidding almost provoked war. There have long been Turkish claims relating to maritime traffic and sovereignty over a large part of the Eastern Aegean.

What makes the current situation explosive are 3 elements:

- social misery, particularly in Turkey, but obviously very strong also in Greece with an ultra-neoliberal government cynically arguing that if

so many young people are unemployed, it is because they have not been trained how to write a CV! The exploitation of a circumstantial patriotism, relayed by the mainstream private media with financial assistance from the Mitsotakis government, could constitute a good diversion, in the dreams of the leaders of the Greek right. In Turkey, Defence Minister Akar evokes the "Blue Homeland", a concept of the nationalist far-right for maritime "reconquest" to the west of Turkey.
- the presence of hydrocarbons in the disputed areas: interests are very

keen on both sides, knowing that on the Greek side, the government already wants to have these deposits exploited by the oil giants Exxon Mobil, Eni and Total.

- the role of the military in the policies of the two governments and the interests of arms dealers. Both NATO members, the two countries devote insane amounts to arms spending: Turkey in 2019 spent 20.4 billion, or 2.7% of its GDP, up 86% since 2010; and Greece, where the memorandums plunged a large part of the population into poverty, is one of the top 3 NATO countries in 2019 in terms of the share of military spending in GDP. And while the staff of Greek hospitals are fighting every day against the poverty of their institutions, tirelessly demanding job creation, while with a worrying rise in Covid contamination, teachers demand a maximum of 15 students in their classes, Mitsotakis is seriously considering budgeting for 10 billion euros in military spending ...

Border demarcations to better pollute?

It has been stressed: the question of maritime limits is an old question, not to be overlooked. However, it is obvious that Athens tends to consider the whole Aegean Sea as a "Greek lake", and the government refuses to consider anything which is presented as an attack on national sovereignty and on international law, even if within the big imperialist institutions, the tendency is to wish for relaxation and the opening of dialogue between the two governments. Several sensitive questions arise: the limits of territorial waters, which Greece would like to extend from 6 to 12 nautical miles, which in the Aegean would be seen as a *casus belli* by Erdogan; the limits of the submarine continental shelf, which in practice can go up to 550 km from the coast (we can understand the futility of discussions on this point about Greek islands 2 km from the Turkish coast!); and more strongly since the fairly recent definition of the concept of exclusive economic zone (EEZ), an area where a country gives itself the right to preserve balances but above all to

exploit (fishing, fuel and so on). These notions of maritime law overlap in the Aegean case with other considerations such as those of the "closed sea" which make delimitations even more difficult. Suddenly, Erdogan wanted to illustrate his discourse on "reconquest" last winter by passing or rather by imposing an agreement on the Libyan government on the delimitation of an EEZ between the two countries, blithely encroaching on what Greece defines as its responsibility, and then imposed a *de facto* recognition by sending a seabed exploration vessel flanked by military ships. To better reject the fait accompli, in June the Greek government signed an agreement with Italy defining an EEZ in the Ionian Sea (suddenly, Erdogan wants to "protect" Albania!). Then in August an EEZ was agreed with Egypt, this last zone overlapping that established by Turkey.

In the present situation, what is at stake beyond the strategic aspects is obviously not the concern to preserve natural spaces: on the contrary, all these manoeuvres have only one goal, the maximum exploitation of the seabed for the greater profit of the oil companies. However, the Mediterranean has for a long time already been a sea threatened by very high pollution: in addition to denouncing the inter-bourgeois race for profit, what is imperative is therefore also to reject any new source of pollution in the Mediterranean. This is all the more fundamental when we see the contempt of the Mitsotakis government for the defence of the environment in order to better serve its polluting friends of all kinds.

Nationalist poison in Greece

Last winter, Erdogan's sordid operation bringing thousands of refugees to the Greek borders (Evros river, north-eastern islands) to push a certain number to cross into Greece, created a climate of hysterical nationalism on the Greek right and far right, which spoke of an "invasion" of the territory and set up, alongside soldiers deployed in large numbers,

para-military groups openly infiltrated by the Nazi criminals of Golden Dawn and other European fascists. The mainstream media then hinted at a bellicose discourse on territorial integrity that anti-racist mobilisations were struggling to fight against. Today, this nationalist discourse is starting again, in defence of "maritime borders", but also in the face of the invoked danger of invasions of small islands close to Turkey, and Greek nationalists can obviously thank Erdogan: recently, the caudillo of Ankara threatened to invade the small island of Kastellorizo, accusing the Greek army of accumulating forces there. In this situation, it goes without saying that we must firmly denounce the bellicose intentions of Erdogan, but more generally challenge the nationalism and militarism shared by the two regimes.

Without forgetting another very concrete aspect: the patriotic discourse totally ignores the concrete reality of these small islands! Thus, concerning Kastellorizo, a deputy from Syriza, Papachristopoulos, recalled in a recent forum that there is no pharmacy there, that the health centre is under-staffed, that the 50 young people in school are deprived of half the teachers needed, and that relations with their close neighbours in the Turkish town of Kas are and continue to be very good... Money for social needs and friendship between peoples, not for weapons of war!

The dangerous game of the imperialist "allies"

Faced with a situation that could quickly degenerate into open conflict, everyone acts according to their economic and/or strategic concerns. Thus, Stoltenberg, the secretary of NATO of which the two countries are members, is accused by Athenian officials of allowing the situation to deteriorate so as not to annoy Turkey, an important relay of the United States in the region. The USA are also procrastinating with regard to Turkey: they would not like to see their Turkish customer increasing the number of arms it orders from Russia.

On the EU side, the Greek insistence on economic measures against Turkey has failed to convince for the time being the German presidency: it seems that Merkel's first concern is not to push Erdogan to use the refugees again to put pressure on the EU. The only common wish is the "opening of dialogue" between the two countries. This diplomatic position in fact conceals a basic tendency to liberal "laissez faire": the impression given is that the envisaged prospect would be to let the situation deteriorate until a military incident from which the various authorities would push for negotiations. In any case, whether the imperialists believe in an illusory way that they can control the situation or this is only a pretext, the threat is really there, as pointed out by *PRIN*, the journal of the NAR (New Left Current): in the current period of crisis, competition between the bourgeoisies can find an outlet in war, and it is out of the question to underestimate the threat of a regional war .

And this militarist slant is strongly illustrated by the position of the French government: Macron rushed to send military boats, planes and the Charles de Gaulle aircraft carrier to the area. Competing in brash statements with Erdogan, he seeks to build support among the traditionally Hellenophile French public, and of course immediately obtained the support of bellicose ultra-neoliberal Daniel Cohn-Bendit in a column entitled "We are all Greek Europeans" (*Liberation*, 17 August, 2020). He speaks of the success of "structural reforms as deep as they are violent" to designate the ruins left by the troika in Greece, and also pays homage to the French president: "By sending military reinforcements to the Aegean Sea, Emmanuel Macron saved the honour of Europe". It is therefore urgent to recall the obvious: Macron

acts above all as a sales representative for Total in the Mediterranean, and the sending of planes and warships is, beyond strategic aims, a commercial demonstration, to encourage the Greek state's purchase of frigates, Rafale and the modernization of Mirage and Exocet and Scalp missiles!

There is therefore nothing to expect from "international diplomacy", and on the contrary we have to be very concerned about the headlong rush, which cannot be contained for long: thus, Erdogan was apparently pressing for a Greek ship to be sunk, which his military hierarchy refused, while on the Greek side, a national military committee evokes the sending of hundreds of mobilization sheets to reservists.

An urgent and essential mobilization

Faced with this situation, we could expect at least an anti-war campaign from the Greek left: it is quite the opposite among the reformists! Indeed, Syriza, walking in the nationalist footsteps of Pasok, criticized the EEZ agreement with Egypt because it takes away a little of Greece's maritime sovereignty, while Tsipras for his part boasts of having made Erdogan back down a few years by brandishing the military threat! Only a few voices criticize this orientation, criticizing the EEZ agreement with Egypt as a provocation preventing the opening of talks with Turkey. On the side of the KKE (the Greek Communist Party), there is denunciation of the imperialist game aimed at removing Greece's sovereignty! In this case, the Greek reformist left is therefore more

nationalist than Prime Minister Mitsotakis, whose strategy is particularly lacking in clarity: in spite of posing as "head of the nation", with the probable objective of negotiations (at the International Court of Justice in The Hague), he rejects for now the bellicose discourse, while leaving his far right (Samaras and fascist defectors) and a good part of the media to propagate it.

Fortunately, in this tense situation, the tendency for a good part of the Greek anti-capitalist left (organizations like NAR, SEK and Synantisi) is to mobilize on a triple axis:

- against nationalism, for international solidarity and the fight for the defence of social gains. It is therefore decisive that the international fight also includes a battle in each country against local capitalists: there is no question of going to be killed for the interests of the Greek or Turkish bourgeoisie.
- against militarism and militarization, for peace between peoples.
- against maritime drilling and for the protection of the environment in the Aegean Sea.

If these axes are put forward with some nuances by all, we are already seeing some concrete results: thus a joint appeal by NAR and the Turkish Labour Party, other Greek-Turkish contacts being in progress. And also acts of significant symbolic importance, such as the inhabitants of Datsa, a small Turkish town opposite the Greek island of Halki, unfurling a huge banner "peace will win" in both languages on the port. The objective now should be to try to regroup forces for a broad unitary movement to develop in Greece, Turkey but also all over Europe, for a Europe and an Aegean without borders!

Athens, 6 September 2020

When Chinese eat grass: the economic crisis amid the coronavirus pandemic

13 September 2020, by **Au Loong-Yu**

Early 2020 witnessed a second blow to China's exports - the coronavirus pandemic.

Signs of economic contraction

Although China's export dependency has been steadily declining for the last decade, one quarter of active labour in the country (200 million workers) still depend on the export sector for jobs. The three most important coastal cities are Shanghai, Shenzhen and Guangzhou. They are all heavily dependent on foreign investment, which accounts for between 60 and 70 percent of the cities' GDP. No wonder we saw a contraction of the national GDP by 6.8 percent year-on-year in the first quarter of 2020. For the first time in thirty years, China has abandoned an annual GDP target for 2020.

Official data on unemployment stands at 5.9 percent, but no one believes it. One of the major flaws of official figures is that they only count those who possess urban household registration. So they exclude rural migrant workers. A Diplomat report put the real figure at 12 percent, and this figure is widely agreed. One report has put it as high as 20 percent, or 70 million unemployed. In China, the party continues to massage figures to make its performance look good.

2020 may also be the year when public revenue growth becomes negative for the first time in thirty years. This may further put pension funds at risk as they have been running out of money despite public subsidies. The recession in the real estate market, which has been one of the main pillars of growth, is also bad news; municipal governments now find themselves unable to sell as much land at a favourable price to developers as before and have seen a drop in their revenue as well.

This will also affect their ability to pay

back loans - municipal governments are heavily indebted. Since the 2008 financial crisis, local governments have set up Local Government Financing Vehicles (LGFVs) to borrow money to invest in infrastructure so as to boost demand (they also allow officials to steal public money from state projects). Much of the debt is hidden, but it is estimated at between 16 and 42 trillion RMB (between 2.3 and 6 trillion US dollars).

A report from the Bank of International Settlements put China's total debt at 256 percent of GDP. It warned that it is more than high enough to lead to a banking crisis. However, one needs to be aware of the fact that, unlike the debt of many similar middle-income countries, China's debt is mainly domestic, denominated in RMB, not foreign currency. So it is subject to more governmental control.

Promoting domestic consumption

With the deterioration in China's relationship with the US, Beijing's most recent response to its sharp decline in exports is to promote the "domestic circulation system" - boost domestic demand. This demand has two sources - investment and household consumption. Raising investment is not the answer as China has already suffered from over-investment. The abnormally high investment rate of more than 40 percent of GDP is the result of a long-term industrialisation strategy promoted by the state. But it has depressed workers' wages and peasants' income, and so it has also depressed household consumption. While household consumption of 60-70 percent of GDP is considered normal internationally, in China it has always been low, on average as low as 50 percent between 1952 and 2019. [41] What is more alarming is its continuous fall, from 47.7 percent in

2000 to 34.6 percent in 2010; since then it has risen again but only very slightly, to 38.8 percent in 2019.

To correct this would require a redistribution of wealth, with a significant rise in the income share of working people, to enable them to buy what is domestically produced. The regime has long realised the danger of such a structural problem, and has, for over a decade, repeatedly called for reform to raise the wage share of GDP. However, they have failed to do this because increasing the income of the poor is against their own interest. They prefer to solve the problem by exporting surplus capital, for instance the Belt and Road Initiative. [42] Yet with the onset of a global contest with the US, this outlet for China's problem also seems to be much less promising.

State vs private capital

Beijing is now encountering its biggest challenge since its crackdown on the democratic movement in 1989. It is now beginning to turn against its former ally, the private business class. Economically speaking, the private business class, even if not as strong as state capitalism, is still strong. Today, China's private sector accounts for more than half of GDP, although it is the state which monopolises the commanding heights of the economy.

Yet politically the private capitalists are entirely impotent, and they have been the target of state coercion since the economic downturn. On the pretext of fighting corruption, in recent years Xi Jinping jailed a lot of tycoons, amongst them HNA Group's Wang Jian, Anbang Insurance Group's Wu Xiaohui, and movie star Fan Bingbing.

Since late 2018, the state has started promoting the idea that China has to further strengthen the state sector at the expense of the private sector. Since then, 41 listed private companies have sold some of their

shares to the state, and it is the state which now practically controls them. Around the same time, the head

The former period of economic prosperity allowed the simultaneous growth of both the SOEs and the private sector, given the depth of the market reform and the huge size of the country.

The working people had to break their backs in order to satisfy both their bosses and the party bosses, but they could still find jobs. The coming of a new stage of slower growth has made it increasingly difficult to simultaneously satisfy the greed of private businesses and party bosses, not to mention the needs of the poor. Hence the tension between the state capitalists and the private capitalists. This has also prompted the latter to pursue capital flight.

The poor suffer

The bottom layer of Chinese society is now in an increasingly dire situation. There is much less industrial action

this year than last year. The pandemic and the economic downturn have prompted many rural migrant workers to stay in their home villages. Those who are lucky enough to have a job in the cities have become more conforming.

In May, a remark made by Premier Li Keqiang not only put a spotlight again on the millions of working poor. It also might suggest disagreement at the top. He said that China has 600 million people with a monthly income of 1,000 RMB. This is more than 40% of the Chinese population. As one reporter remarked, this amount of money would not be enough just for an employee's monthly lunch expenses in big cities.

Li Keqiang said this in the midst of a huge effort from Xi Jinping to eradicate absolute poverty in China by the end of this year, promoting China to the level of "xiaokang", or a "moderately prosperous society". Li's remark is a slap in the face for Xi.

What annoyed Xi further was Li

pushing local governments to support street vendors as a way to provide jobs for the jobless. This is considered to be discrediting Xi's "xiaokang" society. Soon the media was filled with attacks on the economy of "street vendors". This event has exposed differences at the top level in the midst of an economic downturn. Even if Li is more realistic in his policy, it would be the bureaucracy who implement it. The problem is that this bureaucracy is never neutral; it constitutes the core of the exploiting class. Soon it was revealed that cities which had provided a public space for street vendors had also taken the opportunity to levy heavy tolls on them, a tenfold increase in some cities.

In the economic downturn, a lot of Chinese are now feeding on "grass", but the burden is definitely not evenly distributed. It is, again, the working poor who suffer. The party bosses continue to enjoy their more than "moderately prosperous" lifestyle.

Source Amandla 71/72 September/October 2020.

Experiments in Free Transit

12 September 2020, by Joshua DeVries

Unfortunately, local officials are quite clear that these are only temporary for health purposes and will be reversed once it is "safe."

Over the last several decades, though, many cities around the world have experimented with free transit. Free Public Transit editors Judith Delheim and Jason Prince collect a dozen-and-half essays of these stories written by activists, academics and journalists involved in the issue.

Many cities have reduced or even given free fares for specific groups, generally the elderly or students. Delheim and Prince compile pieces on more political efforts.

The main part of the book consists of

15 articles of implementation and struggles around free transit in 14 cities or regions. (Two chapters are about Bologna, Italy.) Half of these are in Western Europe, three in Canada and the United States but the editors also include chapters on Brazil, Mexico and China.

The local chapters are bookended by four broader essays, two by the editors and two by a city development researcher. These provide some theoretical overviews and concrete proposals.

As is to be expected in a collection like this, some are more inspiring and well written than others. On the whole, it's well worth reading for transit activists or any class-conscious activist

considering projects that confront capital's control of our lives, and are winnable on a local level.

In the Beginning

Perhaps the most inspiring example is Bologna, Italy in the 1970s. Long run by the Communists, "Red Bologna" also had a tradition of public participation and a strong democratic spirit in the citizenry.

In a chapter taken from the English translation of his section of Red Bologna, Swiss journalist Max Jäggi details the amazing changes brought about in a city that "had more cars in proportion to population than any city in Italy except Turin," where

“pedestrians were relegated to second class road users,” buses had “used up most of their petrol in standing still” and “200,000 cars a day poured into the Centro Storico and created an almost permanent haze over the area, causing the leaves in parks to turn grey.”

The reasons for the successes of the project are myriad, but among the most important were a coherent and specific vision of the changes, public involvement and a visionary administration. The Communists recognized that while they had not “developed a concept of socialism in one city,” still “they have provided norms of conduct and public management different from those” which had prevailed in Italy.

The beauty of the plan was that it drew a picture of a Bologna where humans, not cars, were the center of planning. Pedestrian zones were created in the city center and nearby neighborhoods. Large investments were made in transit; fares were done away with during rush hour and very cheap at other times; private automobiles were rendered uneconomic for daily work commutes and buses were given preference.

Motorists retained unrestricted access to a mere one fourth of city streets. Other were open only to local residents or business deliveries, to buses or cabs, at certain times of day, or in some cases, only to pedestrians.

There was strong opposition from predictable quarters, but by involving residents in discussions and public debates, city leaders built strong support.

Within two years, car trips into the city dropped 25% and transit use rose 50%. According to J  ggi in 1974, “Now Bologna’s street scene has changed. Children play basketball and old people rest on benches in the Piazza del Unit   — in the workers’ district of Bologna — where before endless queues of cars idled at traffic lights.”

Hasselt: Brie on Limburgers

Michael Brie, a professor with the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation in Berlin and policy committee member of the party Die Linke, describes another success, this one in the Flemish Belgian city of Hasselt, capitol of the province of Limburg.

A mid-sized city of less than 80,000, the medieval town was being destroyed by increasing traffic. Surprising most, Steve Stevaert of the Flemish Socialist Party (social democrats) was elected mayor in 1994, partially on a platform opposing “new infrastructure for automobiles and proposing instead a city for people.”

Bringing together union, local business, environmental, social equity as well as regional economic interests, he won with an explicit vision opposing “car friendly” cities.

Each day 150,000 people from the surrounding area, twice as many as live in Hasselt, come into town to shop, and 40,000 students as well. Some 22% more people work in Hasselt than live there. Most of these traveled by car.

Mayor Stevaert ended transit fares, but as in Bologna, that was only part of the program. The brakes were applied to a proposed third ring road, and the inner ring reduced from four to two lanes.

Bicycle and pedestrian spaces were increased. Two-thirds of city center parking spaces were repurposed and rates for those remaining substantially increased. Commercial delivery times were restricted and speed limits lowered.

The result was a 13-times increase in transit passenger trips between 1996 and 2006 while the population increased by just 5%. This obviously required a significant increase in spending on public transit. They added new buses, a dense network of stations, a coordinated link to regional transport and headways (times between buses) on lines were decreased to just five minutes in many

cases.

There were costs associated, but less than \$30 per resident per year. Even this only counts the transit budget and ignores savings in medical expenses from decreased pollution and increased exercise, not to mention personal gas costs.

It wasn’t an unmitigated success. Most people still have cars and still use them, but on a qualitative level, they improved the livability of the city center.

In 2012, the social democrats had to form a local coalition with the Greens and the Christian Democrats, a party supporting austerity measures. This led to an end to universal free fares, although retirees, those under 20 and those with low incomes could still ride free. Fares for others were raised to just 60 euro cents. The culture had shifted, though, and traffic jams did not return.

Brazil: From Dream to Nightmare

In ones of the few chapters that ventured outside the developed world, Paula Aftimus and Daniel Santini covered Brazil. Aftimus is a Brazilian journalist and Santini is a project coordinator for the Brazilian office of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation.

In June 2013 in response to another transit fare increase, the Free Pass Movement (MPL in Portuguese) led demonstrations as thousands took to the streets in cities across Brazil. Cops with “black Robocop suits, big shields and a vast armory ... used tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse the crowds,” shooting out the eye of a reporter covering the actions in S  o Paulo.

Intended to spook the populace, the brutality of the government instead made people angrier and “protests grew larger after each act of repression.”

Workers and families joined crowds of students. Demands for free transit grew to include education and public

health policies. Nervous about the support the public showed for the demonstrators, the fare increases were scrapped and the federal government promised new programs addressing the other issues.

Plans and demands for free transit went back to the end of Brazil's two-decade military dictatorship in 1985. The closest came in São Paulo, Brazil's largest city. The city's first woman mayor, Luiza Erundina, was elected in 1988. Her transportation secretary, Lucio Gregori, was a supporter of free transit and drew up plans for the public and private sector to finance it. The private sector and their corporate media led a campaign and defeated it.

Gregori argued for separating the cost of running a transit system from fares, noting that private business is the greatest beneficiary of transit and therefore should pay for it. Erundina was later elected five times as a federal representative, presented and eventually won the addition of transport as a social right in the Brazilian constitution.

Sadly, as with most constitutional guarantees, not only in Brazil, this one remains unfulfilled.

Theoretical Conclusions and Lessons

In a compilation written by a variety of authors, the success of free transit movements, the quality of writing and the coherence of politics vary widely from chapter to chapter, but on the whole, it's a valuable addition to the library of those thinking about mobility as a right.

Some of the chapters with the least success do present analyses of the losses. The most valuable theoretical and strategic insights are in the local examples. In the most successful and inspiring examples, we can pick out some important lessons.

It helps to have both base involvement and a radical or at least supportive

city administration. Maintaining substantial changes requires a broad focus beyond just free fares. These factors may seem obvious, but the specific lessons from the case studies are essential for activists.

Unfortunately, the chapters explicitly approaching theory and vision do not offer as much.

Jan Sheurer, a research fellow at Curtin University in Perth, Australia, studying social and cultural aspects of mobility and disruptive transport technologies, presents opening and closing chapters for the book.

He makes some dubious claims, including an argument that car "sharing" (i.e. private taxis with a website) outfits like Uber and Lyft "blur the boundaries between public and private transport," ignoring the dominance of the industry by such private profit-driven companies.

Sheurer also claims that autonomous vehicles will lead to reduced traffic but doesn't address how to prevent each person from using their own autonomous vehicle.

He puts forth, seeming as a positive effect, that Uber, Lyft and autonomous vehicles "may enable transit operators do away with a sizable portion of their staff." This glosses over transit unions, the most organized force pushing for greater transit. Many of his suggestions are apolitical and technocratic, assuming that political change can be made with just a good idea rather than through organization and power.

Despite that, in his second chapter Sheurer presents what looks like a useful tool he and colleagues developed to chart a multi-variate, quantitative map of effects of access to transit on property values. He proposes additional property taxes to nab windfall profits that currently accrue to real estate owners.

There are issues with the property tax model (why not use an aggressively graduated income and wealth tax?) – but it does present an interesting use of data which he points out could lead to greater utilization of land held by speculators near transit.

Regardless of any issues with the attempts at theory, the local examples easily outweigh any criticism. They demonstrate the value of blending base struggles with government leadership.

The modern left has a tendency to crane its head back, always looking at the highest elected bodies. Without explicitly addressing it, the victories presented here demonstrate the value of lowly transit authorities and city councils as well as the necessity of wide-scale involvement.

The examples in the book that were the most successful tended to be both broad and specific. As the Bolognese said, "Free fares were just the beginning." In addition to a variety of methods of pulling people into transit: free fares, frequent service, dense networks, there are also forces to push people out of private cars: reduced road access, fewer and more expensive parking spaces, lower speed limits.

To win support, change can't simply come from on high, but whether it comes from a popular movement or elected officials, in order to succeed it must be broadly consultative.

Transportation costs in money and time can be substantial for those who have no option other than a mediocre or poor city bus. Recent events in two generally right-wing states offer the possibility of an issue that could be used to organize and to win.

In 2019, the council in Kansas City, Missouri approved a move to a universal free fare system. Also last year, Houston's transit authority paused their plan for contactless payment in order to consider free public transit.

Places like Luxembourg or Estonia (save this chapter for dessert) with the plausibility of nationwide free transport may seem a world away from our political experiences in the USA, but if it can happen in Texas and Missouri, it can happen anywhere.

Source September-October 2020, [ATC](#) 208.

Black Lives Matter & the Now Moment

11 September 2020, by **Anthony Bogues**

All this occurs in a moment when there is a historic pandemic, which should make us as a human species reflect on our contemporary ways of life. A pandemic that exposes the structures of the American health system, where race and class determines those who will survive and live and those who disproportionately die.

In the midst of this crisis in which lockdowns and shelter-in-place are everyday practices, we witnessed one of the most significant global protests that the world has seen for some time. The protests upended many commentators, shattered many conventional wisdoms about politics, and at least for a time punctured the everyday normal to which many of us had become accustomed.

So what was at the root of this upsurge? What are its significances? And, therefore, how might we understand it?

In the epigraph to the first chapter of *Black Reconstruction* (1935), W.E.B. Du Bois writes about "How black men, coming to America ... became a central thread to the history of the United States, at once a challenge to its democracy and always an important part of its economic history and social development." That challenge has historically been the touchstone for both American democracy and its civilization.

Racial slavery was a cornerstone of capitalism. It is not that racial slavery laid the foundation for capitalism; rather racial slavery, the plantation slave economy, the African slave trade were themselves practices of capitalism. At the core of the inauguration of capitalism was not the factory system with its wage labor but the slave plantation, unfree labor and a network of credit and debt arrangements.

In *Debt: The First 5000 Years* (2011), David Graeber points out how the Atlantic slave trade depended upon a system of debts and credits. Within this system emerged various institutions we now associate with capitalism from bond markets to brokerage houses.

There was also the emergence of major companies whose chief functions were linked to slave trade, financing plantations and other aspects of the European colonial project. Here one can refer amongst others to the Dutch West India Company, the French Société de Guinée, and of course, the Royal African Company of England.

At the core of what historian Catherine Hall calls this "slavery business" was the African captive who became an enslaved person. The late African American theorist Cedric Robinson called this historical process "racial capitalism."

The Enslaved Black Body

The enslaved body as the Caribbean historian Elsa Goveia said was "property in person." It was a body that produced commodities, while itself commodified. The black female enslaved body reproduced this process three times over: as a body-producing commodity, while itself a commodity, and then through sexual violence being a reproductive body of enslaved labor.

The plantation was a site of generative violence of commodification. Capitalism was inaugurated through the various violences enacted upon the enslaved black body.

Exploitation was established upon the foundation of unfree labor. That is the history of capitalism: not a stages

theory of transition of societies from one mode of production to another, but rather a historical process of generative violence upon the bodies of the African enslaved.

In such a history the body is not secondary, it is the source of the methods, the several ways, of practices which turn the human into an enslaved dehumanized thing. For creating such a historical process colonial and planter power needed to construct forms of life, ways of thinking, construct modes of being human that would at least for a time guarantee the full reproduction of a society.

To put this another way: exploitation requires forms of domination, and the latter requires ideas and practices which the dominant elite and others accept. This is about the manufacturing of what Gramsci calls "commonsense," a kind of naturalized underpinning of a society, an ideational glue which holds society together.

In slave and colonial societies violence was regularized as a technique of rule because in such societies might was right. And while this was so these orders also ruled by means of a set of ideas and practices about who was human and who was not.

Racialized "Common Sense"

All nations as we know are an "imagined community" and as such we search for what glue bind the nation together. In America, the glue that has bounded the society together is not the fiction of America as an idea, the exception of the "City on the Hill," rather it has been anti-black racism.

What Du Bois calls the "wages of whiteness" became the naturalized

common sense which structured the everyday practices of living. Anti-black racism has a long history, founded within the matrices of the generative violence of the African slave trade and elaborated in plantation slavery through a complex system of customs and legal codes.

It was codified in human systems of classification promulgated by European natural historians in the 17th century, mapped by Christian doctrine, whereby some human beings had souls and some not; and then, in the 19th century, became re-codified through the so-called scientific studies of skulls.

Phrenology was a pseudo-science of the study of the mind, in which it was said that Africans were inferior because of the size of their skulls: since the brain was then thought to be located in the skull. Ultimately, when science made it clear that there was no scientific basis for anti-Black racism, then culture became a terrain to explain the supposed inferiority of blackness.

So blackness as visual marker produces within the dominant common sense the death of the Black person. Black life becomes disposable, is a lack, has no interiority, is locked upon itself. As a visual marker, the black body has no escape. Its public presence is an affront, it must be tamed, put back in its place. It must be not allowed to breathe, because breath is life and for the black body to breathe means it has life.

This is not primarily an American phenomenon. The history of racial slavery in America, the inauguration of Jim Crow and formal segregation, given the imperial power of America on the world stage created the illusion that there was a special American race problem.

All societies of course have their own historical specificities, but anti-Black racism was not an American feature alone. What Du Bois called the "color line" was embedded in the world because racial slavery and colonialism were parts of a global system ruling much of the world from the 15th century Columbian voyages onwards.

The anti-Black racism of European colonial powers drew from racial theories created in America, the Caribbean, the historical encounters between Europe and Africa. South African apartheid drew some of its resources from the structures and practices of American Jim Crow.

In all this the black body was the disposable surplus; not the other but the irremediable non-other, that which could not be fully included into the body politic of the given nation. Such an irremediable body, always on the outside, challenges the very meaning of democracy itself. It is why struggles around anti-Black racism shake the society, indeed call Western civilization into question.

Challenging the Foundations

If we agree historically that the foundation of the capitalist West was racial slavery and colonialism and the accompanying genocide and attempted genocide of the Indigenous populations, then what we are witnessing today are the challenges to this foundation.

Capitalism is not just an abstract economic system as Marx made clear long ago when he noted that economic relationships are always between people. To rule, to be able to reproduce itself, any social system creates ways of living, modes of being human as it is then understood. Historically and in the present, anti-Black racism and the creation of whiteness and of white supremacy was both a way of life and a signifier of being human.

It is not just an ideological belief but rather a naturalized common sense that in many ways functions like a fantasy, one which has material life and consequences. Common sense as well in part is constructed by the historical understandings of a society about itself.

We are, as humans, historical beings that make sense of ourselves through memories of the past. We take from that past to make the self. In societies where the past has been a historical

catastrophe, where regularized violence operated as "power in the flesh" making the "human superfluous," that past becomes a critical way to establish the grounds for inhumane ways of life.

America's unwillingness to confront the fact that it was a slave society since its founding as a British colony; that practices of settler colonialism wreaked havoc on the indigenous population, along with Europe's unwillingness to confront its own history as multiple colonial powers; these now provide a dominant common sense which structures the present.

Yet as the poet and thinker Aime Cesaire noted in 1955: "Between the colonizer and the colonized there is room only for forced labor, intimidation, pressure, the police, taxation, theft, rape, compulsory crops ... no human contact, but relations of domination and submission."

This history is elided by European countries. It is a history made visible through the various pacification campaigns, the genocide of the Herero people in Namibia, and under Belgian King Leopold the regular cutting off of the hands of the Congolese people.

It is a history codified through forms of rule which created the African subject into a "native" and turned various African social and political formations into tribes. History, however, lives in the present and becomes memorialized into the public landscapes of monuments, an encoded system of public signs which enact meanings in the public domain.

So when the Black Lives Matter Movement and those activated by it demand the removal of monuments, they are engaged in a move of symbolic insurgency to get rid of the public landscapes of the everyday violent historical monumentalization in the present. This happens in America, in South Africa, the UK. And continental Europe cannot escape the fire this time.

After the Murder of George Floyd

So here we are. For over a month there have been in America the single largest protests in America's history,

ignited by the public lynching of George Floyd who cried out “I can’t breathe” before being murdered, and then died with the words “Mama” on his lips. In that modern lynching scene, for nearly nine minutes we witnessed the meaning of anti-black racism.

Yes, it was the policeman who kneeled down on his back and neck. Yes, the American police force were operating like modern day slave catchers. But there was something else, and that something else was the casual nonchalance, the non-recognition that Floyd was human. It was the nonchalance that Floyd was just another disposable black body.

The daily confrontation between Black men and increasingly Black women with the police is the nodal point where anti-black racism is most visible. In this nodal point there is no pretense. State authority expresses itself that might makes right, that Black life does not matter. This is so in Brazil, in parts of Europe, the Caribbean, the United States of America or indeed in parts of Africa. Here ordinary Black life does not matter.

After the death of Trayvon Martin in 2013 a group of Black feminists, Patrisse Khan-Cullors, Alicia Garza and Opal Tometi, formed the organization which became known as “Black Lives Matter.” Today the name of the organization has become a political banner igniting the political imagination of both Black and white around the world.

There is a rich historical current in which Black revolts/uprisings have catalyzed various struggles around the world. In the 19th century the dual Haitian revolution inspired Greek anti-colonial figures fighting against the Ottoman Empire when some of them wrote to the Haitian government requesting arms and political support.

We recall how what was then called “Negro Revolt,” the Black uprisings in the 1960s, influenced feminist and antiwar movements around the world. In all this the African American spiritual “We Shall Overcome” became a clarion political message of many movements. So why, might we ask,

does Black Lives Matter at this moment become transformed into a catalytic political banner, one which has engaged the political imagination of thousands?

I return to Du Bois: Racial slavery was the foundation of America and, I would argue, of the making of the modern world. As a form of domination its very core was the double and triple commodification process I addressed earlier. It was about making non-human another human being.

As a generative historical process, it lasted for centuries. That is a special form of domination which not only required violence but creating another kind of human being, one who would be surplus and disposable. It also created the conditions for Black struggle to be catalytic, a point the Caribbean historian and radical thinker C.L.R. James made in 1948. When living underground in the USA he noted in a seminal essay, “The Revolutionary Answer to the Negro Problem in the United States” that “this independent Negro Movement is able to intervene with terrific force upon the general social and political life of the nation.”

Black Lives Matter became a political banner because it challenges continued racial domination, its deep rooted legacies and consequences. It says we are human. As such it demands that the society should be transformed to create new ways of living. It not only therefore exposes police brutality but calls to order the entire historical foundation on which Western civilization rests, which is why getting rid of the historical monuments which venerate the West has become so crucial.

Why a New Historical Moment

While part of a historic Black Liberation tradition, BLM political organizational methods have also developed critiques about Black masculinity. Given all this, Black Lives Matter as a political banner is world-historic. And here the reader might pause and wonder why?

Let us return to the making of the modern world; to the ways in which anti-Black racism continues in the after-lives of racial slavery to dominate black life as it has done so for centuries. So when there are sustained protests against the institutional and everyday forms of anti-Black racism and this happens on the global stage, is this not world-historic?

The current global protests are world-historic because they confront the entire panoply and edifice that built the modern world. They are also world-historic because they posit different methods of political organizing which breaks from previous forms of radical Black movements.

When the movement demands that monuments, which invoke the past and undergird the present, must fall, it draws from the earlier struggles of South African students and the Rhodes Must Fall Movement (bringing down statues of Cecil Rhodes, a colonial founder of white supremacy in southern Africa — ed.).

It demands abolition, making that word capacious, creating a new political language not just about abolishing prisons but demanding the opening of a new space, invoking the radical imagination to think of new ways of life. If many social and political radical movements have paid attention only to the state and the economy as structures of the present, Black Lives Matter is attentive to the history of the structures and their underlying assumptions and common sense.

We are indeed in a new moment. Some say this moment feels different in part because the worldwide protests have been multiracial, as the image of a lone white woman sitting on the sidewalk in a rural American town with a sign which reads “Black Lives Matter” illuminates.

But perhaps what is most different about this moment is that for the first time in a world governed by neoliberalism, where as Stuart Hall and Alan O’ Shea put it there is a neoliberal common sense, we are witnessing an uprising that challenges

a foundational element of that common sense, in which anti-Black racism has been a glue for the American body politic.

This is an uprising of the radical imagination which demands abolishing the reproductive structures of the making of the modern world. As Stuart Hall makes clear in his work, common sense is a contested terrain. In every major uprising where elements of the dominant order have been challenged, power when it cannot defeat immediately or ignore the uprising attempts to coopt signs and symbols of the upsurge, thereby gutting them.

So the response of many American corporations has been to proclaim support for Black Lives Matter, not for the movement but to appropriate the banner turning it into a slogan. So when Amazon proclaimed on its website at the height of the protests that Black Lives Matter, it was responding to a popular upsurge it could not ignore.

Amazon's practice was one of appropriation. One of the remarkable features of American power is its ability to quickly gobble up what begins outside of the body politic and rework it into a hegemony without

fundamental changes occurring. This is one aspect of the present moment.

But there is another somewhat troubling aspect to the moment. It is this. The current Trump regime is one which can be called authoritarian populist. One core of its ideology draws extensively from the political traditions of American white settler nationalism, a nationalism in which there is not only anti-Black racism but hostility to the figure of the so-called "foreigner."

In the current moment this is represented by the deep anti-immigration policies and statements of the ruling regime. What the Black Lives Matter movement has done is to challenge this authoritarian populist ideology. The response of the regime is to, in Trump's phrase, Dominate. In other words, to shut down the movement in whatever way in an attempt to silence it and to retake the ideology field of battle.

That the regime to date has not been able to successfully shut down the movement speaks to its power, but it does not mean that the battle is over.

We end where we began, with Du Bois and Black Reconstruction, where in 1935, he identified a form of politics

he called "abolition democracy." It was, he argued, the necessary radical political framework — if the transformation of America was going to occur after the Civil War. For Du Bois, "abolition democracy" in his words "pushed towards the dictatorship of Labor."

By then Du Bois was in the most radical phase of his intellectual and activist life. Eighty-five years later the Black radical imagination has reworked abolition into a demand for new ways of life, dismantling the structures which inaugurated the modern world.

Fundamental change may not come and at the time of writing this piece, things can be said to be flux and for sure a revolution is not around the corner.

But historically, fundamental change requires the work of the radical imagination, the thinking that a new form of human life is possible. The global Black Lives Matter protests have opened that space. That is its remarkable significance for the current moment.

Source [*Against the Current* No. 208, September/October 2020.](#)

Impact of European policies on the Global South and possible alternatives

10 September 2020

The neoliberal structural adjustment policies which have been pursued for decades have played an important role in increasing inequality and, ultimately, in the way the epidemic has spread. Contrary to widespread belief, the epidemic does indeed differentiate between origins and social classes, affecting in particular those at the bottom of the social ladder. It has also particularly affected countries that, on the pretext of maintaining strict fiscal discipline, have given up - or have been

prevented from - building an efficient and accessible health care system.

Thus, while many countries in the Global North are experiencing the harmful consequences of the privatizations and budget cuts that have been applied in recent decades, the countries of the South are for the most part prevented from developing efficient health care systems because of the heavy burden of debt on their public accounts.

In the European Union, the crisis has again been marked by an inability of Member States to coordinate their responses and develop common strategies. While the small island nation of Cuba - which has been subjected to a US blockade for 60 years - sent medical teams to more than 20 countries including Italy, which was hard hit by the pandemic (this is in line with Cuba's policy of international solidarity, as recently demonstrated in Haiti after the 2010 earthquake or in Africa against the

Ebola virus), the policies of EU Member States in this area have been more than timid if not non-existent. No stockpiles of masks or medical equipment had been jointly agreed on in the EU. No European medical team was formed. The national retrenchment sought by the extreme right-wing forces scored a point when the various governments closed their borders (in a very disorderly manner). Only after months of prevarication do Eurozone Member States seem to have reluctantly agreed to pool a small share of their sovereign debt – a decision that the stronger states will surely make the weaker ones pay for by continuing the fierce competition that characterizes the Economic and Monetary Union.

When it came to defending the interests of the capitalist class and their companies, on the other hand, the Member States of the EU, like the other countries of the Global North, were all able to develop a similar political orientation aimed, as in the case of the bank bailouts that took place from 2008 onwards, at socializing the losses of large companies (with no guarantee that jobs would be maintained) by injecting vast amounts of public money into them. In order to do this, the EU Member States did not hesitate to abandon the dogma of fiscal and budgetary discipline on the basis of which Greece and other countries on the European periphery had been designated as “bad pupils” and forced to adopt severe austerity measures during the previous crisis. European governments are thus once again agreeing to increase their public debt in order to help big capital and thus make the people pay for the crisis.

The specific impact of the CoViD-19 pandemic in the countries of the Global South is a striking example of the accentuation of inequalities between different regions of the world. It is a situation in which the European Union and many European States have a major responsibility,

because of past and present policies towards these countries of the Global South. Any force aspiring to break with the dominant capitalist order on the European continent must act to put an end to the exploitation of the peoples of the Global South.

The present work is the fruit of the ReCommonsEurope project, which we have been carrying on within the Citizens for Financial Justice consortium since 2019. Previously, from 2018 onwards, this project engaged the CADTM, in collaboration with the European Research Network on Social and Economic Policy (EReNSEP) and the Basque trade union Eusko Langileen Alkartasuna (ELA), in a project aimed at fuelling the debate on the measures that a popular government in Europe should prioritize. The present work is relevant for all social movements, peoples and political movements that seek a radical change in favour of the 99%. In line with our commitment to develop concrete proposals for dealing with immediate problems, we have chosen to call this project “Impact of European policies on the Global South and possible alternatives.”

With this second phase, we seek to define a set of clear proposals that a popular government should implement in order to bring about real and profound change in the unjust relations between European states and the peoples of the Global South. To this end, we are engaged in a process of elaborating texts, based on joint work between activists, politicians and researchers from countries of the Global South and Global North. This work concerns the following areas: debts claimed by countries of the Global North – in particular European countries – from countries of the Global South; free trade agreements; migration and border management policies; militarism, the arms trade and wars; and reparation policies with regard to the spoliation of cultural property. In this brochure, in order to set out a general framework, we take up and

adapt the chapter on international relations from the *Manifesto for a New Popular Internationalism* in Europe signed in 2019 by more than 160 people from 21 European countries. This manifesto was published in four languages (French, Castilian Spanish, English and Serbo-Croatian). It presents the most urgent measures concerning the following issues: money, banks, debt, labour and social rights, the energy transition in order to build eco-socialism, women's rights, health and education, as well as more broadly international politics and the need to promote constituent processes.

More than ever, we believe that it is essential to fuel and develop debate on alternatives to a system that increasingly shows its incompatibility with such a fundamental right as the right to lead a life of dignity.

ReCommonsEurope was initiated by two international networks, the CADTM and EReNSEP, and the Basque trade union ELA, in order to contribute to the strategic debates taking place within the European popular Left today. It was written in one year by sixteen people active in six different countries (Belgium, Bosnia, France, Greece, the Spanish State, and the United Kingdom); the authors are active in different organisations and movements (trade unions, political parties, activist movements) and bring together diverse and complementary expertise (economics, political science, philosophy, anthropology, law, ecology, unionism, feminism, North/South solidarity, and so on). Three generations are represented. The Manifesto is supported by more than 160 signatories from 21 different European countries, among whom a majority of women.

Globally, the pandemic hits women

9 September 2020, by **Terry Conway**

In this article, I start to explore the impact of the pandemic, and the sharp economic crisis that has deepened in its wake on 52 per cent of humanity – on women. The current political situation is both laying bare and exacerbating existing inequalities. To assess it without making women's position central will not adequately equip us to respond to either the profound challenges or the seeds of positive change facing us.

While statistics indicate that a greater proportion of men than women have died as a direct result of Covid-19, in other significant ways women's position is more adversely affected.

The International Labour Organisation's (ILO) June report on the world of work puts it like this;

"In contrast to previous crises, women's employment is at greater risk than men's, particularly owing to the impact of the downturn on the service sector. At the same time, women account for a large proportion of workers in front-line occupations, especially in the health and social care sectors. Moreover, the increased burden of unpaid care brought by the crisis affects women more than men." [43]

And the Informal economy?

This quote from the ILO ignores the informal economy, which has also been particularly impacted.

People working in the informal economy in the vast majority of cases live hand to mouth, with neither savings nor food supplies to fall back on if they are not able to engage in their "normal" activity. These two billion workers represented 60 per cent of the world's employed population in 2018. For many of them,

the need to quarantine if they show symptoms of the virus, or to physically distance while selling their wares, is impossible. This raises the serious risk of further spread of the virus. The fact that a high proportion live in dense shanty towns exacerbates the risks even further.

In its April 2018 report, "Women and men in the informal economy; a statistical picture (third edition)" the ILO notes;

"Countries with the lowest level of GDP per capita tend to have the highest level of informality The gender gap in the share of informal employment is also more likely to be positive in countries with the lowest level of GDP per capita, which means that women are more likely to be in informal employment than men. The gender gap is actually positive in two out of three low- and lower-middle income countries." [44]

Those who work in the informal economy are more likely to feel impelled to continue to work, despite the threat to their and their families' health, than those in more secure forms of employment. But it's not always possible.

If you make your living selling to tourists, as huge numbers do across different continents, when there are no tourists, there is no income. If you normally travel to your place of informal work on cheap public transport, several hours walk from where you live, and there is no public transport because of the pandemic, you cannot sell your goods. If you are a sex worker, whether working on the streets or as an escort, the market for your services is severely affected by lockdown in many countries.

For many informal workers, the repression and militarisation that has frequently accompanied lockdowns (from Duterte's Philippines to

Bolsonaro's Brazil, from Orban's Hungary to Trump's USA) make their lives even more precarious. This is particularly the case for those whose migration status and or lack of gender conformity pushes them further to marginalisation. [45]

Multiple whammy

To unpick this further we can say that women are faced with a multiple whammy:

- Women have lost income, as sectors such as hospitality are disproportionately affected by the crisis. There have been measures of partial protection, mainly in the global north, where workers have not initially been sacked but laid off and paid a proportion of their normal income by the state. But even here women are disproportionately hit.

- If your pre-pandemic life, working two or more jobs, left you on the edge of poverty, then the loss of even part of that income is even more disastrous. And many of these jobs will permanently disappear as the crisis deepens. And for many women, employment also means some independence and self worth.

- Significant numbers of women work in socially necessary services – health, education, care, food production and distribution, and transport. In these sectors, the provision of personal protective equipment and other essential health and safety measures have often been life threateningly lacking. This criminal deficit has been met with resistance, as we can see from the hunger strikes of doctors in Pakistan in April or the action of Nigerian doctors in June and Zimbabwean nurses and doctors as I write. Women, and particularly migrant and indigenous women, are more likely to work in the least protected jobs within these sectors

e.g. as cleaners in the health service or in care homes. [46]

- “Stay home stay safe” is dangerous for those of us for whom home is a site of abuse. [47] In 2017, 38 per cent of murders of women in Europe were committed by a male intimate partner. 30% of women who have been in a relationship report that they have experienced some form of physical and/or sexual violence by their intimate partner in their lifetime.

- This also applies to younger people including LGBTQI youth forced back into parental homes by the economic crisis, or deprived of the social support that community organisations or places to socialise previously offered.

The dangers are compounded where increased criminalisation and militarisation accompanied lockdown.

Domestic labour

The most gendered effect of the pandemic is the reprivatisation – and feminisation – of domestic work. Women spent more than 3.2 times as much time on unpaid work as men before the pandemic. The gap between the hours of domestic work carried out by women and by men was narrowing very, very slowly.

Food poverty has deepened during the pandemic including in the global north. The lengthening of queues in shops and food projects, the shortages of supplies of basic staples as well as the closure of cafes and restaurants disproportionately affect women. Women often make sure that children and adult males are fed before themselves.

But childcare is also central. For millions of people the informal support that was central to the patchwork that makes up childcare, from older relatives and family friends, has been torn away. The fact that the pandemic itself is generally more often fatal amongst older people is a factor, but so too are the effects of lockdown and sometimes militarisation.

Schools have closed in 190 countries according to the UN. [48] Where

online education has been provided, this has served to illustrate the sharp digital and other forms of poverty that exist in working class communities. Living in overcrowded homes is not conducive to learning, even where individual motivation and parental support exist.

Even for those working from home, the differentials are sharp. In households where two adults in a heterosexual relationship live with children and both work at home, there are many anecdotes that tell how women’s working day is interrupted to deal with children while men seem much more able to ignore them.

So the differences between the levels of domestic labour carried out by women and by men are almost certainly increasing again.

And there is a vicious circle between increased domestic labour and unemployment for women. A survey conducted in Nairobi’s informal settlements, for example, revealed that 42% of women were unable to get paid work because of an increased care and domestic workload caused by the pandemic. [49] In Britain, half of working mothers said they were unable to find the childcare they needed to return to work. [50]

Context of struggle

Objective reality seems bleak and governments and bosses are determined to make sure that the costs of the crisis are borne by the already dispossessed. But we are not passive observers of what is happening to our lives, livelihoods and communities.

In recent years we have seen a new wave of mass feminist movements and an increased participation and leadership of women in mass broad protest movements and uprisings. [51] So internationally women went into the pandemic in a better position to resist backlashes than would otherwise have been the case.

The growth and international spread of the Black Lives Matter movement

since the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis in May 2020 is impressive. The movement was originally created by three women in 2013 to protest police violence in the United States. Now, millions, particularly of young people, have mobilised. Discussions about the legacy of slavery, of imperialism and racism were previously the preserve of Black activists, and to a lesser extent of the left. Now they are extensively covered by significant sections of the mainstream media.

And political debate is extending on other questions too. Across the globe, existing community organisations, spawned to deal with previous disasters, have reanimated, while others have sprung into existence, dealing with food poverty, isolation, state violence and more.

The pandemic has led to discussion about what kind of work is valuable in itself (creates what Marxists call “use value”) and what forms of work have the primary function of producing profits for the employers through the extraction of surplus value from the labour of workers.

Food production and distribution, education, health and local transport are, as already noted, sectors in which large numbers of women work. This is the labour that holds societies together. But it is not valued, economically or socially, precisely because it is seen as traditional women’s work.

Social reproduction

Despite decades of campaigning by feminists and sections of the labour movement, women’s position in the labour market is largely circumscribed by what is assumed to be our “natural” role in the family.

The labour of cooking, cleaning, caring for our immediate and extended families, nursing, educating and socialising of our young is work carried out by women – and for no pay. Family forms and the specificities of women’s unpaid labour, not to mention the division of labour

between older and younger women, vary significantly in different societies. But core tasks and the reality of the division of labour between (the majority of) women and (most) men do not.

These tasks clearly require a multitude of skills - from complex timetabling, to the chemistry involved in cooking. It is assumed that anyone can carry them out - and therefore, because there is a greater supply than demand, they can be low paid.

One key aspect is that they involve emotional labour, because they are relational. They involve negotiation, persuasion and the ability to read other's needs and wants, including when they can't (or won't) articulate them, at least through verbalising.

But because the transmission of those skills takes place largely invisibly through family and community (although often reinforced through

highly gendered education systems) they are not valued even when they are transferred into the labour market itself.

This is seen most sharply in paid domestic work, where the division of tasks between childcare, cleaning, shopping, cooking - and not infrequently providing sexual "services" to the men of the family - is entirely at the employer's will. Many women live where they work and many are migrant workers, with few if any rights, making them even more vulnerable to many forms of abuse.

Even where public services exist and therefore there is a great division between say education and health care, genderised pay differentials exist. In many countries, for example, education for young children is worse paid than that for older ones, and more feminised.

Questions about how to transform jobs in destructive industries, from arms

production to fossil fuel-driven transport, into a green new deal based on renewable energy and on social justice for the global south are being popularised by ecosocialists. Given the depth of environmental devastation, it is indeed an urgent discussion. This is the case also for trade unions who too often react to the economic crisis in a purely defensive manner, more under the slogan of build back any old how. They forget that there are no jobs on a dead planet.

But we also need to use this opportunity to demand a stronger care sector in its widest sense - more care, education, youth services; what feminist economists call purple jobs, alongside the green jobs that environmentalists demand. And like green jobs we need to organise to make sure these are well paid, that the clapping that happened for carers in many countries does not continue to go alongside badly paid and insecure work for millions of women. [52]

Lebanon's neoliberal and confessional political system in question

8 September 2020, by **Joseph Daher**

The material damage amounts to billions of dollars - an estimate of 15 billion has been put forward by the authorities. This tragedy comes in addition to an already catastrophic socio-economic situation after the eruption of the economic crisis in October 2019 and the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. The proportion of Lebanese living below the poverty line exceeded 50 per cent after the Covid-19 crisis, while the unemployment rate reached 35 per cent.

The sources of this new drama in Lebanon are to be found in the neoliberal and denominational political system and the domination exercised by the different fractions of the dominant classes that compose it.

All the dominant political parties have denied having any knowledge of the presence of ammonium nitrate in the port hangar which caused the fatal explosion of August 4, 2020. However, the entire structure of the port, its management as well as the Customs Authority, which manages the port jointly with the Beirut Port Authority, are in the hands of personalities affiliated with the dominant actors of the Lebanese political system.

"Support" against austerity

A large number of heads of state have officially given their support to the Lebanese people. But as in any crisis,

states and international monetary institutions seize these moments as opportunities to promote and deepen the neoliberal dynamic, such as the extension of the market economy into various sectors hitherto nationalized. Emmanuel Macron, during his highly mediatised visit to Lebanon for a few hours after the tragedy, called for "reforms", together with the director of the IMF, Kristalina Georgieva. Their implementation was made a prerequisite for any release of financial aid, both by the IMF - which Lebanon officially requested in May - and by all of its international backers, particularly the participants in the conference in Paris in April 2018 who set aside more than \$11 billion in loans and grants for Lebanon. In return for these billions of dollars, the

Lebanese government must commit to developing public-private partnerships, reducing the level of debt and enacting austerity measures.

Popular solidarity and protest

Following the tragedy, solidarity between the Lebanese and migrant popular classes (Syrians, Palestinians and those from sub-Saharan African countries) manifested itself, to provide assistance to people who had suffered the destruction of their homes and to clear the streets of debris.

During the weekend of August 8 and 9, massive demonstrations took place in Beirut to demand that those responsible for the tragedy face prosecution and to overthrow all the parties in power without exception.

The resignation of Prime Minister Hassan Diab on August 10 under popular pressure did not calm the protest movement, which continues to mobilize, even with declining intensity. On August 14, the main Lebanese political forces in Parliament ratified the state of emergency, which had been declared on August 5. The Lebanese army can therefore make arrests without having recourse to the courts, limit the freedom of the press and the media, prohibit gatherings, etc. Ending popular protests is indeed a priority for the dominant political parties.

An alternative to build

The appointment of a new Prime Minister endorsed by all denominational and bourgeois political

forces is situated within the perspective of maintaining the system as it is and without change. Calling for a new government of national unity bringing together all bourgeois denominational forces, as French President Emmanuel Macron has done, are helping to maintain the status quo.

The demands of the protest movement for justice for the explosion of 4 August come in addition to those raised since October 2019 for social justice and the redistribution of the country's wealth. These demands cannot be separated from opposition to the denominational political system, which protects the privileges of the economic and political elites. The construction of a credible and inclusive mass political alternative, non-denominational and social, defending the interests of all popular classes, remains a necessity.

For an internationalist anti-war movement against national myths

7 September 2020, by OKDE-Spartakos

1. The current Greek-Turkish crisis in the Mediterranean is not the result of an alleged unilateral aggression and provocation by Turkey. Nor is it, in abstract, the result of the intensification of imperialist rivalries or the rival claims of the bourgeoisies of Greece and Turkey. The specific reason for the crisis has been the agreement of the Greek government with the dictator of Egypt in the context of a policy of the Greek bourgeoisie that aims to exclude the Turkish bourgeoisie from access to the - still controversial - wealth-producing resources of the SE Mediterranean. General pacifist propaganda, no matter how necessary it may be, is not enough in a period of dangerous war games. The dangerous belligerence of the Greek state must be revealed, which exposes the working class and the people to the risk of a catastrophic war for the interests of the capitalists.

2. Greece's main weapon in its attempt to exclude Turkey from the Mediterranean is the relative favor it currently enjoys within the Western capitalist bloc, on the part of the US and major EU powers (France, etc.), mainly due to the partial diplomatic turn of Turkey to Russia. Greece's clear goal is a continuous EEZ (Exclusive Economic Zone) between Greece and Cyprus, bordering the EEZs of its allies, Israel and Egypt to the east and Italy to the west, on a maritime map in which Turkey will have no place.

3. The Greek government has blown up the German-mediated dialogue since the July crisis, announcing a bilateral agreement with Egypt on a partial demarcation of the two countries' EEZs, which includes sea areas also claimed by Turkey and Libya. Turkey's new seismic surveys are a response to

this unilateral action taken by Greece.

4. The seismic surveys of Oruç Reis are carried out at a very great distance from the Greek islands (it is indicative that they leave intact 90% of the EEZ claimed by Greece for the tiny island of Kastelorizo). Contrary to the nationalist criticism against the "alleged softness" of Mitsotakis, the Greek government has reacted to the Turkish surveys aggressively and dangerously, not only seeking the diplomatic isolation of Turkey but also binding international airspace over the area for ??aeronautical training and preparing a joint military exercise with the US Air Force, after having already performed a joint exercise with the French Navy. At the same time, the government demonstrates its determination by announcing the expansion of the territorial waters of Greece in the Ionian Sea, an

announcement also made two years ago by Kotzias, SYRIZA's Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time.

5. At the same time, the Greek government is utilizing refugees in a vulgar way. As soon as Turkey raised the issue of safe navigation and therefore rights at sea, the Greek government was cynical enough to set up the recent communication show with the "harassment" of Greek vessels by Turkish ones during the refugee rescue operation in Halki, just a few days after Greece has provoked international indignation for its criminal illegal maritime repatriations of refugees by boat.

6. The Greek government, together with the parliamentary parties and the media, are shouting against last year's Turkey-Libya memorandum for delimitation of the EEZ between the two states and denouncing the unilateral actions of the Erdogan government. They conceal, of course, the long and systematic aggressive actions taken by the Greek governments: the seismic surveys that Greece already conducted in 2008 in the disputed area where the current Turkish surveys are now carried out; the contacts with Cyprus and Israel for a continuous EEZ of the 3 states that would exclude Turkey, the negotiations with the Gaddafi government for demarcation with Libya, ignoring the Turkish claims? the participation of Greece in the imperialist intervention in Libya and the talks with the new government, which followed the overthrow of Gaddafi aided by the imperialists etc.

7. As is usual in these cases, at a time when the government is implementing the aggressive agenda of the bourgeoisie by making the appropriate maneuvers, the opposition is gaining ground in nationalism and bigotry. This includes the parliamentary left. SYRIZA unequivocally plays the game that Mitsotakis played against them in the case of the Prespa imperialist agreement: pretending to disagree with the pragmatic nationalism of the government and trying to take advantage of the worst nationalist reflexes in society by criticizing the ND government for accepting a reduced continental shelf in the agreement with Egypt and for a

supposedly subdued operational response to the seismic surveys. KKE denounces the supposed surrender of sovereign rights, poisoning the working class with nationalism and hostility against the Turkish people, and shows how hypocritical and hollow its leftist rhetoric is - at this critical moment, KKE aligns with the aspirations of the Greek bourgeoisie. Even Varoufakis forgot his pre-election statements that hydrocarbons should remain at the bottom of the Mediterranean and called for a pause to the bilateral negotiations with Turkey and, if necessary, a unilateral declaration of an EEZ. The parliamentary left criticizes the right-wing government from a reactionary point of view.

8. The fact that Oruç Reis is operating on the "Greek continental shelf" is a gross inaccuracy. There is neither Greek nor Turkish continental shelf and EEZ in the region, since according to international conventions, when there are conflicting interests, their demarcation presupposes an agreement between the two parties. There is no such agreement. So this is not a Greek continental shelf or EEZ, but a maritime area claimed by both countries. Therefore, the reference of US officials to "disputed areas" is just a realistic description of the situation and not an alleged move against the national interests of Greece, as many tried to support, dispelling the convenient myth that the US is ready to "rob us", thus and hoping to surround the Greek aspirations with a fake anti-imperialist halo.

9. It is also a myth that the international law is on the side of Greece in this dispute. Greece claims a full continental shelf and an EEZ of 200 nautical miles around all its islands, including not only Kastelorizo, an island of a few hundred inhabitants which lies opposite to Turkish cities of hundreds of thousands people, but also the uninhabited Strongyli island (which is necessary in order to achieve a continuous continental shelf and EEZ with Cyprus). The Greek governments have long argued that the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (Montego Bay Convention) justifies the Greek positions, but they conceal that Turkey has never signed the treaty and is

therefore not bound by it (this is the same agreement that provides for the "famous" right to extend the Greek territorial waters to 12 miles). However, even if Turkey was forced to accept that the islands normally have a continental shelf and an EEZ, the extent of these zones is neither self-evident, nor does it arise from the treaty. Greece demands a demarcation based on the principle of "equidistance" (median line), which favors Greece overwhelmingly. However, international practice, as well as the convention itself, provides for the "principle of equity", according to which what is generally fair should be taken into account on a case-by-case basis - is it fair for an uninhabited island or an island with a small population to exclude hundreds of kilometers of densely populated coasts and virtually an entire state of 80 million people? Anyway, international experience shows that in cases where small islands are off the coast of large coastal countries, they are generally granted a severely reduced continental shelf and EEZ (France-Canada dispute over Saint-Pierre and Miquelon, France-Britain dispute over the islands of the Channel, Germany-Denmark-Netherlands dispute over the North Sea islands). Let's say it bluntly: based on the international law forged by the imperialist conventions invoked by Greece, what would be "fair" to only allocate to the Greek islands in the Mediterranean an extremely reduced EEZ.

10. If we insist on the legal aspect, it is not because it is what it really matters, but only to demonstrate that there is no real law that Greece has on its side. The crisis is about a regional imperialist conflict, and it is well known that in these conflicts everyone uses the capitalist "law" as they see and fit. In this dispute, Greece's demands are not "fair". They are outrageous.

11. The working class of Greece (as well as that of Turkey) has nothing to gain from an EEZ which will be exploited exclusively by local capitalists or multinational companies. The fact that the lion's share of the possible hydrocarbon drilling would be taken over by foreign capitalists is secondary, because the interests of all capitalists, regardless of their

nationality, are foreign to the workers. Greek and Turkish workers, on the other hand, have everything to lose from a possible war. A Greco-Turkish war would be a bloodbath for the workers of the two countries for the interests of their bosses alone. But even without the war, the rivalry of the working classes of the two countries makes their respective bourgeoisies and governments stronger, with the power of "national unity" against the supposed common external enemy. It is well known that, in the face of "national danger", any claim and demand of the working class must stop for the so-called common good.

12. The working classes of both countries have only to lose from the transformation of the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean into a lake of extraction, within a logic of absolute adherence to the largely depleted hydrocarbon economy, a prospect that will further destroy the already degraded natural environment and that will poison the air and water even more.

13. The working class is expected to be influenced by patriotic myths and nationalist hysteria. National prejudices are very difficult to eradicate. However, we must speak clearly, and tell the truth, even if we will necessarily be a minority in the beginning. If what we are saying today is not popular, the experience of the workers and the poor will soon show that the sovereign rights of Greece which we are called upon to uphold are only in the interests of the capitalists - and our own destruction.

14. The half-truths by which certain sections of the extra-parliamentary left or even anarchy respond do not offer good services to the working class and the oppressed. Left patriots

or even "anti-imperialist" anarchists speak of Turkish "provocations" and accept the national myths, either directly or by more sophisticated arguments. Various pretexts are employed for the direct or indirect support to the Greek side:

-The authoritarian or even "fascist" nature of Erdogan's regime, as if the allies of Greece (the dictator of Egypt Sisi, the butcher of the Palestinians Netanyahu or the monarchies of Saudi Arabia and the UAE) as well as the Greek government itself served interests other than those served by the Erdogan regime too, that is the interests of the capitalists of their respective countries

- Turkey's supposed economic prevalence over Greece, as if Turkey had not been in a deep economic crisis for some time - to which Erdogan is trying to respond with promises of gas deposits in the Black Sea and potentially in the Mediterranean, as a headlong rush, to the dramatic devaluation of their national currency, among other things

- The revisionist role of Turkey, which is supposed to be the only one that challenges the Treaties and the status quo in the region and threatens to rearrange the borders, as if it were not Greece that, for example, was the first to historically unilaterally expand its territorial sea to 6 nautical miles and its airspace to 10 nautical miles or to station an army on the demilitarized islands;

- The supposed long-term favor of the imperialists towards Turkey, at a moment when the biggest imperialist powers, with Trump and the EU heading the list, are standing by Greece, announcing new sanctions against Turkey for the sake of Greece and Cyprus.

All of the above are pretexts in sin, left slang to join the nationalism that drags workers behind their bosses.

15. In such critical situations, a general pacifist bilateral condemnation of the Greco-Turkish rivalry that is "reactionary on both sides" is not enough either. Of course, the rivalry is reactionary on both sides indeed, and we have no doubt that Erdogan is first and foremost an enemy of the working class and the people living in his own country. However, the labor movement of the peoples of Turkey is the one to deal with him, and it is already doing so, without needing the aid of Greek patriots. The task of the working class here is first and foremost to confront the capitalists of this very country, with their governments, their state, their imperialist aspirations and their war plans. There can be no trust in the negotiations between governments, the imperialist "international factor" and the so-called international law. We need an anti-war movement, in practice, today. To accomplish all this, the working class must get rid of the patriotic and nationalist poison. And this is exactly where the main task of the anti-capitalist left lies: to help do it by uncovering the national myths.

No to the Greek aggression in the Eastern Mediterranean

No mining and extractions in the Mediterranean

Rise up against war plans - for a mass movement inside and outside the army

Solidarity and fellowship between Greek and Turkish, local, refugee and migrant workers

6 September 2020

Source [OKDE-Spartakos](#).

Behind Lebanon's Catastrophe

6 September 2020, by Gilbert Achcar

EXPERTS HAVE ESTIMATED that the power of the blast was something like 1500 kilotons of TNT, which would amount to one-tenth of the power of the Hiroshima blast. It devastated houses over a very big radius.

They saw it in the island of Cyprus, which is more than 150 miles away from Lebanon. It was gigantic — very simply put, one of the biggest explosions of all time, short of nuclear ones. And you can get a sense of what it meant since it has been estimated at one-tenth of Hiroshima.

Close to 300,000 people instantly turned homeless. I'm lucky that no one of my close relatives was injured. Even though their homes were severely damaged — with all the glass shattered, doors and window frames exploded — the flats weren't completely devastated.

The amount of destruction is unbelievable. It's like if there were a car bomb every 100 meters or 200 meters over a very large radius. The Lebanese have been used to car bombs: Beirut is a city that has been so much the theater of all sorts of violence but nothing compares to this. Criminal Negligence and Sectarianism

It's more than neglect, it's criminal negligence if you know that you have something like this in the heart of a city and leave it in place for years. Fortunately, it was on the edge of the sea; had it been located in the middle of the city, the devastation would have been of course much, much bigger. But part of the blast went in the sea.

That anyone could leave such a quantity of highly explosive material for so long in such a place without any of the necessary precautions is just mind-boggling. You can't understand how any people, any responsible people, including I would say even the people working there... I mean imagine Suzi, that you were working in a place like this and you know that there is this thing and you know how dangerous it is.

You would go on strike — you'd say we can't work here and we won't work here until this is cleared. But the problem is they didn't do anything. Every few months a report sent to the

authorities about that storage, about the necessity to do something, but nothing was done.

It's a very corrupt government, probably one of the most corrupt on earth. And there are plenty of them, as you know. But this one is very, very much corrupt, based on the partition of power based on religions and sects.

The political system of Lebanon is sectarian, basically a division of the spoils and the positions of power among warlords and political leaders. And you have this combination of an economic sector where the banking sector plays a major and central role, that is connected to the political class which dominates the system in Lebanon.

This is what produced what you have, a country whose rulers hide their money outside. They have been making billions and billions of dollars through every kind of trick you may think of, including all sorts of traffic in connection with the surrounding countries, with Syria, and so forth.

It has been a money-laundering country, money originating from the cultivation of drugs and from every traffic you can think of. Whatever illicit or criminal activities you can think of, you will find them exerted in Lebanon, with the difference that they are exerted by the ruling class, the country's ruling groups.

Hence there was a huge anger that started long before this blast, and burst out on the 17th of October last year in a popular uprising whose key slogan was, "All of them means all of them!"

Resentment and Despair

It was to my surprise that [on the occasion of French president Macron's visit] tens of thousands of people signed a petition demanding that Lebanon be put again under French Colonial mandate for 10 years.

Of course, it is likely that even those who launched it are aware that it can't fly but it's a gesture of despair, of resentment, of anger, saying that the

guys ruling us are not up to the task and we need international rule or something like it. Some people would put it in a less colonial way and ask for the United Nations to rule the country.

There have been demands like that but of course that's going nowhere. It's people venting their anger and as you said, the fact is that those who rule Lebanon are not interested in getting the support of the whole population. They are catering each for their own constituency.

That's a sectarian system and within the sectarian system you have a sub-sectarian political system, with every leader essentially interested in preserving the allegiance of his — and I mean his because there's no her, or almost no her — constituency, and that's how it works.

So you have a number of such allegiances, but no allegiance to the whole, to the public interest. I'm not speaking here of the true kind of social allegiance that a socialist would attend to, I'm just speaking in terms of what a bourgeois state is supposed to do under normal conditions and in order to ensure a minimum of hegemony, of consent, as you said, among the population.

Nothing of this is done and with the economic collapse and the huge depreciation of the local currency, the country has become divided, cut in two. It's no longer what you have in the bank that makes a difference, or your income. It's whether it is in Lebanese liras, the Lebanese currency, or in dollars.

If you are constantly getting dollars from abroad — they call them "fresh dollars" — you can withdraw them from the bank. If your dollars are not "fresh," that is, if you had, say, \$100,000 in the bank a year ago, you can't withdraw it — except in Lebanese currency at the exchange rate fixed by the government, which is way below the market rate. So you can imagine what it means for those whose income is in the Lebanese currency.

This has turned a huge number of people into poverty. Close to half the population is now below the poverty

line according to estimates â€” double the proportion prior to last fall â€” in a country that wasn't regarded as poor, compared to other countries of the Global South.

Lebanon was a relatively better off country, but it's gone through a major collapse, as we have seen in other countries such as Argentina where the local currency collapsed. The Lebanese economy is dollarized â€” and many of the rulers store their money in dollars abroad.

Since they're getting "fresh money" from their foreign accounts or from their sponsors â€” because many of them are linked to foreign states, whether the Saudi Kingdom or Iran or others â€” they don't care about the rest of the population.

Neoliberal Before Neoliberalism

Lebanon has been neoliberal before neoliberalism. This is a country of wild capitalism, savage capitalism. It's been like that for a very long time. It has long been regarded as a fiscal paradise, one of the world's prominent fiscal paradises, referring to tax-heaven countries where there is bank secrecy enabling money-laundering and where a lot of things happen below the surface.

No one is going to be worried as long as they have connections among the rulers and are giving these rulers a share of the pie. It has been like this for very long time. The country went into civil war as you know, in 1975, for 15 years there were ups and downs during those years, for sure, but they are regarded as one long period of war, which ended officially in 1990.

It ended through an agreement between the Syrian regime and the Saudi monarchy, that was sponsored by the United States. The key figure for years was Rafik al-Hariri [assassinated in 2005 â€” ed.], who was prime minister and presided over the country's postwar reconstruction, which was done on a crudely neoliberal basis.

All the terrible features of the

Lebanese capitalist system that existed before 1975 were reproduced and even worse because of the conditions created by the war. So that's what you have: a mafia-like, a gangster-like kind of state, with the difference is that it's not one ruled by one single mafia. And it's perhaps better not to have one single mafia ruling your country, but competing mafias. The Lebanese equivalent of countervailing powers is different mafias balancing each other, though they eventually cooperate in exploiting the country.

Energized Protests

Today â€” we're speaking on Saturday, the eighth of August â€” has seen major demonstrations in the central parts of the city with, for the first time, occupation of ministries. Three ministries have been occupied. There were also attempts at occupying other ministries and the headquarters of the Bankers Association of Lebanon was attacked.

People know what they are targeting. They are targeting the whole political system and the economic system; and they see, very rightly so, that the two systems are completely intertwined, combined as a machinery of exploitation and of criminal negligence.

The new explosion has been absolutely spectacular, as you said, but the criminal negligence didn't start and end there. Lebanon's level of pollution is appalling. This is a country where you have garbage stacking up in the streets, a country where you don't have a regular and reliable supply of electricity, a country, that is, where very basic requirements of modern life are not ensured.

Criminal negligence didn't start on the fourth of August 2020; it's been there for many, many years, and the country's condition is unhealthy by many standards. The probability of diseases of certain kinds, including cancer, are quite high in Lebanon because of all that.

Today's protests have really gone qualitatively one step further in the form of struggle beyond what we have

seen before, with to the occupation of ministries. Add to this that, symbolically, the protesters have hanged in the city center six cardboard figures representing the six key political leaders of the country.

In the good tradition of the sectarian distribution of power, they've chosen two Christians, two Muslim Sunnis and two Muslim Shia. So you had the President of the Republic and a rival political Christian figure; you had Saad al-Hariri, the Prime Minister right before the uprising last October, the son of the famous Rafik Hariri who was Prime Minister during the 1990s; and you had Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah's leader and his close ally who leads another sectarian Shiite organization that is called Amal.

These six cardboard figures were hanged in Martyrs' Square. All this is symbolic, of course. It's like the petition about French tutelage in that it reveals the level of anger. All this is very worrying, I should also say: the level of anger in the country is such that anything can happen any time. This is, after all, a country that has been through wars and wars.

The previous uprising that started on 17 October last year and went on for several weeks, was a huge mass movement that covered the whole country. It was truly the first broad popular movement encompassing all parts of the country and people of all religious denominations, Christians and Muslims alike.

But it had subsided due to various factors, one of them being the pandemic. As in other countries, the pandemic has played a counter-revolutionary role in some way; it's managed to stop movements in some countries in a very demobilizing way.

Take Algeria, for instance, where they had every week a huge demonstration: this stopped with COVID, because of the pandemic, which the government used as an opportunity to repress the movement. So that was part of the story, in addition to the fact that the movement in Lebanon didn't have a recognized representation and still doesn't have one.

It doesn't have any organized

leadership – I’m not speaking of a centralized leadership, but of any kind of coordination that can speak in the name of the movement and put forward demands in a systematic way. In the absence of that, the movement went down, until you had this huge explosion.

It’s a new beginning now. It wasn’t a huge outpouring of people today in Beirut. It was estimated that fewer than 10,000 people were there, but these were people braving not only the pandemic but also other risks as it has become dangerous today to walk in central Beirut because of the shattered glass and all that can fall from devastated buildings. So we’ll have to see how the movement goes on.

Uncertain Regional Outlook

The bigger picture is difficult to tell, precisely because of the problem that I mentioned. The issue is that in what was called the Second Arab Spring, four countries were involved, which are Sudan, Algeria, Iraq, and Lebanon, with a major difference between three of them – Algeria, Iraq and Lebanon – and Sudan, the only country where you have a multitiered leadership of the mass movements, very democratic and very horizontal, including neighborhood committees.

In organization there is strength. Strength is not only in unity as the motto says, but also in organization. And that’s what is lacking in Lebanon and that’s why it’s quite difficult to guess what will happen out of that, especially now that you have a new international intervention illustrated by Macron’s visit. It will be followed by an attempt by Western

governments to do something out of the crisis.

I’m afraid that they will use Lebanon again to settle regional and international accounts. This country, Suzi, has been for several decades a theater of regional and international wars. Foreign powers settled their accounts there at the expense of the country and of its population: the Saudi Kingdom, Iran, the United States, Israel, Syria, Iraq and others.

Because of the lack of organization, I don’t see yet a possibility of a real democratic renewal, a radical democratic and social renewal of the country. But we should hope at least that this new tragedy will give a powerful impetus to the buildup of such a movement.

Source: September-October 2020, ATC 208.

The Fires Currently Raging in California, and Climate Change

5 September 2020, by **Barry Sheppard**

As of August 24, nearly 120,000 have fled their homes as 1.2 million acres have burned, greater than the state of Rhode Island. Two of the wildfires rank as the second and third largest in California’s history – and they’re still growing. The largest was in 2018.

This is happening during the pandemic, which has caused increased difficulties for those evacuated from their homes, as areas where they find refuge must obey distancing rules so these areas cannot hold as many people.

Over 1,200 homes and other structures have been destroyed.

One of the oldest nature reserves of California giant Redwood trees, some over 2000 years old, has been set ablaze. Some may be saved due to fire-resistant bark that accounts for

their old age enduring many fires, but many have not. Already the soaring tops of many of these trees where their branches and green needles are, have been burnt, and it will take years for them to grow back.

The fires continue to rage on. There have been 700 fires, with two dozen major fires that firefighters are still battling.

These fires sprang up in the Greater San Francisco Bay Area encompassing a region from the city to its north, east and south.

Thick smoke, creating unhealthy conditions, has spread over the region, impacting 8 million people.

These fires in the Bay Area were ignited by a freak lightning storm of around 1,200 strikes in one night.

These were “dry lightning” strikes. Lightning occurs in thunder storms. “Dry lightning” happens when the air below the storms is hot enough to evaporate most or all of the accompanying rain before it reaches the ground, the present case.

So these strikes sparked the fires without the rain that could have dampened them.

The lightning storm itself was caused by the remnants of a tropical storm that went north in the Pacific from Mexico and then veered into central California and continued north, encountering the heat wave.

California has two seasons, a wet one in the late fall and winter and then a dry one in late spring to fall. Vegetation grows during the wet season and then dries out, providing

tinder for fires.

Within the dry season, two types of fire seasons have occurred in recent years. One, which runs from June through September, is driven by a combination of warmer and dryer weather. Those fires tend to be more inland, in higher elevation forests. This is what we are experiencing now.

The second runs from October through April even in the wet season, and is driven by strong westerly hot winds coming from deserts east of California, that cross mountains into the state. These fires tend to spread three times as fast as the earlier ones and burn closer to urban areas. That's what we can look forward to.

While Californians expect wildfires in the dry months historically, climate change has drastically increased the number of fires as well as their intensity, as we have seen markedly over the last decade. One indication of the effect of global warming is that this decade has seen 10 of the greatest wildfires in the state since records were kept beginning in 1932.

Dr. Park Williams of Columbia University's Earth Observatory noted in the August 22 *New York Times*, "Behind the scenes of all this is, you've got temperatures that are two to three degrees Fahrenheit warmer now than they would've been without global warming." This has resulted in drier conditions over the past decade.

Determining the links between any individual fire and climate change takes time, and analysis from the evolving science studying this. But the effects of greenhouse gases humans produce underlie everything that occurs in the atmosphere, including the tendency of climate change to make dry places even drier over time. The states in the west, including California, can expect an increasingly fiery future.

Reflecting the austerity policies of capitalism, including in the United States, just as the health system was pared down to where it had no

reserves to deal with the pandemic when it struck, the fire fighting system in many states including California is stretched thin.

The thinned out number of firefighters has been augmented by the use of trained prisoner firefighters.

One intersection of the pandemic with the fires is that because the prisons have become epicenters of the virus, some prisoners with less than five years remaining of their sentences have been allowed to go home. Many of the firefighting trained prisoners come from this group, resulting in greatly reducing this pool of firefighters.

California is asking other states and even Australia to send firefighters to alleviate this crisis, which will only get worse in the months ahead.

Given the institutionalized system of mass incarceration, which is the source of the New Jim Crow afflicting the oppressed Black population and other peoples of color, it is no wonder that the prisoner firefighters welcome the chance to get outdoors. They are often used for the most dangerous and difficult jobs, including clearing lines to contain the fires.

They are "paid" \$1 an hour. The 13th Amendment to the Constitution passed after the Civil War outlawed slavery - except for prisoners. This was famously used as part of the Jim Crow system exemplified by the notorious "chain gangs", but is still used today, to outsource slave prison labor to contractors for a price, to help finance the mass incarceration system.

As far as the California prison firefighters are concerned the state doesn't pay the prisons, but uses these firefighters to reduce its number of regular firefighters, cutting expenses.

Obviously the regular firefighters are fighting to expand the number of regulars instead.

But for the prisoner firefighters, they love their jobs. A recent article in the NYT reports, "Some Californians,

including former inmate firefighters, say the program provides a sense of purpose, offering prisoners a chance to prove themselves, and the satisfaction of helping others.

" 'It gave me a sense of direction and a sense of worth.' said Francis Lopez, who spent a year as an inmate firefighter. 'There are people high-fiving you, there are big signs saying "thank you to the inmates for fighting our fires, for saving our homes," You can see that and you think, "Wow, I can do good. I can be a person who is being respected."

"His one complaint: Inmates should be given a direct path to a firefighting job once they are released." Fire departments are loath to hire people with prison records.

While dismantling the system of mass incarceration and slave labor (if it hasn't already been done), this experience also indicates what a workers' state could do in providing real socially useful jobs with pay to offenders as part of the transition to abolishing prisons altogether under socialism.

To return to climate change. Another aspect now occurring on the other side of the country is a rare event: two hurricanes simultaneously forming in the Gulf of Mexico aimed at the U.S. - a harbinger of what experts predict will be an intensification of the hurricane season this year. Global warming does this in two ways. It warms the Atlantic Ocean, the Caribbean Ocean and the Gulf, imparting more energy to hurricanes as well as increasing water dissolved in the atmosphere and thus heavier rains.

This probably has something to do with the tropical storm that formed in the Gulf, crossed Mexico into the Pacific, went north and then became the dry lightning storm that set off the current fires.

2 September 2020

Source [Against the Current](#).

Women's Agenda in Turkey: Top Issue Is Gender Based Violence

4 September 2020, by **Sanem Oztürk**

One of the main issues brought in the agenda of women is the TCK 103 (Turkish Penal Code, Article 103) problem, in other words, a proposed motion to pass an amnesty for the perpetrators of sexual abuse of minors. This whole issue roots back to 2016 when deputies of the ruling party AKP managed to include the motion into the reform package that was designed then, as a "temporary amnesty" which would include the perpetrators who committed this crime before 16 November 2016, and "if the victim marries the offender, and if the crime is committed without force, threat, or any other restriction on consent."

Of course, this outrageous motion was protested in almost every city and women filled the streets with the demand of withdrawal of the motion. First of all, as women's movement is quite aware, there's no such thing as "temporary" in Turkish legal system. Such a motion will definitely set an example for the future and a law that would let go the child abusers "who did it for one time." Secondly, this whole issue has been revolving around a "culturally normal" argument which is exactly what feminists have been fighting for decades, because we are absolutely fed up with the fact that domination over women, different forms of gender based discrimination and violence are justified and normalized all over the world by this very argument of culture, which, as we know, is not something written on the stone. Culture changes; culture has to change. In fact, this transformation is the very thing women's struggles around the world try to realize.

Third, since the marriage with the offender is a precondition of the amnesty and same sex marriage is illegal in Turkey, this motion would

normalize early and forced marriage and rape of girls while abuses against boys remain punishable, which is a definite violation of the equality principle in the Turkish Constitution. And last but not least, seeking consent in a sex crime against children is... Well, we simply refuse to even think about it.

This scandalous motion that had been brought to Turkish parliament in 2016 was withdrawn with the votes of the opposition parties after the riots of women all over Turkey. However, the story did not end there after this win on women's side. In 2020, the same motion was proposed again and the issue remains to be one of the main struggle fields in the agenda of women's movement; except, this year we are stronger than before. The platform established against this motion which gathered more than 300 women and LGBTI organizations is more overarching than ever. It's still quite a challenge to keep the fight against a mentality that occupies the absolute majority of the Parliament and vastly dominates every sphere of life including media; however, women's movement does not give any sign of pullback. In fact, the recent debate around the Istanbul Convention seems to increase the support to women's movement, even from the AKP voters, according to the latest polls. [53]

The abovementioned debate around the Istanbul Convention is now the main agenda in Turkey in terms of women's rights not only because violence against women goes up enormously (especially throughout AKP rule since 2002), but also because the oddity of the debate itself because the party who signed the Convention and the party who started the debate around the demand of withdrawal from the Convention is the very same AKP.

A quick look at some numbers may give an idea about the increase in gender based violence in Turkey: Only in the first term of AKP government, femicides skyrocketed by 1400%! Only in July 2020, 36 women were murdered by men. As a woman working at a women's organization, let me just mention that the social workers have been buried under violence cases. So, it's only natural to ask this question: Why does a government who repeats that "they will fight against violence" at every occasion tries so hard to withdraw from a Convention of which sole purpose is to eliminate gender based violence? Why does it even become a subject of debate in a country there's at least one femicide almost every day? The answers from the AKP wing are shaped around "family values" (you know, women may keep being tortured as long as the holy families are not broken) and "preventing Convention's secret agenda of 'promoting homosexuality'" (well, we are running out of creative ways of explaining there's no such thing).

These issues are not new. These are the steps in AKP's agenda since it came into power. The steps towards a Turkey that gender equality has no place, as openly mentioned by many AKP representatives since 2002. But this is not a struggle women will back down, because where will it stop? What will happen after the withdrawal? Turkey's national law on violence against women (6284) which has a reference to Istanbul Convention is and will be under as well. Then what? Civil Law? Penal Code? Equality Principle? Constitution? We know that gender equality cannot be solely associated with and debated around the legal sphere. We also know that we have worked very very hard to gain every single right as women in Turkey and the legal sphere is only one, but a

very important front of the struggle.
As of today, women seems to have the

upper hand in terms of the social support whereas the number of seats in the Parliament tells a completely

different story. The agenda will remain hot in the coming weeks. And women will remain alert and ready.

Cost of potato vs cost of a bullet

3 September 2020, by **Metin Feyyaz**

One way to observe this trend, is to look at the development of wages compared to US Dollars currency rate and annual inflation rate. In the graphic below, if we take gross minimum wage, average daily earnings, annual inflation rate and yearly average US Dollars exchange rate in 2009 all as 100, you can observe how each of these grew. It is here quite evident that until 2018, both the gross minimum wage and annual average of daily earnings grew much more faster than the annual inflation rate or annual average US dollars exchange rate. So it would not be so wrong to say that the working class in Turkey was on the offensive in order to gain new rights and advance their working conditions and wages until 2018. This offensive was not usually organized by any organization and unfortunately mostly overlooked by the radical left as well. So it did not turn into a political leftwing movement and this was a lost opportunity for the radical left.



By 2018, this situation had changed. In mid-2018, Turkey experienced sudden increase of foreign currencies and huge inflation together with job losses. So the actual economical crisis for Turkey started much earlier than

the COVID-19 pandemic. And the working class movement which was on the offensive in order to gain new rights during last decade while economy was also growing, now has retreated back to defence in order to protect their existing rights, jobs/wages, or against dismissals, in order to get their unpaid wages or severance payments etc. The pandemic has only amplified this trend.

During the pandemic, Turkey did not experience a lockdown similar to European countries, factories were still working by risking the lives of workers but due to lack of demand and lack of supplies for some products, there were massive stoppages in the production. As a response to this, the government introduced a short-term work benefit scheme. In this scheme, the government paid 60 per cent of average gross income as net with a cap of 4381 TLs - 498 Euros per month, according to the government's own declarations 3,7 million workers benefitted from this short-term work scheme. But this benefit had strict conditions that excludes some workers. That is why for those who cannot benefit from this short term work benefit the government introduced another scheme where employer can send worker to unpaid

leave and the government would pay 1171 TLs - 133,23 Euros per month. Around 1,2 million workers benefitted from this. But the amount of money given by this benefit is far from even covering the basic needs. The real effects of the crisis on the employment probably will be seen by September once this government support ends. Together with the expected wave of mass dismissals, a wave of defensive struggles can be expected as well.

That is why the government is also trying to manipulate workers' reaction by trying to win them to the ranks of nationalistic and military mobilization. In mid-August, on a TV interview with Ministry of Economics, when he was asked about fastly increasing foreign currency, he replied by talking about the costs of military operations by adding of course these would have affects on economy and citizens should bear that cost. In 2019 Erdoğan also said something similar by telling that "I am asking to those who talk about price of eggplant, potatoes, peppers, do you know the cost of a bullet?"

Thus there is now there is a much bigger duty standing in front of the left in Turkey, to connect the workers' grievances and struggles for their daily needs with their struggle against the government's aggressive nationalistic and militaristic policies.

Working Women in Lebanon

2 September 2020, by **Farah Ghamloush**

The phenomenon of unemployment is no stranger to Lebanon, in fact, it is one of the country's core problems that is in constant increase. The last study on employment conducted in 2018-2019 by Lebanon's Central Administration of Statistics (CAS) in partnership with the International Labour Organisation found that the general unemployment rate is 11.4% with youth unemployment being 23.3% [54]. In early 2019, the previous minister of Labour, Mohammad Kabbara, announced that the rate for youth under 25 reached 37%. [55]

However, this official number is much lower than the rate right now during the corona pandemic and the country's dollar and economic crisis. Without any particular crisis, women are usually discriminated against in the job market with regards to pay, choice for employment, and attitudes in the workplace. As a matter of fact, Lebanon is ranked at the moment in the 145th place out of 153 countries on the World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Index 2020, meaning it is the 9th worse country concerning the gender wage gap. Can you imagine how worse the situation for women is right now?

One way to assert themselves as strong, non-submissive women is to work, but ironically, under today's capitalist standards, work has become another form of enslavement, especially so for women. Not only would corporations rather hire males because of the patriarchal mindset of men being "more qualified", but also in their biology, women pose a threat to the business in general because every woman is a potential child-bearer and child-rearer. All kinds of care work fall on women in our society - caring for their children, husbands, household, and parents in their old age.

According to the labor law in Lebanon, women are prohibited from working in areas that are considered "hard or hazardous" for women such as mining, welding and metalwork, glass work,

slaughterhouses, and the like. Males put laws which reflect their own truth and view, and this is problematic, especially when we look back at the women in Soviet Russia who demonstrated their capability of providing the labor force needed during the war in typically masculine areas of work like railways, mining, metallurgy, and timber rafting, alongside taking on military roles. The greatest victory patriarchy could ever achieve is making women believe in the limitations it set for them.

With regards to maternity leave in Lebanon, women are granted a paid leave for ten weeks only, and employers can and have put pressure on pregnant women to submit their resignation or to appoint a replacement during their leave. What is more is that paternity leave is not enforced in the country and that's mainly because of the traditional gender role that assigns women all caretaking tasks, while scoffing at the idea of husbands/fathers sharing the burden with their female partners; it is viewed as "emasculating" for the macho heterosexual male.

People have learnt to accept such injustices that result from capitalist systems, considering it as the only way to live, thus succumbing to it. But they immediately counter any mention of socialism with the card of Stalinist horrors and gulags. But let's consider some socialist practices that were proposed by influential female figures like Lily Braun and Alexandra Kollontai; Poland had already granted its female employers 12 weeks of fully paid maternity leave by 1924; in Czechoslovakia, women had eighteen weeks of paid maternity leave plus a job protection as decreed by the Labor Code by the year 1956. In 1973, Bulgarian women were granted 120 days of fully paid maternity leave before and after the first child's birth, in addition to six more months of paid leave at the national minimum wage; fathers were also educated on the importance of their contribution to the household and were decreed paternity

leaves. The list goes on.

One can also get a more direct comparison by looking at the quality of lives led by Eastern German women in contrast to their Western counterparts. In the German Democratic Republic, the state fully supported women when they entered the labor force; single mothers and fatherless children were taken care of and not marginalized like today. All basic needs were provided by the government and women invested in their educational and professional lives even as mothers. There were centers for children of female students on campuses. On the other hand, women in the Federal Republic of Germany where capitalist practices were applied, went back to their traditional gender role of housewives after the end of WWII; they took care of the children, stayed in the kitchen, and went to church. In fact, women were not allowed by law to seek a job other than their housework without the consent of their husbands until 1957. The lack of support to manage the dual responsibility of childcare and work hindered West German women from getting full-time jobs, so married women often settled for part-time jobs with a huge gender wage gap, bigger than that in Eastern Germany.

In our Arab eastern societies, it is usually the mother who gives up her dreams and ambitions to be a full-time housewife, while the father remains invested in his professional and social life. It is always women who are pushed to make a choice between striving in their own personal and professional lives, or their identities as mothers and wives. Women should be able to be both because they can, and they have in the past because they were in a nourishing environment that enabled them.

The premise of work for women who seek independence can be more than just means to get money. Most importantly, it frees women from the captive inferior position in her relationship with males since she

doesn't need their money to survive. It becomes about personal growth, feeling of accomplishment, purpose, but sadly reality is very different, and in many cases, women have to endure horrible circumstances to afford basic needs. The current money-hungry system with straight males at the top of the food chain will never care about the suffering of women, and even more so of women of color who have

to work "less prestigious" jobs like domestic workers who mostly toil under harsh and exploitative conditions with no actual protection.

Following the example of Emmeline Pankhurst and her likes who formed the Women's Social and Political Union in the UK that fought for women's political rights courageously, women in our society should unite themselves in unions that welcome

women of all backgrounds and nationalities to fight for their social, economic, and political rights. In addition to our fight being one of class, we should not forget that it is also one of gender because we are not only economic nor solely political forces, we are primarily human beings with a wide array of rights to obtain.

[New Politics](#)

Athletes Making Sports Matter

1 September 2020, by **David Finkel**

Later that same year, U.S. track athletes John Carlos and Tommy Smith were infamously vilified for their fisted salute on the Mexico City Olympic victory podium, then were peremptorily recalled home and had their careers trashed. On the culture wars front, guitar superstar Jose Feliciano and Detroit Tigers broadcaster Ernie Harwell came in for heavy criticism after Feliciano, at Harwell's invitation, performed at a Tiger Stadium World Series game a gently swinging rendition of the national anthem that wouldn't raise an eyebrow today.

Times have changed. The 2020 National Basketball Association playoffs inside the Orlando COVID-free bubble were abruptly suspended on Wednesday, August 26 when the players of the Milwaukee Bucks, rapidly followed by other teams, voted unanimously not to play their scheduled game in the wake of the police shooting of Jacob Blake in Kenosha. The Bucks read a statement demanding that the Wisconsin state legislature take immediate action for police reform and accountability.

TNT commentator and former NBA player Kenny Smith announced on the air that in solidarity he didn't feel he should be working the broadcast, and left the studio as Shaquille O'Neal remarked, "I respect that." This kind

of action is unheard of in the tightly corporate world of sports entertainment.

It didn't stop there. The Milwaukee Brewers baseball team also called off their game, while the WNBA didn't play after the Washington Mystics players showed up with letters on their uniform fronts spelling Jacob Blake's name, and each with seven bullet holes drawn on the back. The WNBA players have already dedicated the league's 2020 season to the memory and demand for justice for Breonna Taylor. As one Mystics player put it, "We're not just basketball players. When we go home, most of us are still Black."

Major League Soccer followed the others' example. This was all on the night when Mike Pence told the Republican Convention that under his and Donald Trump's rule, "we will never defund the police — never," while a far-right youthful militia admirer gunned down protesters in Kenosha.

It was four years ago that Trump bellowed that any "son of a bitch" football player who followed Colin Kaepernick's example of taking a knee during the anthem should be "FIRED — FIRED!" Today, with the beginning of the National Football League

season a couple weeks away, some teams beginning with the Detroit Lions have cancelled practice sessions.

The contrast between the white-nationalist-promoting, virus-super-spreading president and the dignified militant stance of today's generation of professional athletes could hardly be greater. At this writing on Thursday, August 27 the situation is fluid. Tonight's NBA playoff games are also postponed, while players are meeting to determine their demands and course of action.

According to some accounts, LeBron James has called for cancelling the entire multi-billion dollar NBA playoffs, while other reports indicate that the schedule will resume this weekend. Many developments are likely to have happened by the time you're reading this article. As I'm finishing it, it turns out that in response to players' demands, the majority-Canadian and mostly-white National Hockey League has suspended its playoff games for tonight and tomorrow August 27-28.

What happens next remains to be seen, but certainly this "wildcat athletes' strike" is not over, and it's a powerful and hopeful sign at a time of calamity in a deeply sick society.

Source [Against the Current](#)